

Small Tourism Enterprise Network Formation in Rural Destinations:
Integrating ICT and Community in Western Southland New Zealand

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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**For my parents
Ian and Joy Deuchar and my darling children
Amanda and Jamie Nodder**

Also dedicated to the late Lex Wylie of Riverton, New Zealand

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Carolyn Joy Deuchar

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List of abbreviations

AUT	Auckland University of Technology
CI	Community Informatics
CPF	New Zealand Digital Strategy Community Partnership Fund (CPF)
DoC	Department of Conservation
DMO	Destination Management Organisation(s)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
FIT	free independent traveller
ICT	information and communication technology/ies
MED	Ministry of Economic Development
NZTRI	New Zealand Tourism Research Institute
NZTS 2015	New Zealand Tourism Strategy
RTO	Regional Tourism Organisation
SDC	Southland District Council
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise(s)
STD	sustainable tourism development
STE	small tourism enterprise(s)
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
VIN	Visitor Information Network
WSPAI	Western Southland Promotions Association Incorporated

Abstract

A critical issue facing tourism destination development is how the industry can be used as a tool to stimulate local economies and generate sustainable livelihoods. As in many parts of the world, small tourism enterprises (STE) lie at the heart of the New Zealand tourism industry and play a pivotal role in the economic development of many regions. As an important conduit between visitor and community, the performance of STE can enhance or detract from visitor satisfaction with the tourism experience as well as affect the competitiveness and sustainability of the destination.

There is increasing evidence that STE business performance can be significantly enhanced by the formation of networks, partnerships, alliances and clusters. Tourism policy is focusing increasingly on the development of 'dense' networks of STE as a tool to improve the performance of the tourism industry worldwide. Information and communication technologies (ICT) offer considerable potential to facilitate networking among small tourism firms.

This PhD research examines rural STE network formation, the processes that underlie it, and how ICT facilitate and strengthen those processes. The thesis adopts regulation theory and the concept of flexible specialisation as tools to understand STE networks and the ways in which they can contribute to regional social and economic development. It adds to these approaches by introducing social network theory, and an understanding of the types of social relations that underpin network formation.

A case study involving a community informatics initiative (referred to as 'web-raising') in Western Southland, New Zealand is used to evaluate STE network formation and the role of ICT in the development and maintenance of the network. A mixed methods approach is adopted to inform the research with data collected through a series of formal semi-

structured interviews, informal conversations, observations, and a review of secondary data.

The thesis adds to the available literature on small and medium-sized enterprise networks in general, but more particularly to the sparse empirical research in the area of STE network formation in rural destinations by integrating the important dimension of community. The study reveals the important linkages that exist between STE owners/operators and community that are commonly overlooked in the literature. By broadening the approach to STE network development to consider the social, economic and cultural aspects of sustainable tourism; it is argued that network formation in rural destinations should be guided by social well-being indicators, local economic development and community empowerment. In addition, the study finds that the effective use of ICT can facilitate entry for STE owners/operators to the network by creating 'points of collaboration' and are an important element in creating an enabling environment in which collaboration can occur.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale and significance of the study

Around the world political and economic leaders promote the growth of a healthy tourism sector as a way to achieve desired societal outcomes. These outcomes include employment and job creation, increased foreign-exchange earnings, the growth of GDP and the attraction of foreign investment (Wahab & Cooper, 2010; Jones, 2005a). Globally, the total contribution of travel and tourism worldwide is expected to generate US\$9.2 trillion by 2021. Forecasts are that by 2018, tourism will provide employment to a projected quarter of a billion people (297 million) worldwide (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2011).

While tourism contributes to local economies worldwide, the challenges facing the tourism industry are complex and numerous. Climate change, political unrest, natural disasters and pandemics all impact on travel patterns. Added to this, economic fluctuations and increased levels of competition between destinations have significant effects on national, regional and local development.

Tourism is important to the New Zealand economy, representing almost one-fifth of all export earnings and directly and indirectly contributing 9% of the country's GDP in 2011. In the year ended 31 March 2011, total tourism expenditure reached \$23 billion, supporting nearly one in ten (9.6%) of the total New Zealand workforce (TIANZ, 2011; Ministry of Tourism, 2011).

The New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 (NZTS 2015) (TIANZ, 2007) is a 'yield-driven' strategy that sets out to strengthen financial returns from tourism by 'working smarter' while "enhancing the quality of the visitor experience and New Zealander's quality of life" (TIANZ, 2007, p. iii). Growing visitor demand for tailored tourism experiences

requires businesses to provide a comprehensive range of products and services that can satisfy the client's specific requirements for a richer visitor experience. In early 2011, Tourism New Zealand unveiled a change to its successful '100% Pure New Zealand' marketing campaign, introducing a stronger focus on the individual experiences on offer and changing the popular tagline to '100% Pure *You*'. The new campaign focuses on the 'feeling' and benefits gained from a 'uniquely New Zealand' experience. In an ever-changing and volatile sector, there is a need for the industry to build an outstanding tourism experience and support the visitor to develop a relationship with, and a strong sense of attachment to, the places they visit in order to keep them returning. Those who deliver the experience are increasingly required to be capable of adapting to the shifting environment and be able to react quickly and flexibly to the various economic, political and social forces that drive and shape tourism.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) play an important role in modern economies. They provide jobs, create income and become major contributors to local and regional economies (Morrison & Teixeira, 2004). While no standard definition of SME exists in New Zealand, SME play a major role in New Zealand tourism where it is generally accepted that the tourism sector is characterised by *small* business (MED, 2002, 2005a, 2010) with approximately 85–90% of these organisations having fewer than 20 employees (Tourism New Zealand, 2001, p. 44). Indeed, the majority of tourism enterprises in New Zealand are considered to be *micro* in nature, i.e. employing no more than five employees (Creative New Zealand, 2003). For the purposes of this thesis, small tourism enterprises (STE) are referred to as those micro enterprises that are commonly family-run or owner-operated with fewer than five full-time equivalent employees (Van der Duim, 2005).

STE encounter many challenges and opportunities that are intensified by increased globalisation. Global forces that influence tourism's development outcomes include the growing influence of transnational corporations, pressures of demographics and

technological change, broad-based economic changes, and evolving structures of governance (OECD, 2010, p. 53; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Globalisation operates at several scales – local, national, regional and global – and “interweaves external conditions with local ones” (Teo, 2002, p. 460). STE exist at the sub-national level of regions and communities and are both directly and indirectly affected by global forces. In order to thrive in this environment it is crucial that they learn ways to navigate, at a local level, through the global economy (Reisinger, 2009). To enhance the performance of STE and understand their contribution to local and national economies, it is necessary to become more aware of the ‘place’ of STE in this global–local nexus.

Governments and public agencies, nationally and internationally, are creating and implementing policies and initiatives to better enable and empower the tourism sector and increase productivity. Since the 1990s, a theoretical shift in tourism planning and policy making requires that strategies be more focused on “bringing stakeholders together for effective analysis, development of clear goals and objectives, evaluation, monitoring and implementation” (Hull & Huijbens, 2011, p. 229). Initiatives include activities designed to build the innovation capacity of businesses and services through training and educating, as well as promoting the development of clusters and network alliances (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010; Dredge 2006a; Hall, 2008; Scott, Baggio & Cooper, 2008). In New Zealand, the NZTS 2015 is similarly focused on the need for STE to improve yield and to optimise opportunities to collaborate in order to draw on economies of scale and resource efficiencies (TIANZ, 2007, p. 29) and to engage with consumers by moving from a supply-side focus to a consumer focus in terms of marketing and distribution.

There is increasing evidence that the performance of small firms can be significantly enhanced by the formation of partnerships, alliances and clusters (Tinsley & Lynch, 2008; Dredge, 2006b; Porter, 1998a, 2001; Lynch, McIntosh, & Tucker, 2009). By networking, STE have the potential to retain the advantages of being small (e.g. flexible and

adaptable), while also creating economies of scale, better utilising resources, and optimising opportunities to explore potential markets at a global level through improved local connections and innovations. The challenge remains to demonstrate value to entice the “stubbornly self-sufficient and competitively focussed” (Wilson, 2002, p. 11; Polo & Frias, 2010) small business community to engage in such networks. There is a need for research to be conducted into the nature and perceived value of collaborative activities of STE, and how these contribute to a locality’s ability to engage more sustainably with the global economy. Specifically, there is a need to understand more about the nature of the local connections of small tourism businesses within a locality, as well as the factors that foster and intensify interconnectedness through networks, and the wider benefits networks bring to the industry as a whole (Beritelli, 2011; Tinsley & Lynch, 2008; Michael, 2007; Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006).

1.1.1 Social capital and rural tourism networks

Woolcock (1998, p. 151) offers a simple definition of social capital as “encompassing the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit”. Social capital is a sociological concept that is built on the premise that human beings are essentially social beings, and should they share common values, goals and levels of trust and reciprocity, social relations have productive benefits.

Several authors argue that these elements of connectedness are essential to revitalising and building resilient rural communities (Reimer, 2002, 2009; Ribeiro & Marques, 2002; Jones, 2005a). Nowhere is the role of STE, or the need for local collaboration between small tourism firms, more critical than in rural communities. Such communities are confronting serious challenges brought about by changes in world trade in agricultural products and pressures to restructure rural economies. In many regions around the world this has resulted in depopulation, job losses and a need to diversify land use. In order to revitalise farming areas and service towns previously dependent on the agricultural sector, many are including tourism activities in their business dealings to

generate extra income (Aylward & Kelliher, 2009; Brennan & Luloff, 2007). Others are engaging in rural tourism as a lifestyle choice (Bensemann & Hall, 2010; Peters, Frehse, & Buhalis, 2009).

Rural tourism is often based in areas with very low population density and this is particularly true in New Zealand (Bensemann & Hall, 2010; MacLeod & Moller, 2006; Albrecht, 2009). Internationally, rural tourism experiences are highly diverse with products ranging from farm stays to outdoor adventures. Nature-based activities and the experience of 'rurality' are increasingly attractive to travellers (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011; George, 2010). The spiritual and emotional dimensions of the rural tourism experience are also vital – especially those that offer the visitor an opportunity to establish a strong place attachment to those localities that resonate with their own past lived experiences, childhood memories, and culture and heritage (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

STE are often embedded in local and regional networks. As a result, they enjoy closeness to suppliers and complementary businesses and have important understandings of local heritage and cultural information (George, 2010; George, Mair, & Reid, 2009; Gibson, 2009; Albrecht, 2010). Traditional farming communities are known to have strong social relationships “engendered by the ownership and control of agricultural means of production” (Urry, 1995, p. 80; Aylward & Kelliher, 2009). In a tourism context, there is little in the literature to aid the understanding of these social relationships, how they ‘work’, or how they contribute to STE network formation or the function of STE as a conduit between community and visitor (Beritelli, 2011; Tinsley & Lynch, 2008; Hall, 2005).

Internationally, government agencies around the world are beginning to recognise the enormous potential offered by tourism for rural areas and structure tourism policy accordingly (Aylward & Kelliher, 2009; Brennan & Luloff, 2007). There is, however, little evidence of rural tourism in New Zealand being targeted as a specific area of growth in

national tourism planning (see TIANZ, 2007) other than those objectives concerned with improved infrastructure such as waste water and roads.

Globally, lesser known rural destinations tend not to feature highly in central or local government tourism planning (Rosenfeld, 2002). In New Zealand, interest groups such as promotions associations and tourism groups often provide a grassroots collective effort to promote their 'place' as a great place to work, visit and live. However, other than the passion and energy of volunteers who may have a deep sense of community attachment, these groups and associations often have limited support and resources to develop and market their destination (Albrecht, 2009). The 'adhesive' that bonds these associations is a deep sense of trust, loyalty and shared values and connections which are usually familial and/or very locally based, perhaps limited to the geographical confines of a particular town or even neighbourhood. While *strong* network ties are important to rally STE and community together to increase access to resources, knowledge and shared experiences; high levels of social and human capital are not in themselves sufficient to provide the basic infrastructure necessary to meet visitor needs. Access to financial resources is a critical factor in successful destination development. Resources such as funding for public transport, roads, utilities and pedestrian access ways (footpaths, tracks) are often made available when central and local government make tourism a priority for economic development (Keeling, 2010; Hall & Richards, 2000).

Social networks and the strong ties found in and between STE and community are useful in grassroots rural tourism development, but there is a risk of the associated social capital found in these networks not being optimised fully should they remain closed to 'others' (Braun, 2004; Novelli et al., 2006). Closed social networks often lack the *weak* (external) ties that "link networks within one community to the diverse resources that may be available in others" (Woolcock, 2001, p. 13). In order to increase these ties, there is a need to find ways to tap into the social and economic aspirations of local communities and link STE and community interactions at a variety of scales – national,

regional and local. It is vital to take into account the specificity (or uniqueness) of place, or the social, cultural, institutional, political and environmental dimensions of different places that add a level of complexity and richness to the context in which STE are embedded (George, 2010).

ICT can facilitate network development (Poon, 1993; Johnston, 2004; Braun, 2004, 2005). Tourism and technology go hand in hand as ICT enhance both the dissemination of information and the channels of communication between tourism consumers and suppliers. ICT, networks and relationships are critical factors that affect the visitor experience at the destination and have a “significant influence on the regional distribution of economic advantage” (Braun, 2005, p. 3).

STE networks have been somewhat neglected as an area of academic study (Braun, 2005; Nordin, 2003). Existing literature focuses on defining and describing networks, as well as their identifiable benefits and success factors. Much of this work is situated in cases from Australia or Europe (Braun, 2005; Morrison, Lynch, & Johns, 2004). While there are significant lessons to be learned from these studies, there is a paucity of research not only on tourism networks in rural destinations in general but also on their contribution to economic and social development. More specifically there is little that explores the role that ICT plays in the formation, development and ongoing performance of STE networks. It is important to not only define and describe tourism networks but to also understand them. More needs to be known about the factors that motivate STE to engage in network formation, how STE access networks, and what role ICT plays in STE network formation (Brás, Costa, & Buhalis, 2010; Hall, 2005, 2008; Milne, Clark, Speidel, Nodder, & Dobbin, 2008).

Regulation theory has been adopted by some researchers to analyse the connection between tourism, ICT and economic development (see Costa & Martinotti, 2008; Van der Duim, 2005; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). The regulation approach is an attempt to explain

the dynamics of long-term cycles of economic stability and change and is used to support claims that an era of mass production (Fordism) has (largely post-1970) given way to new organisational principles and structures. It is argued that to remain competitive in a global economy, STE need to be responsive and dynamic in order to develop unique, high-quality tourism products in an efficient manner (Costa & Martinotti, 2008; Jamal & Getz, 1995).

Flexibility in organisational and knowledge structures of small firms is reflected by, for example, the level of formal and informal networking that allows businesses to share experiences, transfer knowledge and find ways to work together to create new products. However, one important shortcoming of existing literature is that of scale: studies that explore the regulation approach tend to focus on the national level (Goodwin, 2006; Shaw & Williams, 2004) and often fall short of providing a similar analysis at the regional or local level (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001, p. 379; Costa & Martinotti, 2008). This gap in the literature, in one sense, offers an opportunity to delve into a previously unexplored collection of ideas that influence or affect small tourism network development in rural destinations. For example, there is a need to advance understandings of the critical role of the state and of central and local government modes of engagement with tourism at a regional and local level. To make a contribution to the body of knowledge concerned with STE network formation, this study will focus on the dimensions of social capital not yet explored in the literature, including the social relations of STE and the ways that ICT can be used as a stimulus to network development and to intensify interactions with others.

1.2 Research aim and objectives

This thesis explores the tourism 'milieu' in a rural area of New Zealand. Using a case study approach, the research follows a community-building ICT initiative in Western Southland where STE and community use ICT to achieve common goals. It is the *processes* that surround the development of a community-built destination website that

have contributed to the community amassing social capital in effective and diverse ways to overcome a lack of local government support for tourism development (Clark, 2007; Milne et al., 2008).

The aim of this PhD research is to advance theoretical and empirical understandings of the processes that underlie STE network formation and how ICT facilitate and strengthen the networking process. To do this, the research explores new directions in which to apply the regulation approach in theorising the link between tourism and economic development, especially in lesser known rural destinations.

1.2.1 Research questions:

1. How are STE networks formed and maintained in rural areas?
 - How do STE gain entry to these networks?
 - What are the factors that motivate rural STE to engage in network formation?
2. What is the role of ICT in forming and strengthening these networks?

These questions are examined using a single case study. The case study provides valuable insights to the way a tourism and community-related ICT initiative supported one small rural community in the remote Western Southland region of New Zealand to interact with the tourism sector and to strengthen the formation and maintenance of a STE network. The case study is also used to map opportunities for extending the use of ICT in the development of small tourism enterprises, and their interactions with other enterprises and with their surrounding community.

1.3 Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical frameworks that have been used to understand factors influencing and affecting rural STE network formation and the role of ICT as an enabler of those networks. To strengthen these frameworks, other dimensions that form part of this review include regulation theory, and social network theory and the related

construct of social capital. An examination of the literature extends to a discussion of flexible specialisation and tourism, tourism SME networks and their purported benefits, and the important link to socio-economic development. The review also considers changing trends in tourist demand and behaviour – online and offline – and, while focusing on the link between STE and the visitor experience, introduces the role of ICT in tourism network formation and maintenance.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and describes the methods used. The chapter begins by offering a rationale for adopting a qualitative research design and the reasons for choosing the methodology of grounded theory. The grounded theory approach is outlined and discussed in terms of its appropriateness for this study. To understand how STE networks develop, a case is used that embraced ICT at the heart of network formation. A discussion of the case is followed by an explanation of how the methodology was applied in this study. The criteria used for selecting research participants and the multiple sources of data are outlined. These include formal interviews and informal conversations with STE owners/operators, key individuals, tourism leaders, residents and locals, as well as observations from community meetings, workshops and informal gatherings. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the steps taken for the analysis and interpretation of the data that provide the basis for analysis of the network. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the process of substantive theory generation.

Chapter 4 addresses the first research question: *How are STE networks formed and maintained in rural areas?* The chapter begins with an historical account of the evolution of tourism in Western Southland and the emergence of formal network structures. The processes that underpin the development of the community-built website that forms the focus of this case approach are then outlined. A detailed discussion follows of the factors affecting network formation and the motivations of STE owners/operators to engage

with the network. The chapter concludes by explaining the way STE owners/operators gain entry to the network.

Chapter 5 presents the results of primary and secondary data collection and analysis focusing on the second research question: *What is the role of ICT in forming and strengthening these networks?* An analysis of www.westernsouthland.co.nz explores the relationships and affiliations that lie within the structure of the web linkages and is followed by a discussion of the motivations of STE owner/operators for engaging with the project. Key lessons learnt in terms of co-ordination and logistics are presented followed by informants' reflections on the achievements of the project and a discussion of the way ICT was integrated in STE network development in the context of the case study.

Chapter 6 adopts a theoretical lens and draws on the two main constructs that guide the research, namely social network theory and regulation theory (most particularly, the mode of social regulation), as tools to understand the 'place' of STE in the relationship between large-scale external forces and local conditions. Regulation theory, or more particularly the mode of regulation, is used to help clarify the complex web of social, cultural, political and economic factors that are central to the development of STE networks in a rural setting. Drawing from social network theory, this discussion highlights the beliefs, values, cultural practices and individual attitudes of STE owners/operators as part of their communities, and how these dimensions contribute to the development of social relations with other tourism stakeholders that are so necessary for STE network formation.

The concluding chapter summarises and synthesises the main findings of the study and the theoretical, practical and methodological contributions of the thesis. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the research and an answer to the major research questions. Conclusions drawn from the analysis of the case study and their implications

are discussed in terms of the factors that contribute to small tourism enterprise network formation, the processes that underlie it, and how information and communication technologies facilitate and strengthen the networking process. It then presents a grounded proposition to integrating ICT in rural STE network formation. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the future research needed to develop the research findings further.

Chapter 2: Tourism, STE networks and technology

The purpose of this review of the literature is to examine the bodies of theory that have been adopted and adapted in order to understand both factors influencing and affecting rural STE network formation and the role of ICT as an enabler of those networks. The network concept has become increasingly concerned with the emergence of new institutional, economic and non-economic forms of accumulation that shape and support them. In an environment where there is an increasing need to make local and regional economies competitive in a global marketplace, digital ICT have transformed nation-state economies into “a globalised system of accumulation based on a revolutionary transformation of the means of production” (Harris, 2008, p. 14). The review begins with a discussion of the evolution of economic forms, or more specifically, with theories of regulation, regimes of accumulation and modes of regulation, flexible specialisation, networks and other forms of organisation. This information then serves as the background to examine demand-side factors that influence the organisation and production of goods and services associated with tourism today.

2.1 The regulation approach and ‘new tourism’

Globalisation is a term that has become part of our everyday vocabulary. Increasingly, authors discuss the borderless world that we live in as some sort of “external hegemonic force that has a momentum of its own” (Teo, 2002, p. 459), where the nation-state is argued to have become somewhat reduced in its significance as a unit of analysis and as an influential political agent (Newman, 2005; Reisinger, 2009; Teo, 2002). Tourism is a global industry that plays a significant role in the development of many destinations and communities, with tourism flows generated predominantly between developed nations (WTO, 2011c, 2011d).

Tourism is conditional on the production and consumption of a broad range of goods and services that combine to make up the tourism experience (Shaw & Williams, 2004). While packaged tours that are inclusive of a variety of travel-related options are the most obvious example, all tourism experiences depend on the combination of a range of transport options, hospitality services and touristic attractions. Shaw and Williams (2004, p. 21) contend that “this is why it is essential to study inter-firm relationships in order to understand the production of tourism.” The authors also argue that above all, tourism is consumed *in situ* and is place-specific, being “strongly entangled with the making and remaking of local communities.”

Regulation theory is one body of literature that can help to understand small firm networking. Several authors contend that to be able to enhance tourism’s contribution to local economies, there is a need to understand processes of capitalist accumulation in order to become more aware of the global forces and economic prospects facing those who manage tourism businesses and organisations, regions and communities (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001, p. 378; Hall & Page, 2006; Gibson, 2009; Mowforth & Munt, 2009). The dominant mode of tourism is capitalist as most tourism services are produced for markets or are produced in societies that are capitalist. Even non-commodified experiences (e.g. an individual from a developed country goes on a walking holiday and camps freely on common ground) occur in societies where the free time to take such a holiday is “usually generated by working in a capitalist society and where the surrounding natural environment is supported through capitalist relationships” (Shaw & Williams, 2004, p. 28).

New technologies have always introduced new forms of organisational relations (Chase-Dunn, 1998). ICT are causing significant changes to the way small firms are organised and structured and play an integral role in enabling tourism operators to ‘act local and think global’ (Brás, Costa, & Buhalis, 2010; Mpofu, 2009; Shaw & Williams, 2002). ICT offer STE opportunities to move from a product-driven environment to a responsive and *flexible*

marketplace where success depends on “sensing and responding to rapidly changing customer needs” (Buhalis, 2003, p. 31; see also Buhalis & Law, 2008; Poon, 1993). In order to thrive in this environment, small tourism operators need to be capable of organisational change. These new factors of competitive success (organisational form and governance) are best reflected in the structural configuration of the tourism enterprise. Such configurations include co-operative partnerships, alliances with complementary businesses, franchising, and groupings of loosely related partnerships, to name a few (Nordin, 2003; Brás et al., 2010; Knowles, Diamantis, & El-Mourhabi, 2001; Massey, 1995).

To better understand the ‘place’ of STE in this global–local nexus and the way STE become enmeshed in networks, it is important to explore the concepts of social capital, collaboration and network theory in relation to the multiple social, cultural and institutional supports that come together to support economic growth (mode of regulation) within which expanded economic contribution can occur (Goodwin, 2006). Previous studies highlight the need for small firms to collaborate in order to compete on the global stage and strengthen economic outcomes from tourism (Costa & Martinotti, 2008; Brás et al., 2010; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). It is also important to explore ways that economic relations are socially embedded and socially regularised at the subregional level of the STE in a rural setting (Polo & Frias, 2010).

2.1.1 From Fordism to flexible accumulation

Regulation theory and the concept of flexible specialisation provide a framework through which to theorise how and why STE networks form, the value of STE networks to economic growth, and the ways that small tourism firms may enhance their competitiveness and business performance (Van der Duim, 2005; Shaw & Williams, 2004; Costa & Martinotti, 2008). The regulation approach provides a way to analyse the interconnections between institutional forms of capitalist economies by examining the regularities of economic behaviour through a wide range of economic and non-economic

mechanisms (Jessop, 2001; Jessop & Sum, 2006). The post-war economic boom period (1945–1960s) was marked by a Fordist regime of accumulation – a term used to describe a mode of economic growth based on economic and extra-economic conditions favourable to mass production and mass consumption derived from Henry Ford’s revolutionary form of labour in the motor vehicle industry (Jessop, 1997). Fordism involves specific labour processes (mass production), a regime of accumulation (economies of scale and mass market), and a mode of regulation (mass consumerism, large corporations, the separation of ownership and control, and governmental regulation) (Sabel, 1994; Jessop 1997, 2001). Fordism also describes a move to mass industrial production of standardised goods with a high degree of specialisation in labour activities. The Fordist system was characterised by big business, large labour resources with a distinctive division of labour (e.g. unskilled workers executing simple repetitive tasks), the recognition of trade unions, and state involvement in managing conflict between capital and labour (Harvey, 1989).

The regulation approach emerged in France in the 1970s from a group of political economists who worked to explain the dynamics of long-term cycles of economic stability and change. The group (including Michel Aglietta, Alain Lipietz and Robert Boyer) based their theory on three key concepts:

1. *regime of accumulation* : a combination of the mode of production (e.g. Fordist or post-Fordist) and the mode of social regulation; or the social norms, relations and forms of exchange and organisation that regulate the economy (Knudsen, 1996)
2. *mode of regulation*: the collection of social relations, cultural habits, social modes and economic modes of regulation associated with the institutions and structures that reproduce the capitalist society, including the role of the state in maintaining the regime of accumulation. Dunford (1990, p. 306) expands on this to describe the mode of regulation as:

... a specific local and historical collection of structural forms or institutional arrangements within which individual and collective behaviour unfolds and a particular configuration of market adjustments through which privately made decisions

are co-ordinated and which give rise to elements of regularity of economic life.

Dunford (1990, p. 306)

3. *mode of development:* the labour processes and dominant industrial paradigm combined with the regime of accumulation and the mode of regulation (Amin, 1994, p. 8).

This group of writers were particularly interested in how, historically, systems of capital accumulation are 'regularised' (i.e. normalised or stabilised), with a focus on regulatory frameworks and institutions and the rules that govern production and labour laws. Concerned with the evolution and transformation of capitalist social relations and institutions over a period of time, the regulation approach looks at government's role in the regulation of the economy, but even more so, it considers capitalist economies as a function of social and institutional systems (Boyer, 1990).

From the 1970s, the mode of industrial production is argued to have shifted to more flexible forms of production and labour processes, with an emphasis on innovation and meeting (also stimulating) market demand for more individualised, customised goods and services (Knudsen, 1996). Firms began to find it more profitable to produce a diverse range of goods that appealed to different groups of consumers rather than producing large amounts of generic goods. Demand grew for goods that could be customised to personal taste (Amin, 1994). Instead of investing large outlays of capital resources in mass production of a single product, firms now needed to develop systems of production that were flexible and could quickly respond to the changing demands of the market. Supply chain management transformed from the common practice of keeping large stockpiles of a certain product to a flexible approach to production; for example, just-in-time manufacturing and inventory. This production paradigm (*post-Fordism*) is argued to be the mode of production and socio-economic system most commonly found in industrialised countries today. An analogous situation exists in the tourism industry where changes in consumer demand have created opportunities for

small-firm networks to emerge (Buhalis, 2001; Ioannides & Debbage, 1998). As regulation theory continues to evolve, the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century accumulation regime has also become known as *neo-Fordism*, with growth through “new management techniques (such as flexibility, quality, working collaboratively, lean production, and ‘just-in-time’ supply chain) under the regulation of multinational capital and globalization” (Heery & Noon, 2004, p. 303; see also: Poon, 1990). It is these flexible accumulation regimes that replace the former modes of mass production and mass consumption (Garay & Canoves, 2011; Hall, 1991; Poon 1990).

Regulation theory is a way to integrate the structural dynamics of capitalism with institutional forms commonly found in society and provides a tool with which to analyse the concept of Fordism, post-Fordism and the subsequent rise of neo-Fordism (Goodwin, 2006; Garay & Canovas, 2011). Post-Fordism refers to a dramatic period of process change after Fordism, and a move to automation through the use of technology and small batch production (consider lean production, made to order).

Piore and Sabel’s (1984) concept of *flexible specialisation* seeks to explain such changes in markets as well as the changes in the organisation of work. These authors state that industrial societies are witnessing the “emergence of a new form of industrial organisation which is altering all facets of economic activity including the nature of markets, relations between firms and relations between industry and the state” (Sabel, 1994, p. 206). The rapid economic growth of the ‘Third Italy’ is perhaps the most well-known example of flexible specialisation and the industrial patterns associated with the concept.

The ‘Third Italy’ refers to the central and north-east regions of Italy where clusters of small firms and workshops developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Based on an industry of skilled traditional craftsmen (predominantly SME), each region specialised in a range of loosely related products with each workshop usually having less than 10 workers

(Boschma, 2004; Rosenfeld, 1996). These workshops were known for employing highly skilled, well-paid workers producing high-quality products. Within a multidisciplinary relationship, the workshops involved collaborations between workers, designers, engineers and entrepreneurs.

Boschma (2004) reflects on the social structure of the 'Third Italy' in terms of common values and norms, and attempts to assess the impact of social capital on regional economic development. This social dimension has been related to the concepts of trust and reciprocity (Bianchi, Miller, & Bottini, 1997; Bianchi, 2004) and suggests that a local culture of collaboration and trust may have been responsible for the rapid industrial development of the north-east of Italy (in contrast to the poorer-performing south). In a number of sectors where small firms predominated, groups of firms clustered together in specific regions and were able to grow rapidly, develop niches in export markets and offer new employment opportunities.

As the growth of western economies slowed during the early 1970s, in a time of rising inflation and growing unemployment, there was a shift away from manufacturing and industry towards a service and knowledge economy (Massey, 1995). By the late 1970s, tourism had further developed into a major global industry (Law, 1993). During the 1990s, regulation theory and the concept of flexible specialisation were applied to studies of tourism development processes (Poon, 1993; Shaw & Williams, 1994, 2004). The Fordism spectrum of analysis offers a "useful perspective from which to examine the changing nature of tourism production and consumption" (Torres, 2002, p. 87; see also: Garay & Canovas, 2011). However, the bulk of the body of work on the regulation approach tends to focus on manufacturing (Ioannides & Debbage, 1998, p. 98) – the application to tourism as a service sector is more complex.

There has been a major shift in theorising tourism as the industry has evolved (Poon, 1993; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Ioannides, 1995; Costa & Martinotti, 2008). This transition

is described by Van der Duim (2005, p. 136) as “complex *mélanges* of pre-Fordist, Fordist, post-Fordist and neo-Fordist elements coexisting over time and space” (see also Torres, 2002, p.88; Ioannides & Debbage, 1998, p. 106). The Pre-fordist ‘craft’ or artisanal phase of production is commonly accepted as being prior to the 1920s (Ioannides & Debbage, 1998, p. 102) and is characterised in the travel industry by family-run small to medium-sized enterprises, mostly in the hospitality sector, who make minimal use of technology.

Given the continued practice of securing economies of scale in tourism distribution channels, Ioannides & Debbage (1998, p. 100) distinguish between pre-Fordism, Fordism, and post-Fordism but similarly argue that elements of all three phases of capitalist regimes of accumulation exist in the “unique, complex and inchoate polyglot of travel-related production processes, which places a premium on increasingly flexible forms of accumulation.” This argument is supported by Costa & Martinotti (2008), who also attribute the disintermediating effect of the Internet as a major determinant of change in the institutional framework of tourism, diminishing the role of travel agents as gatekeepers, and increasing the power of consumers and small tourism firms by enabling direct access to each other.

While travellers seek direct access to destinations, the national state plays a significant role in regulating tourism in a way that openly and freely affects tourism flows (and subsequent capital) between countries. Today, the role of the national state in regulating tourism is increasingly focusing on strengthening local and regional economies in order to remain competitive internationally (Costa & Martinotti, 2008; Jessop, 2001). However, the nature and level of engagement with tourism sector by the national state is often variable among countries (Shaw & Williams, 2004).

The way the state mediates relations with the global economy is primarily through exercising control over the mobility and movement of people, capital and goods (consider borders controls, visas, foreign-exchange regulations and currency controls,

and landing and berthing rights for airlines and cruise ships) (Shaw & Williams, 2004, p. 36). The national state also influences the movement of capital inbound and outbound and through legal frameworks that regulate tourism production. Examples of the latter include health and safety laws (particularly relevant to adventure tourism operators), and laws relating to environmental and consumer protection. Macroeconomic policies that affect public spending and taxation also have a strong impact on the tourism sector, as do policies and initiatives that provide a safe and secure environment at the destination and those that build capability in the private sector through education and training for this important industry.

Neo-Fordism in tourism is the term applied to modes of organisation and production of goods and services that are essentially Fordist but have presented a paradigmatic shift towards flexible, individualised, highly customisable, niche-market travel arrangements that offer a more rewarding tourism experience (Butcher, 2003; Everett, 2008; Torres, 2002; Ioannides & Debbage, 1998). This shift requires tourism planners to be more supportive of the consumer market and changing consumer behaviours (Jamal & Kim, 2005).

2.1.2 The new moral tourist and the need for collaboration

Much of the groundwork for introducing the tourism production system within debates concerning industrial restructuring, post-Fordism and post-modernism (or 'new times') can be attributed to the sociologist John Urry, who argues that:

In a period of industrial restructuring, many locales have converted the very sweatshops of their manufacturing and mercantile past, into celebrated objects for the tourist gaze (e.g. London's Covent Garden).

Urry (quoted by Ioannides, 1995, p. 50)

In travel and tourism, Fordism manifests itself for travellers in the purchase of standardised, inflexible, packaged tourism products and in the substantial economies of scale gained by, for example, wholesalers (agents) of travel products buying packaged land, sea and air arrangements (transport, accommodation, sightseeing and tours, and food and beverages) (Torres, 2002). By their very nature, these elements of the tourism supply chain are interconnected.

Just as there was a shift in the post-Fordist consumption of manufactured goods, i.e. away from mass production to satisfy large-scale demand, so too has the profile of the tourist changed to reflect “those individuals who, in their daily lives, are used to being able to customise products, services and experiences to their specific personal preferences, supported by the convenience and speed of easy access” to tourism information via the Internet (O’Connor, 1999, p. 46). The ‘new tourist’ is independent, informed and sophisticated in their choice of product. They are environmentally aware and wish to participate in tourism activities that enable them to become more involved with the local society that they visit (Everett, 2008; WTO, 2002, 2003; Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2000).

Poon (1993) compares ‘old’ and ‘new’ tourists and finds that products that ‘new tourists’ will be most attracted to are ones that enhance the individual’s life experiences (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: 'Old' and 'new' tourists compared

'Old' Tourists	'New' Tourists
Search for the sun	Want to experience something new
Follow the masses	Want to be in charge
Here today, gone tomorrow	See and enjoy, but not destroy
Having is important	Being is important
Superiority	Understanding
Like attractions	Like sports
Take precautions	Adventurous
Eat in hotel	Try local fare
Homogenous	Hybrid

Source: Poon (1993)

Today, tourists are argued to be more differentiated, spontaneous, segmented, individual and critical (Sorenson, 2004; Urry, 2001; Brás et al., 2010). These 'new' tourists present a demand-side challenge for tourism firms to provide a greater range of opportunities for experiences than those offered to the 'mass tourist' (Poon, 1993; Ioannides, 1995, 2006). Since the 1970s' shift from mass production and mass consumerism (Fordism) to reflect the effects of 'new times' and 'new tourist behaviours', post-Fordist tendencies in tourism see a call for more individualised holidays, and a demand for greater quality and authenticity and for more environmentally sound ways of developing tourism products (Sorenson, 2004, p. 60).

Butcher (2003, p. 8) develops Poon's (1993) notion of 'new tourists' and reflects on trends towards a growing market of ethical tourists in leisure travel who seek "enlightenment in other places, and a desire to preserve these places in the name of cultural diversity and environmental conservation". Wellness and individualisation are also critical motivators for these travellers who often have a holistic approach to travel. Quality experiences are increasingly sought that enhance a sense of 'wellness' in terms

of mind, body and spirit, and an opportunity to become more self-aware and find one's individual identity and self-knowledge (Spencer, 2008; Weiermair & Steinhauser, 2003; Everett, 2008).

In the 21st century, other socio-demographic factors that affect the demand side of the tourism industry include an ageing population and a similar trend toward health and well-being. Seniors and baby boomers are among those travellers who are in good health, have a good amount of discretionary income, are seasoned travellers, have free time to travel, and seek new and enriching experiences (Jang & Ham, 2009). Taken together, these global trends have stimulated flows of people, capital and culture, and impact on planning and resource allocation at a national, regional and local level. Urry (1990) asserts that the tourist gaze fixes on destinations "that appear to offer a pre-modern existence from which the visitor can learn a great deal" (cited in Spencer, 2008, p. 66). Butcher, (2003, p. 78) also argues that the "new moral tourist seeks respite from modernity through a temporary immersion in culture they perceive to be less sullied from by modern society."

Rural tourism offers the visitor an opportunity to escape from busy urban lifestyles, slow down and enjoy a different pace of life. In turn, increased linkages between tourism and other sectors of the local economy (e.g. agriculture, cottage industry and local food producers) could be enhanced through the adoption of a cluster or network-based strategic approach to improve the competitiveness of the tourism sector as well as the livelihoods of those who live in rural communities (Tinsley & Lynch, 2001, 2008). The challenge remains to increase linkages between STE and others at the destination to optimise the economic, social and cultural benefits that can arise from sustainable tourism development.

New moral tourism, Butcher argues, relates to the preoccupation of individuals, public agencies, NGOs and private enterprise with protecting the cultural and natural resources

that lie at the heart of the travel and tourism industry. Butcher (2003, p. 21) contends that Mass Tourism is characterised by:

Sameness: mass-marketed packages in 'built for tourists' resort complexes

Crudeness: a lack of self-restraint (sun, sea, sex and alcohol)

Destructiveness: scant regard for the environment, culture and local practices of host communities

New moral tourists, on the other hand, value destinations that conserve the natural environment, as well as adopt responsible practices that protect local communities, traditions and culture (Butcher, 2003). The new moral tourist is characterised by:

Difference: primarily concerned with experiencing the daily life of the 'other', the customs, traditions, and way of living of those in the host community, and in sustaining and encouraging that difference

Cultural sophistication: sensitive about their behaviour and the propensity to cause offence; the new moral tourist is aware of cultural difference in the host encounter with tourism

Constructiveness: eager to make a contribution towards the preservation of local culture and environment of the host community; for example, through buying handmade craft goods from local traders over mass-produced and westernised souvenirs, or by participating as a volunteer on a local project.

This highlights the increasing importance of the link between visitor and community. New moral tourists seek an opportunity to interact with residents in host communities in order to learn from the daily life, values, culture, traditions and behaviours of those in places they visit (Butcher, 2003; Weiermair, 2001).

Changing tourists' attitudes and behaviour, and the values and characteristics associated with the new tourism paradigm, encourages connections between people. Spencer (2008) concurs with Poon (1993) and Brás et al. (2010), and argues that there is a specific tourism niche developing that is akin to a social movement of 'like-minded souls' who have concern for the environment and local culture, and that this trend has potential for

mutually beneficial relationships and networks to develop at the destination. By interaction with locals, local tour operators, information centres, and community and environmental groups, for example, the establishment of network ties is facilitated. Collaboration between STE, community and tourism planners has the potential to develop experiences that help those who choose to spend their leisure time for personal growth and education enact their moral choice as responsible travellers as well as afford visitors opportunities for deeper, meaningful interactions with locals to exchange knowledge and information (Spencer, 2008). STE play a dual role as providers of tourism products and/or services and as members of the local community. The implications of the latter in terms of STE network formation in rural areas have not been well investigated in the literature.

2.1.3 The host community

Towards the end of the 20th century, the benefits of Fordist-style mass tourism (e.g. economies of scale resulting in cheaper unit prices for tourists) became increasingly overshadowed by the subsequent negative impacts of increased visitor numbers (overloaded local infrastructure, and detrimental environmental, community and social impacts). Host communities usually bear the brunt of these impacts but it is argued that they often have little control or voice in local tourism development processes or planning (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Jamal & Stronza, 2009; Shaw & Williams, 2004).

To respond to the evolving demand-side behaviour of new moral tourists and to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism, governments and tourism planners internationally are placing greater emphasis on the *sustainable* development of the tourism industry. The World Tourism Organization UNWTO (WTO, 2011a) reports that in 2010 international tourism generated US\$919 billion in export earnings and emphasises the need to intensify the promotion of responsible, sustainable, and universally accessible tourism. As part of the UNWTO mission statement, sustainable tourism development (STD) refers to “the management of the sector globally for the generation of social, economic and

cultural benefits for host communities” to ensure the “supply of quality tourism products and avoid or reduce negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environments”. This places an emphasis on the need for ‘sustainability’ in tourism planning to be as inclusive of social and cultural factors as environmental factors (Simpson, 2009).

To elevate the role of local residents, Murphy (1985) suggests community as a focal point for decision-making, and presents an ecological model of tourism planning for local involvement in destination development. By adopting this approach, host communities guide processes for tourism development such as market segmentation and destination promotion, according to the types of tourism they wish to attract. Jamal and Getz (1995) similarly offer a set of theoretical constructs to strengthen the links between community and tourism planning with a focus on local collaboration and decision-making. Milne et al. (2008, p. 662) highlight “the role of locality and embedded cultural dimensions that need to be factored into government and/or community initiatives” to create sustainable collaborative outcomes and improved economic opportunity through rural tourism. The authors contend that “a key factor in fostering dynamic and flexible STE, and communities that can effectively interact with the tourism sector, is collaboration and networking” between enterprises and also between tourism businesses and the broader community. It is these links between STE and community that are commonly overlooked in the literature associated with the development and maintenance of rural STE networks – a gap that this thesis sets out to address.

The art of welcoming visitors as part of the ‘community show’ is reflected in Murphy’s approach (1985, p. 169) to integrate the wishes, aspirations and traditions of local people into future tourism development. Local residents as friendly, hospitable tourism ambassadors are an important and attractive destination asset (Wang, Bickle, & Harrill, 2010; Shamai, 1991). While this emphasis on community involvement appears sound in terms of STD, critics of the community approach (Taylor, 1995; Ryan & Montgomery,

1994) warn of problems in communities where attitudes towards tourism are divided, and where varying perceptions of 'who benefits' from tourism exist. Several authors (Taylor, 1995; Gretzel, Go, Lee, & Jamal, 2009; Jones, 2005b; Madrigal, 1994; Ryan & Montgomery, 1994) contend that factors affecting resident perceptions of tourism development also include the community 'standing' of tourism entrepreneurs; for example, whether they are born locally or are long-standing residents of a community. Trust plays an important role in the willingness of tourism stakeholders to work together and share experiences, expertise and resources, and is a "critical factor affecting inter-firm knowledge transfer and creation" (Brás et al., 2010; McGehee, Lee, O'Bannon, & Perdue, 2010; Inkpen, 2005, p. 154).

Applications of the regulation approach to tourism have largely ignored some of the social networking and historic specificity of 'place' such as that found in the Third Italy where local craft, traditions, stories, culture and heritage were integral to the economic growth of the region (Piore & Sabel, 1984). Similarly, the important element of 'community' has not often been inserted into the mix. Regulation theory is a useful tool to enhance understandings of the changes in tourism, the role of the small firm, and the need for networks (Van der Duim, 2005; Beritelli, 2011). The regulation approach is characterised by both economic and non-economic factors that contribute to capitalist expansion, but the way it has been applied to tourism has highlighted weaknesses and gaps in dealing with this complex industry (Costa & Martinotti, 2008; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001).

Changes in behaviour, attitudes, values, preferences, socio-demographics, technology uptake and motivations in consumers of the tourism experience have all had an impact on the way STE respond to a dynamic market. These changes call for increased flexibility in organisational structure and supporting frameworks for destination development (Brás et al., 2010; Poon, 1993; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Much of the literature focuses on organisational structure in terms of networks as 'units' but the subsequent impact on the

nature and *functions* of STE systems of connections and the types of social relationships amongst individuals in the tourism value chain (particularly in rural tourism) are not well explored (Polo & Frias, 2010; Beritelli, 2011). To intensify the nature and level of collaboration among and between a broad range of tourism stakeholders, including community, a better understanding of how STE networking in a rural setting actually *works* is needed (Beritelli, 2011; Tinsley & Lynch, 2008; Wang et al., 2010; Hall, 2005; Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006).

2.2 Networks, clusters and small rural tourism enterprise

Interest in the organisational forms of the tourism industry has increasingly focused on social norms and conventions, collaborative activities and collective identities, and processes and procedures between and among public agencies and private enterprise (Beritelli, 2011; Polo & Frias, 2010; Copp & Ivy, 2001). ‘Modes of regulation’ encompass social modes as well as economic modes of regulation, the former having an important influence on the way processes of capital accumulation are structured, facilitated and ‘regularised’ (Jessop, 2001; Silvia & Choudhury, 2006). A number of ‘dramatic environmental changes’ have moved the tourism industry towards new forms of management and organisation (Weiermair, 2001, p. 2; Beritelli, 2011; Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006) where entrepreneurs have been driven to restructure and re-engineer their approaches to business in an environment of heightened competition through the use of co-operative activities, alliances and networks.

2.2.1 Network theory

At the most basic level, a ‘network’ can be described as a system of connections. Since the 1980s, network theory has very much come to the fore to help explain systems of connections and to model relations between things (e.g. individuals, groups, computers, organisations and societies). When considering the pattern of relations between entities in a social space; Owen-Smith and Powell (2004) identify four distinct types of networks.

First are the social networks that exist among individuals; these are based on friendship, romantic connections, advice-seeking and acquaintanceship. Second are the more formal, contractual relationships that occur between organisations. These networks are more structured, and might include strategic alliances, joint ventures and supply-side contracts. Third are the informal networks between organisations where social networks cross organisational boundaries. And finally are connections through shared memberships and affiliations (e.g. trade associations and committee memberships).

The processes through which small firms engage in networks is under-researched in general (Whittington, Owen-Smith, & Powell, 2009; O'Toole & McGrath, 2008; Braun, 2005) and is also not well explored in the tourism-related literature (Brás et al., 2010; Beritelli, 2011). O'Toole and McGrath (2008) argue that that "SMEs need to build a set of capabilities to effectively utilise and operate with their networks" as it is the way they "engage in the process of network practice that ultimately derives benefits". The authors define these as 'relational capabilities', or more particularly:

The capacity of an SME to interact proactively with a wide range of connected actors to purposefully exchange knowledge, create opportunities and joint process improvements including adaptations and innovations.

O'Toole & McGrath (2008, p. 2)

An important capability for SME is to be able to develop relationships between firms in order to innovate and gain access to the resources of other organisations (Ngugi et al., 2010; Gulati et al., 2000; Whittington et al., 2009). Relational capabilities describe the process by which SMEs are connected in a network setting. They encompass the proficiency of SME to engage in a series of activities within a system of connections that involve a process or "a series of actions between the SME actors with a network that produces a change or development" (O'Toole & McGrath, 2008, p. 1). The limitation of the discussion of relational capabilities is that it is predominantly in the context of business-to-business SME networks, and largely highlights cases from the manufacturing sector to enhance supply chain integration, rather than the service sector.

The benefits of networks in a personal context or business environment are commonly described by the way that these relations have value (social capital) and that networks create social capital for individuals (Bourdieu, 1983) and communities (Putnam, 2000). Magdol & Bessel (2003) distinguish between *accessing* social capital as a collection of resources and *mobilising* social capital which *actualises* access to resources. The authors refer to this latter (actualised) form of social capital as 'social currency'.

Social currency is available to utilize when the accumulated social capital investments are activated. It is a medium of exchange that is spent when favors are obtained and is replenished when favors are given. Individuals exchange social currency when they draw from their social capital asset pool (receive social support) or deposit into (provide social support, with the implicit potential for reciprocation) their social capital asset pool.

Magdol & Bessel (2003, p. 150)

Networks are also attributed as a defining feature of innovative regions, and they are said to create trust through reciprocity and embed transactions in a social milieu, thus creating markets (Lynch & Morrison, 2007; Whittington et al., 2009). However, those who participate in these organisational structures are often faced with the challenge of generating a consensus among members in order to develop a set of objectives and a common strategy to co-ordinate tourism at a regional and local level (Brás et al., 2010).

When considering networks as catalysts for constructing and sharing knowledge and innovation, the notion of epistemic communities comes to mind. These are defined as "networks of knowledge-based experts or groups with an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within the domain of their expertise" (Cinquemani, 2002, p. 770, citing Haas, 1992). According to Haas (1992, p. 3), these people share "a common set of causal beliefs and notions of validity based on internally defined criteria for evaluation, common policy projects, and shared normative commitments." While epistemic communities are usually described within the disciplines of science, international relations and political science (Dobusch & Quack, 2008) the notion of an epistemic

community in tourism does not feature in the literature. Nor is there a discussion of how networks of small tourism firms and communities can provide channels through which new ideas circulate from societies to governments.

Factors that can create a successful tourism network include clearly defined objectives and purpose, structure and leadership; a culture of trust; adequate resourcing; member engagement; and inter-organisational learning (Augustyn & Knowles, 2000). Morrison et al. (2004, p. 198) concur with these critical success factors and conclude that in order to identify a real sense of a *managerial* understanding of how these networks should be organised to best advantage, a deeper awareness of the success factors of how tourism networks are formed and sustained is required.

Morrison et al. describe a 'tourism network' in a way that provides a useful starting point for further definition:

A set of formal, co-operative relationships between appropriate organisation types and configurations, stimulating inter-organisational learning and knowledge exchange, and a sense of community and collective common purpose that may result in qualitative and/or quantitative benefits of a business activity, and/or community nature relative to building profitable and sustainable tourism destinations.

Morrison et al. (2004, p. 202)

An understanding of the successful outcomes of tourism networks is useful to promote co-operation in tourism (Nordin, 2003; Pavlovich, 2001; Braun, 2005). Benefits of SME networks in tourism commonly fall into three main categories: learning and exchange, business activity, and community (Bhat, 2008; Bhat & Milne, 2008; Buhalis, 2003; Lynch, Halcro, Johns, & Buick, 2000; Augustyn & Knowles, 2000). To elaborate (see Table 2.2) Morrison et al. (2004) describe the benefits of networks to include:

Table 2.2: Benefits of tourism networks

<i>Learning and exchange:</i>	Knowledge transfer, tourism education, process, communication, facilitation of the development stage of small enterprises
<i>Business activity:</i>	Co-operative activities (marketing, purchasing, product development), extension to visitor season through enhanced product quality and visitor experience, best use of small enterprise and support agency resources, inter-trading within the network and enhanced cross referral
<i>Community:</i>	Fostering common purpose and focus, more income staying locally, community support for destination development, engagement of SME in destination development

Source: Morrison et al. (2004, p. 198), adapted from Lynch et al. (2000)

Nordin emphasises ‘clustering’ as a means of developing the travel and tourism industry to support economic growth through a high level of innovation and the opportunity to increase competitiveness at the destination.

The interdependence of attractions, services, transportation, information and promotion highlights the need for collaboration and it is evident that companies located in a destination have a lot to gain from being located in a close proximity.

Nordin (2003, p. 8)

Trends in tourism planning and management reflect the development of ‘dense’ networks of tourism enterprises as a contributing factor that propels the growth of tourism worldwide (WTO, 2003; Tzortzaki, Voulgaris, & Agiomirgianakis, 2006; Ndou & Petti, 2007). Policies increasingly embrace the language of networking and clustering and encourage small tourism firms to enhance competition through externalities, and linkages across firms, industries and associated institutions. The development of networks and clusters are not in themselves an ‘end’; rather they are a ‘means’ to

improve the tourism product mix. To do this, tourism planners commonly promote STE collaboration as a way to develop high-end tourism products and experiences that appeal to high-spending, low-impact travellers (e.g. adventure or ecotourism products) (Johnston, 2004; WTO, 2003).

While the assumptions behind this approach to tourism planning may be sound, in practice regional co-ordination of tourism activities and network development amongst small tourism firms is largely at a nascent stage (Braun, 2002, 2005; Nodder, Mason, Ateljevic, & Milne, 2003; Nordin 2003; Tzortzaki et al., 2006). Networking and inter-organisational learning are pivotal linkages for STD, though much of the literature on networks and clusters is often applied in the context of manufacturing and technology-based industries (Braun, 2002; Novelli et al., 2006). Relatively few recent studies discuss clusters and networks in the tourism sector (Nordin, 2003; Braun, 2005; Pavlovich, 2001), and even fewer are specifically related to tourism in rural or peripheral areas (Albrecht, 2010; Hall, 2005; Aylward & Kelliher, 2009). This makes it difficult to judge the efficacy of government policy and regional initiatives to enhance the tourism experience through tourism enterprise collaboration and networks. Much of the extant literature associated with tourism networks and small firm collaboration also fails to embrace the important element of community.

Pavlovich (2001, p. 215) highlights the need for further research to better understand connectivity and the process of information exchange in order to build 'stronger coherency' within destination networks. Using the case of Waitomo Caves in the North Island of New Zealand, Pavlovich draws on network theory to illustrate how relational ties within a destination contribute to knowledge creation, intensive information exchange and optimised use of resources. She concludes that "tourism organisations need to have a portfolio of network-oriented relationships (strong supportive ties) and external partnerships (to source new and current information opportunities)."

‘Value for money’ and ‘quality of tourism products’ are key decision making factors for ‘new tourists’ (Weiermair & Steinhauser, 2003). They are also somewhat dependent on the ability of STE to link to local economies through purchasing goods and services from local suppliers. Affordability, quality and accessibility are important factors that dictate the nature and level of economic co-operation between STE and local or regional community (Ateljevic, 2009).

The tourism value chain refers to the full range of activities to bring a product or service through the different phases of design, procurement, production and delivery to final consumers. It is all encompassing, from the visitor’s first encounter with the destination through advertising and promotion to the provision of information associated with the visitor experience, as well as after-sales services and the final disposal of used products, and it involves a good deal of input of various producer services (Weiermair, 2005; Braun, 2005). In other words, the tourism value chain combines supply-side and demand-side value integration and is a useful mechanism with which to pinpoint those areas where innovation is most likely to occur (Weiermair, 2005).

Braun (2005, p. 7) explores the importance of value chains, networks and co-operation as drivers for the growth of small firms and concludes that more needs to be known about tourism SME networks, local value chains and related destination assets. Braun suggests that the mapping of assets at the destination end of the service chain will “provide knowledge on local and regionally embedded networks” and assist in building competitive advantage by “aligning value-adding activities based on networking with the tourist”. Networking can be as basic as the establishment of personal connections and the exchange of information between individuals (‘soft’ networks), or as complex as ‘hard’ networks between firms which involve activities such as joint production and marketing – the latter highlighting the economic importance of strategic alliances and *clusters* (Rosenfeld, 1996; Ffowcs-Williams, 2000).

Delgado, Porter, and Stern (2011) contend that industries that participate in a strong cluster enhance rates of employment, foster a growth in wages, and increase the number of establishments in a region. The authors analyse data from the US Cluster Mapping project and also give evidence of the emergence of *new* industries where there is a strong cluster environment.

Initially described as “a geographic concentration of competing and co-operating companies, suppliers, service providers, and associated institutions” (Porter, 1998b, p. 78), the *cluster* concept now relates more strongly to the very important dimensions of modern innovation (Johnston, 2004). The OECD produced a different working definition of clusters, placing greater emphasis on the knowledge dimension:

Clusters are characterized as networks of production of strongly interdependent firms, knowledge-producing agents and customers linked to each other in a value-adding production chain.

OECD (1999, p. 157)

Behind attempts to promote cluster development, there are generally three distinct objectives (Bhat, 2008; Boekholt & Thuriaux, 1999, p. 383). These relate to the need to improve the international and national competitive advantage of certain sectors, to improve SME competitiveness and, thirdly, to improve the attractiveness, economic performance and development of a region.

Some authors state that the terms ‘networking’ and ‘clustering’ from a business perspective are distinctly different (Forsman & Solitander, 2003; Porter, 1998b) while others suggest that the boundary between the two is, at best, blurred and difficult to distinguish (Nordin, 2003; Braun, 2005). Forsman and Solitander (2003, p. 1) maintain that research into business networks is anchored in the management discipline whereas contemporary economic geographers conduct research into regional development where the common theme of “knowledge transfer is rooted in the spatial dimension of localised knowledge and facilitated by geographical proximity and clustering.” Distinct from

Porter's definition of clustering, Forsman & Solitander (2003, p. 5) define networks as consisting of "relationships connecting actors (individuals, groups of individuals, firms, parts of firms, firms or group of firms) that are co-operating in order to achieve a common goal." In other words, management researchers have focused on networking as a form of co-operation towards a common goal whereas economic geographers have highlighted the role of the 'cluster' as a conduit for knowledge transfer and creation towards a collective vision. Nordin (2003) highlights one difference between a network and a cluster being that whereas networks can occur amongst actors situated anywhere; clusters usually refer to a core of firms in a limited geographical area. The main distinctions between the two sets of connections (networks and clusters) are presented in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Characteristics of networks and clusters

Characteristics	Network	Cluster
Membership	Networks have restricted membership	Open membership – clusters are based on social values that foster trust and reciprocity
Relationships	Competitive <i>through</i> co-operation Networks allow firms access to specialised services at lower costs	Competitive <i>with</i> co-operation Clusters attract needed specialised services to a region
What brings actors together?	Common business goals Networks are based on co-operation	Collective vision Clusters require both co-operation and competition
Base for interaction	Formal partnerships Networks make it easier for firms to engage in complex production	Informal interaction Clusters generate demand for more firms with similar and related capabilities
Scale	Limited inter-firm (restricted by the number of relationships that can be sustained)	Large, no limit
Basis of knowledge transfer	Relationships	Location/proximity

Source: Adapted from Forsman & Solitander (2003, p. 8) and Rosenfeld (as cited by Nordin, 2003, pp. 1314)

Nordin (2003) makes reference to tourism as an integrated system in a limited geographical area and this brings to mind the concept of the destination. Nordin argues that the development of clusters in tourism may depend on a variety of factors such as government support, policy setting, improvements in infrastructure, and joint marketing efforts where the interdependence of related products and services (attractions, transport, accommodation, information) highlights the need for collaboration. The author contends that networks, clusters and strategic alliances therefore form part of a 'holistic' sustainable tourism management system. Viewed in this way, they are integral to the provision of tourism experiences that exhibit quality, affordability, accessibility and variety with the aim of enhancing competitiveness and higher levels of tourism yield.

Improving yield in tourism requires approaches that are designed to increase the average spend per tourist by repositioning a destination as a place for sustainable, differentiated products and services that command a premium price (US Aid Global Competitiveness Report, 2004). In order to do this, objectives in the NZTS 2015 relate to marketing and managing a world-class visitor experience, securing a long-term future by conserving the natural, built, cultural and social environment, and 'working smarter'. In relation to the latter, the development of partnerships and strategic alliances among businesses is one of the recommendations for implementation of this tourism plan:

Co-operation among public agencies and strategic partnerships between tourism companies and among inter-dependent companies across other industries is of vital importance.

TIANZ (2007, p. 20)

2.2.2 Government policy, networks and clusters

Cluster development is recognised internationally as a core approach to building a modern economy (Delgado et al., 2011). Globally, there is encouragement from governments to foster partnerships and build capacity clusters in order to compete at a global level across a number of industry sectors including tourism (Beaumont & Dredge,

2010; Dredge 2006a; Hall, 2008; Scott, Baggio, & Cooper, 2008). Selected policies, advisory committees and policy units within New Zealand Government departments reflect an element of this focus on a high level of networking and collaboration, particularly in policies that affect the SME sector.

The Growth and Innovation Framework (GIF) of the New Zealand Labour Government (1999–2008) was an initiative of the New Zealand Ministry of Economic Development (MED) and highlighted collaboration between market players as a key element of a well-functioning modern economy (MED, 2006). Of particular note are the New Zealand Trade & Enterprise Cluster Development and Incubator Development Programmes and the Regional Partnerships Programme (RPP).

The Cluster Development Programme fund was disestablished in July 2006. Reasons for the dissolution of the Programme include a lack of specificity in policy design, a lack of transparency in aspects of New Zealand Trade & Enterprise's operational decision-making processes, and poorly identified objectives and economic outcomes of the programme (MED, 2006). The RPP was reshaped into the regionally-based Enterprising Partnerships Fund in 2007. In 2008, the new National Government reviewed this fund and recommended that as many tourism-based projects have 'outcomes' that are more than just economic in nature (e.g. environmental, cultural or heritage implications), these initiatives may be better suited to other funding mechanisms (such as lottery grants and funding for culture and heritage).

The New Zealand Government's 'Economic Growth Agenda' also supports collaborations and networking through the Regional Partnership Fund. Strong collaborative networks are identified as factors that facilitate economic growth in the Enterprising Partnerships Fund (MED, 2007, p. 8). In terms of government support and funding, it is therefore important to ensure that the link between SME network development and the subsequent impact on tourism's economic performance is clearly defined in terms of

economic outcomes and that there are clearly demonstrated benefits for the region and New Zealand. This rather narrow focus on the economic contribution of tourism fails to address the complexity of the industry and the broader economic *and* social benefits it brings to individuals and communities.

These funding schemes focus on the creation of regionally based collaborations and partnerships or networks that benefit multiple regional stakeholders rather than individual firms or sectors. However, to say that all destinations fit Porter's definition of 'integrated systems' would require a higher level of co-operation, collaboration, and collective visions than found in the case of New Zealand (Wilson, 2002; Clark, 2007).

2.3 Social networks, social capital and tourism

The benefits that flow from the norms, trust, shared information, co-operation and reciprocity associated with both formal and informal social networks (social capital) are essential components in the successful development of networks of small tourism firms (Beritelli, 2011; Ateljevic, 2009; Nordin, 2003; Morrison et al., 2004).

The notion of the social network has been used to express and explore the often complex relationships that exist between members of social systems in a range of settings – from interpersonal (between individuals) to those between organisations at a local, regional, national and global level. Social network theory draws on the underlying assumptions of network theory which “emphasize the fact that each individual has ties to other individuals, each of whom in turn is tied to a few, some or many others and so on” (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 12).

Many authors argue that in order to facilitate such ties, a social infrastructure is required (Rosenfeld, 1996; Jacobs & De Man, 1996; Granovetter, 1985, 1992). Social interaction, trust and a shared vision are factors that underpin the relationship (*ties*) between actors (*nodes*) in a network. These interpersonal ties are defined as connections between

people and usually fall within three categories: *strong* (between family members and close friends), *weak* (between distant friends, colleagues and acquaintances) or *absent* (Granovetter, 1974; Carmo, 2010).

Rogers (1995, p. 19) refers to such relations as 'homophilous' (between those with similar beliefs and mutual understandings) and 'heterophilous' (between dissimilar individuals) 'communication channels', and emphasises the importance of shared understandings within networks in order to facilitate the transfer of knowledge. He states that heterophilous communication "may cause cognitive dissonance because an individual is exposed to messages that are inconsistent with existing beliefs, an uncomfortable psychological state" (Rogers, 1995, p. 289). It is the tension that arises from an individual holding two conflicting thoughts at the same time (cognitive dissonance) that serves as a driving force to impel the mind to acquire new knowledge or establish new beliefs (Granovetter, 1985). In other words, cognitive dissonance can be a precursor to innovation and creativity and this (according to Granovetter) places a caveat on the importance of embeddedness. Granovetter (1985) argues that strong ties will not supply you with as much diversity of knowledge as those among weak ties. In Granovetter's 1973 paper 'The strength of weak ties', he hypothesises that weak ties can build bonding relations between groups or organisations to 'bridge' the information flows between different groups. However, Liu and Wei (2005, p. 103) find that this logic can be faulted:

Granovetter's concept of embeddedness implies that economic exchanges always take place between people who know each other but are not completely strange to each other. In comparison with the hypothesis of weak ties, the concept of embeddedness emphasizes on trust rather than information. But trust should develop on the basis of long-term contact or communication between transaction parties. Thus, it is obviously to be seen that the concept of embeddedness implies the strength of strong ties, which is contrary to his former hypothesis of the strength of weak ties.

Liu & Wei (2005, p. 103)

This debate is important to rural tourism where STE often rely on personal connections embedded in geographic communities to share knowledge and experiences (Aylward & Kelliher, 2009; Beritelli, 2011). The concept of small firm embeddedness is common in tourism network literature (Uzzi, 1996, 1997; Pavlovich & Kearins, 2004) where it is asserted that social factors affect business success. STE develop social relations and systems of connections in order to access knowledge, information and resources. This is the premise of a good deal of the literature outlined earlier. However, in order to enhance not only their own business performance but also the performance of the destination as a whole, it becomes necessary for STE to form connections beyond those within their own groups and develop links to local authorities or Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs). These links are vital in order to improve destination marketing, enhance infrastructure for tourism, and upgrade skills and knowledge (perhaps through a 'mass request' for workshops or regular industry updates). In other words, STE need to move in circles different from their own to gain access to information, knowledge and resources beyond those they already possess.

This raises the issue of the importance of stronger social ties and connections between STE and other stakeholders – especially those in public agencies and government. Ties that are based on shared goals and visions and a good deal of trust and reciprocity are important but do not always exist between private enterprise and public agencies (Nordin, 2003; Baggio, 2008). This has profound implications for organisations, such as those in rural areas, that do not have access to a larger social system of relationships (Aylward & Kelliher, 2009) and needs to be addressed in the context of this research. A better understanding of the nature of the *social relations* that contribute to social capital and how social ties are strengthened is thus essential.

2.3.1 Social capital and rural tourism

Putnam (2000, p. 19) describes social capital as “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” The

key indicators of social capital include informal and formal social networks, social relations, trust, reciprocity and group membership, and most definitions also emphasise the role of networks and social norms. The core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value and *add* value. In the case of tourism, social capital is manifest in a variety of ways in the tourism value chain; for example, by STE developing a working relationship with other small firms to offer an enhanced visitor experience with a view to improving business performance and yield and, subsequently, destination performance overall (Pavlovich, 2003; Denicolai, Cioccarelli, & Zucchella, 2010).

To elaborate on the above definition there are two main components of the concept of social capital that need to be considered. These are *bonding* social capital and *bridging* social capital. The former “constitutes a kind of sociological superglue” (Putnam, 2000, p. 19) and refers to the value assigned to social networks between homogeneous groups of people. Putnam (2000, p. 22) describes these as ‘inward looking’ and tending to reinforce exclusive identities and the formation of close-knit groups with a similar nature. *Bridging* social capital refers to the value of social networks between socially heterogeneous groups. Putnam offers two examples: criminal gangs create bonding social capital, while choirs and bowling clubs create bridging social capital. Putnam explains that bridging capital occurs among groups who are more outward looking and “encompass people across diverse social cleavages”. Bridging social capital, he argues, has a host of other benefits for societies, governments, individuals and communities. Notions of trust and reciprocity amongst people who share a common locality and a common bond due to the street, town or region that they live in, offer an extremely valuable resource for local and regional economic development (Reimer, 2002, 2009; Putnam, 2000; Fukuyama, 1996; Coleman, 1990).

Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) distinguishes social capital from economic and cultural capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance

and recognition.” Coleman, adopting a sociological perspective (1988, p. 96), describes “supportive relationships among adults and children that promote the sharing of norms and values.” This approach is perhaps the most similar to the very first definitions of social capital, including that of Hanifan (1916, cited in Putnam, 2000, p. 19) who stated that social capital comprised “those intangible substances that count for most in the daily lives of people – namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit.” Woolcock (1998, p. 151) offers a simple definition of social capital as “encompassing the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit.” Fukiyama (1995, p. 10) takes an economist’s perspective and defines social capital as “the existence of a certain set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permit cooperation among them.”

Robinson and Williams (2001) explore the concept of social capital and how interpretations vary between New Zealand Maori and European definitions. They suggest that it is vital that policymakers understand the implications of whanau, hapu and iwi connections, and to understand Maori aspirations and customary ways of association. Value homophily and geographic propinquity are also important tools to build social capacity (social capital and social cohesion) in rural locales (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Where traditional notions of social capital (Putnam 2000, for example) distinguish family from community, in the Maori context “family (whanau) moves across the immediate family to the wider family network (hapu) and the tribe (iwi) where the extended family becomes the community and the community is made up of extended family” (Robinson & Williams, 2001, p. 55). These authors explain that it is important to note that relationships in Maori society are formed around information association and connectedness of whanau (extended families) and iwi (tribe or clan). Similarly, Pacific people base ‘community’ on familial ties, founded on the values of love, respect for age, reciprocity and spirituality (Laban, 2011). These are important notions to bear in mind

when considering new moral tourists who are attracted to rural destinations not only for the natural environment, but also for the spiritual and emotional dimensions of the tourism experience (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

Similarity breeds connection and in a rural small-town setting it is important to bear in mind Hanifan's (1916) notions of the concept of social capital given the simplicity of ideas such as neighbouring, fellowship, goodwill and social intercourse as well as Robinson & Williams's (2001) links to social, geographical and familial propinquity. Woolcock's (1998) notion of the role of social capital to facilitate collective action for community benefit is also highly relevant to the development of tourism networks in geographically isolated small rural communities.

Tourist activities in rural settings offer the visitor an opportunity "to get closer to the values of the rural world, such as its culture and heritage, contemplating the countryside, tranquillity, physical and spiritual renewal, and the like" (Polo & Frias, 2010, p. 26). While tourism holds great potential for diversification from traditional land use (such as agriculture), and to regenerate and revitalise rural areas, there is a need for a better understanding of the complex processes of social and economic development in rural communities in order to mitigate the effects of peripherality (Brennan & Luloff, 2007).

Tourism offerings in rural areas are often diverse, fragmented and unco-ordinated in terms of management of the destination due to the wide variety of stakeholders involved requiring joint action (Cawley & Desmond, 2008; Simpson, 2008). While this may also be said of the urban environment, issues such as peripherality and geographic isolation, local parochialism, and the different motivations of rural tourists add to the complex nature of rural tourism (Hall & Page, 2006; Polo & Frias, 2010; Tinsley & Lynch, 2008). Polo and Frias comment:

Rural tourism development is complex, considering the wide variety of companies, agents and resources to be jointly managed, the objectives of each participating company, but also to broader objectives relating to the development and conservation of resources in the rural tourist destination.

Polo & Frias (2010, p. 25)

STE play a pivotal role in developing “unique activities at places visited by a more segmented specialised and sophisticated market” (Novelli et al., 2006, p. 1). STE are not only an important conduit to link visitors with those who live in rural communities, they also play a vital role in rural areas where they create much needed employment opportunities, support other commercial ventures, and reduce rural-urban shift (Ribeiro & Marques, 2002; Polo & Frias, 2010). While small firms are often focused on their own performance, they do support the infusion of tourist expenditure into local economies and thereby contribute to the multiplier effect of tourism (Buhalis, 2001).

Several authors contend that for tourism to be beneficial in terms of income generation, economic growth and improved rural livelihoods, it has to be linked to local activities such as agriculture, cottage industries (e.g. handcrafts, food products) and other small-scale enterprises (Mshenga, 2009; Simpson, 2008; Brás et al., 2010). An increase in demand for tailored tourism experiences requires tourism businesses to provide a comprehensive range of products and services that satisfy tourists’ specific requirements for a rich and authentic ‘total visitor experience’ in the destination (Novelli et al., 2006; Nylander & Hall, 2005). In response to this call for complementary tourism products, STE in developed and developing nations are making greater use of partnerships, affiliations and co-operative practices that also overcome problems of size and economies of scale, isolation and limited access to resources and global distribution channels (Beritelli, 2011; Baggio, 2008; Brás et al., 2010).

It is commonly argued that SME, whether in tourism or other industry sectors, often lack the capital, skills, training, marketing support and information to run efficiently (Brás et al., 2010; Milne et al., 2008; Van der Duim, 2005; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2004, p. 6; Ateljevic

& Doorne, 2000, p. 379). Networking and clustering is seen as a critical success factor in the support of these businesses with enhanced network capabilities enabling STE to transform external communications and enable collaboration with new and existing business partners.

Social capital in rural communities is suggested to be at a higher level than that found in urban environments (Reimer, 2002; Carmo, 2010). Reimer argues that as *capital*, the concept is concerned with the organisation of assets, processes and resources that can be invested into production and used to achieve common goals and outcomes. As *social capital*, the emphasis is on the relations and social structures that encourage collective activities, co-operation, collaboration and networks – thus social capital becomes an important asset for community development (Reimer, 2002, p. 2; Reimer & Bollman, 2006, Van der Maesen & Walker, 2005). Importantly, Reimer contends that social capital is a stock that can be used (though not exclusively) for economic outcomes and that to understand social capital it is necessary to understand related social relations. Considering social capital as a ‘stock’ that can be drawn upon, he argues that it is important to identify the *availability* of social capital and the ways in which it is *used* (or not used) in a particular setting. As a form of *capital*, social capital is thus an asset or resource that is embedded in different types of *social relationships*.

Granovetter’s (1985) embeddedness argument maintains that market exchange is influenced by the norms and values inherent in social networks in which it occurs and, as part of that construct, friendship, social connections and social systems of support offer benefits to enhance business performance. Thus the level of embeddedness in a network increases with the density of connections and linkages within that network. What is not so well presented in the tourism SME literature, however, is a deeper understanding of the *type* of social relations that exist in the process of social capital accumulation, the indicators of the *availability* of social capital, or the processes that surround the *use* of social capital (Tinsley & Lynch, 2001, 2008).

Several authors comment that the density of social networks, and the intensity of the interpersonal interactions that underlie them, have a profound effect on the effectiveness and sustainability of development projects, particularly in rural and peripheral environs (Carmo, 2010; Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002; Aylward & Kelliher, 2009; Reimer, 2009). If social capital is viewed as an asset, the desired outcome from its use or application becomes social cohesion. Defined as “the extent to which people respond collectively to achieve their valued outcomes and to deal with the economic, social, political, or environmental stresses (positive or negative) that affect them” (Reimer, 2002, p. 13), social cohesion is a useful term to describe the extent to which individuals and groups work together (van der Maesen & Walker, 2005). The extent of cohesion is, however, dependent on the activity. For example, a local tourism group may be very cohesive when concerned with the quality and availability of signage (street signs) in a certain neighbourhood or town, but they may not be as cohesive when the issue is related to building permits for tourism accommodation purposes.

Social cohesion, social capital and social capacity are central concepts to rural revitalisation (Reimer, 2002, 2009; Reimer & Bolman, 2006; Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002). A symbiotic relationship exists between social capital and social cohesion: one contributes to and sustains the other and vice versa, with the level of social cohesion contributing to social capital. To explain how people organise their relationships, distribute resources and structure their institutions to achieve a particular goal, Reimer (2002) proposes four modes of *social relations* to understand the basis for social capital and how *social cohesion* is embedded in each of these relations (see Figure 2.1). In other words, these forms of relations connect and link people and groups in different ways to different institutions. Reimer (2002) argues that in order to access resources (material, cognitive and influential) that it is important to develop the ‘social capacity’ to function well in these different types of relations. Recognition of the strengths of each type of relation offers opportunities for business, policy and local collective action. He also

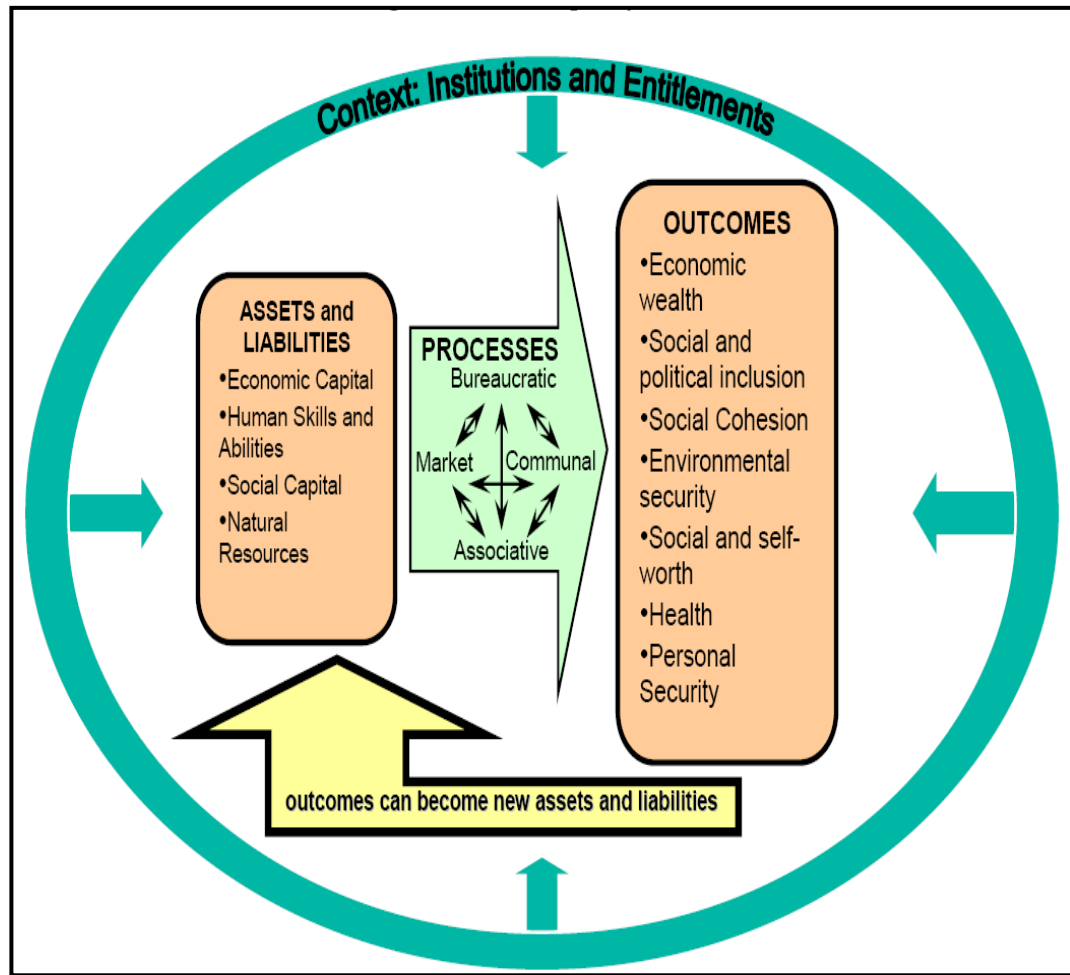
contends that in the dynamic environment and ever-changing marketplace of the 21st century, all forms of relations are necessary. Businesses and communities that are dynamic, flexible, responsive and capable of change have a better chance of 'thriving' if they can draw on all four forms of social relations to improve their 'agility' and form a basis for working together. The four forms of social relations presented by Reimer (2002) are concerned with:

<i>Market relations</i>	The exchange of goods and services within a free and information-rich market context. Contractual, short-term, supply and demand, e.g. commerce, labour, housing, trade.
<i>Bureaucratic relations</i>	Rationalised roles based on the structuring of authority through general principles and rules; e.g. government, law, corporations
<i>Associative relations</i>	Shared interests; e.g. recreation, charities, religious groups
<i>Communal relations</i>	Generalised reciprocity, identity, birth; e.g. families, cultural groups, gangs.

A useful approach for thinking about social capital is to examine the concept in terms of social *capacity*. The New Rural Economy (NRE) Capacity Model and Framework (Reimer, Lyons, Ferguson, & Polanco, 2008, p. 6; see Figure 2.1), identifies five elements of social capacity. The first three elements are associated with the assets and liabilities available to a group or community; the actions and processes that may be taken by individuals or groups to recognise, reorganise, or manage those assets in order to produce outputs classified within the four modes of social relations; and the outcomes of the reorganisation of assets and liabilities. The fourth element reflects the dynamic quality of the framework and indicates "how the outcomes at one point in time may become new assets and liabilities in the future". Finally, the fifth element is recognition of the role of contextual features that may constrain, enhance, or modify any of the first four

elements. The authors contend that the framework is scalable with applications from the level of individuals through to communities, regions and nations.

Figure 2.1: New Rural Economy Capacity Framework



Source: Reimer, Lyons, Ferguson, & Polanco (2008, p. 6)

The NRE Capacity Framework provides a useful way to think about STE social network processes and social relations as being more than just a generalised acceptance (if not under-developed rhetoric) that networks that tap into available social capital are 'good' for tourism development in rural destinations. Rather, elements can be broken down to

understand the four modes of social relations in terms of what builds a good stock of social capital that can be drawn upon to enhance STE performance.

While collaborative approaches to business amongst STE are on the rise (Bras et al., 2010; Denicolai et al., 2010; Braun, 2002; Applebee, Ritchie, Demoor, & Cressy, 2000) the challenge remains to entice New Zealand's small business community to engage in such networks. Braun (2002, p. 14) contends that levels of social capital embedded within a region are "becoming more important than a region's physical attributes" (e.g. natural and built environment) for the economic growth of a given area. Linkages within the tourism sector and with other sectors (e.g. agriculture and local transport) can be leveraged to substitute imports with local supplies and enhance the tourism experience by taking advantage of the specificities of 'place' (Van der Duim & Henkens, 2007, p. 13). Inter-sectoral linkages (especially with agriculture) are vital for stimulating the local rural economy and help to avoid a sole reliance on the tourism sector.

2.4 STE networks in rural destinations

Shifts in patterns of consumption and demand for agricultural products, goods and services worldwide have led rural producers to explore new opportunities presented by tourism in order to diversify business activities (Tinsley & Lynch, 2001, 2008; Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & Van Es, 2001). Restructuring of the agricultural industry worldwide has put pressure on rural communities and brought about a need to transform and diversify economic activities (Hall, 2005; Aylward & Kelliher, 2009).

Rural areas in New Zealand are experiencing considerable change and diversification of land use (MacLeod & Moller, 2006; Blandford, 2002; Oppermann, 1997). Prior to 1984, generous government subsidies for agriculture (e.g. the production of wool and lamb) resulted in overproduction and inefficiencies. Removal of subsidies in the 1980s and 1990s brought about a rapid pace of change for those in rural communities (Mackay, Perkins & Espiner, 2009; Benseman, 2006). The New Zealand Government rendered

support in the form of debt write-offs and the appointment of 'rural co-ordinators' who worked with rural communities to restructure local economies (Blandford, 2002). This 'weaning' period from government support to self-sufficiency meant substantial growth in other sectors such as tourism and small business.

Such transformations bring challenges for rural destinations, especially those characterised by geographic isolation, low levels of human capital (managerial skills and qualifications), and small populations (Lynch, Holden, & O'Toole, 2009). However, on the positive side, the strengths of close-knit rural communities are commonly reported to lie in high levels of social capital and social cohesion, and natural assets such as beautiful countryside, mountains, flora and fauna, and beaches (Reimer et al., 2008). Growing demand for tourism experiences that are located in beautiful, natural and peaceful rural environments offers opportunities for rural people to diversify their activities and to develop a variety of tourism offerings (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011; George, 2010). Farm stays, food and agricultural tourism, ecotourism (as examples) have opened entry to new markets for rural enterprises.

The quality of the tourism experience in a rural destination is dependent on more than just an amalgamation of a set of discrete entities that deliver touristic attractions and complementary services and products. It is the people whom the visitor encounters during that experience that also matters for many visitors. Lifestyle choices, aspirations and non-economic motivations are important stimuli to tourism business formation (Hall, 2005; Ateljevic, 2009; Morrison et al., 2004). These choices primarily relate to quality of life attributes such as the desire to live at a slower pace and focus on personal relationships and personal development, as well as an opportunity to showcase the local environment to those who visit (Goulding, Baum, & Morrison, 2005). It could be said that this creates a 'match made in heaven' between the *new tourist* who seeks a personally enriching encounter with the destination, and the lifestyle entrepreneur who has values-

laden motivations for being in business that are not solely related to the accumulation of personal wealth (Shaw & Williams, 1994; Benseman, 2009).

Small tourism firms are embedded within broader community structures and networks. However, policy-makers often view tourism in isolation from other factors that constitute the social, environmental and economic fabric of communities (Hall, 2005; Butler & Hall, 1998; Wheeler, 1993). Ateljevic's (2009) work in rural Wairarapa (a region that has recently seen a large expansion in the New Zealand tourism sector) finds a strong link between entrepreneurship in small tourism firms and a bottom-up approach to destination development. Although in the Wairarapa region both top-down and bottom-up approaches occur simultaneously, Ateljevic argues that much of the credit for regional rejuvenation should go to local forces including individual businesses, business associations made of passionate locals and 'savvy' newcomers to area, and proactive local authorities (Ateljevic, 2009, pp. 302–303). This highlights the need to find ways and means of ensuring that all sectors of the community participate in tourism development.

Encouraging the development of inter-sectoral linkages and communicative relationships between firms that may not always consider they have much in common with each other, is vital to the development of new and innovative tourism experiences (Hall, 2005, p. 161; Lynch et al., 2009). By bringing people and firms together to talk to each other, an opportunity exists for mutual interests to be discussed and to identify potential areas where co-operation and collaboration can take place. This, in turn, encourages the development of social relations where social, economic and intangible capital can grow (Lynch et al., 2009).

Hall (2005, p. 162) warns that in rural destinations the development of social relations takes time and is highly dependent on the "availability and long-term commitment of local champions to network development." The tendency of rural people to be involved in a broad range of social and community activities as well as diversifying business

activities (e.g. farmers who include tourism activities in their endeavours) means that people are busy, leaving little time to sustain such onerous commitments. Specific approaches to leadership and advocacy in rural tourism networks are required, different from the current focus on a single individual who makes a sustained and long-term contribution of resources (time, money, personal connections and energy) as a committed 'champion' (Milne et al., 2008).

There is a heavy focus in the tourism literature on the dyadic relationship between private tourism enterprise and public agencies (Bras et al., 2010; Thomas, 2007; Thomas & Thomas, 2005; Bramwell, 1994; Bramwell & Lane, 2009). Examples and cases from New Zealand and internationally show that there is a lot of 'talk' of networks and regional policy to get STE to work together but that this is not occurring at a significant level in rural destinations (Hall, 2005; Braun, 2004; Michael, 2004). Very little is known about how rural tourism networks and clusters actually *work* (Hall, 2005, p. 157) and even less is presented on how they have evolved or how collaborative activities are actually implemented, sustained and intensified. Pavlovic's approach (2001; 2004) to understand the evolution of tourism and the systems of connections of key stakeholders, not only provides an understanding of how tourism networks evolve over a period of time but also helps to identify key individuals and their roles in a rural destination and tease out the issues that will influence and impact future tourism development.

This thesis contends that in order to enhance and enrich the tourism experience it is necessary to look beyond the rather limited approach that much of the literature has taken to date. It is vital that tourism planners seek to engage and involve the broader issues of community (Frew, 2005). Tourism SME networks have predominantly been examined in terms of connections between businesses, or between the enterprise and public agency, with the purpose of the network being to enhance individual business performance. Interventions to encourage STE to develop collaborative activities with each other and complementary businesses are often aimed at getting businesses to work

together in order to link these networks to processes of economic development. Such processes include the creation of new jobs and forms of employment, development of new industry, the extension to global trade, and increased regional investment. Benefit to host community is often considered but generally as an afterthought, while the role of community in the tourism network is discussed as a 'third party', if at all (Ali & Frew, 2010; Moscardo, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Several authors expand on the notion of a business network and urge business owners to see themselves as part of a wider ecosystem and environment (Nørgaard, 2011, Moscardo, 2011; Faulkner & Russell, 2001; Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004). The 'tourism ecosystem' has a structure which is often based on dyadic RTO/STE relationships and participants that primarily come from enterprise and public sector agencies such as destination management organisations (DMOs), RTOs and industry associations (Zahra, 2011; Moore, 1996; Pollock, 2001). The ecosystem approach consists of networks of organisations stretching across several different industries and, to a lesser degree, with a broader stakeholder group (communities of practice, host community, visitors). Individual enterprises and public agencies feature as the focus of the ecosystem, with other groups, including host communities, having a less significant profile and remaining somewhat peripheral to the central part of the network (Stuart, Pearce, & Weaver, 2005; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Moscardo, 2011; Dredge, 2006b; Hall, 2005). Baggio (2008, p. 4) similarly describes a tourism *destination* as a "complex agglomeration of diverse systems of interrelated economic, social and environmental phenomena and networks." The author suggests that a systems approach has been a helpful tool to enable researchers to identify and emphasise the interdependencies of the various sectors and highlight the complexity and variety of all aspects of tourism.

In a rural setting, tourism and community are inextricably linked (Pavlovich & Kearins, 2004; Tinsley & Lynch, 2008). To examine the STE network, it is vital to adopt an approach that goes beyond the elements traditionally focused on when describing a

tourism system. If collaborative activities are to generate benefits for the community and enhance the quality of life of those that live in a particular rural region, then there must be more than the simple mantra that it is 'good to collaborate'. Instead, the outcomes of the collective effort to promote a destination need to strengthen the core tourism competencies and social capacity of the destination and enhance the tourism experience. As Murphy and Murphy (2004, p. 382) comment, "Tourism models need to go beyond advocating a collaborative approach to provide the comprehensive guidance necessary for turning tourism ambitions into a reality." The authors contend that communities with a sustained enabling environment are in a strong position to guide their citizens' participation in local economic development through tourism. Fundamental aspects of that environment are ample political, social, legal, infrastructural, economic and environmental resources. Such an environment has an impact on the ability of the destination to successfully adopt a collaborative approach to tourism planning and development (Nørgaard, 2011). Identifying the systems of stakeholder social connections within rural and peripheral destinations is a vital step towards raising the awareness of tourism impacts and commitment from public agencies, as well as addressing the often conflicting needs and priorities of stakeholder groups (Murphy & Murphy, 2004, Nørgaard, 2011).

When thinking of 'networks' as systems of connections, Farrell and Twining-Ward contend that:

Knowledge of complex adaptive systems, natural ecosystems, co-evolution, a more inclusive tourism system, integrated social-ecological systems, and non-linear science, will place tourism in a considerably better position to move towards a transition to sustainable tourism development than it is today.

Farrell & Twining-Ward (2005, p. 119)

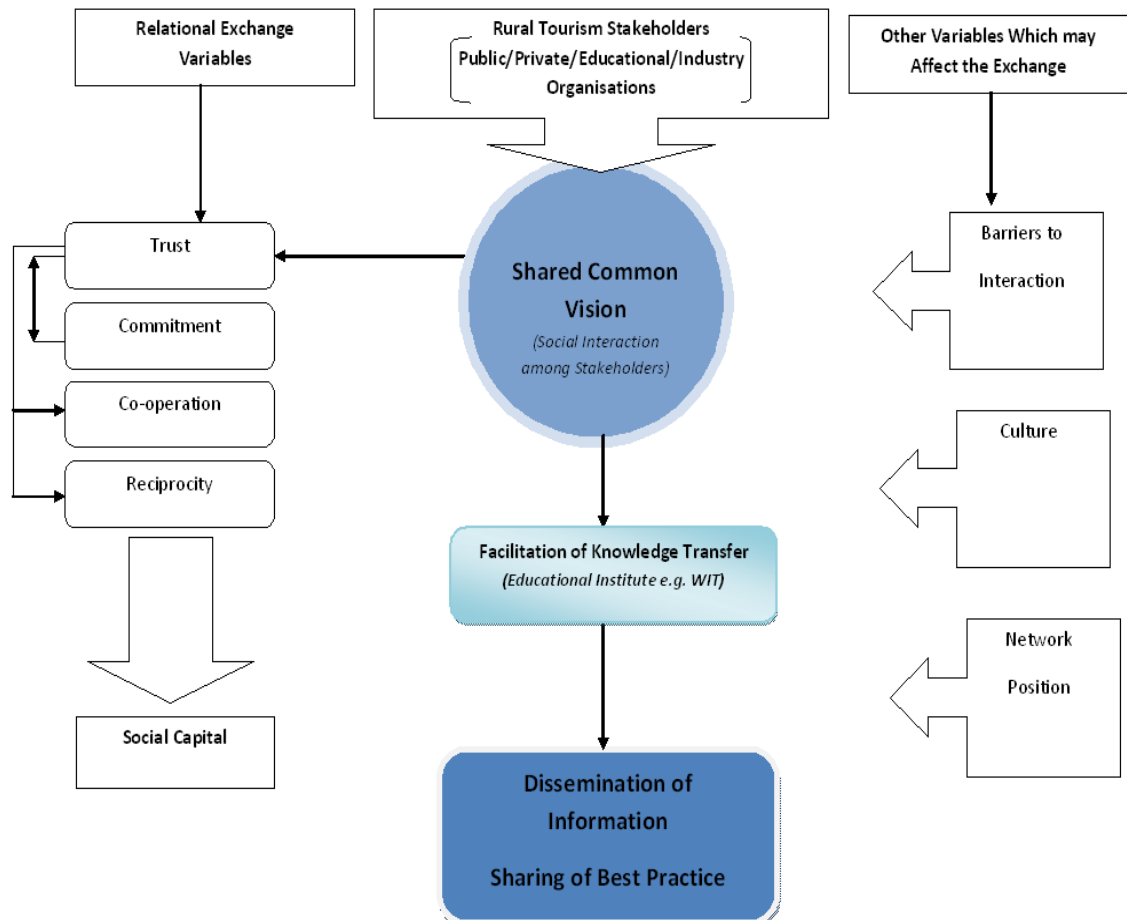
A destination can be described as a system comprised of a number of elements that share some sort of relationship (e.g. the traveller, tourism operators, supporting tourism agencies and associations) and that successfully evolves by robustly and resiliently

responding to internal and external forces (Faulkner & Russell, 2001; Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004).

Small firms in tourism exist in a market environment where there is a need for a dynamic capability to “integrate, build and continuously reshape tourism competencies (promotion, marketing, accommodation and so on)” (Denicolai et al., 2010, p. 261).

Aylward & Kelliher (2009) make an important contribution to understanding stakeholder network relationships for rural tourism development. Using a case study approach in the south-east region of Ireland, their work adds to a growing pool of research that has moved from a mainly dyadic perspective to one focusing on the dynamic nature of networks and the web of relationships that this can encompass. This perspective is built around, and highlights the importance of, the relational element of networks where the emphasis is on the building of commitment, trust and co-operation between actors. Aylward and Kelliher offer an *Integrated Model of Rural Stakeholder Network Relationships* (Figure 2.2) and view networks from a social perspective “to advance understandings of the complex relationships within a rural network environment” (Aylward & Kelliher, 2009, p. 14).

Figure 2.2: Integrated Model of Rural Stakeholder Network Relationships



Source: Aylward & Kelliher (2009, p. 14)

The authors cite four relational variables – trust, commitment, co-operation and reciprocity – as a critical dimension of network relationships and important determinants of social capital in the network. They also contend that an over-arching *shared common vision* may be a starting point from which to develop a sustainable model of rural tourism network relationships (Aylward & Kelliher, 2009, p. 5).

Pollock’s ‘Destination Web’ also places the focus on enterprise but integrates technology in its description:

... an interconnected community of autonomous but inter-dependent, travel related enterprises that collaborate in order to provide value for visitors, profit for providers and partners, and benefits to the host community.

Pollock (2001)

Much of the literature concerning tourism SME alliances, business partnerships and networks cites the opportunity to enhance competitiveness, profitability and economic efficiencies as key motivating factors for individual engagement (Dredge, 2006a; Tinsley & Lynch, 2001; Pavlovich, 2003). The World Travel and Tourism Council's *Blueprint for New Tourism* (2003) highlights how the tourism sector may provide prospects for a better quality of life for people across the world by offering a gateway to economic progress, both at a national and local level. Suggested new approaches to STD rely on coherent partnerships between the private sector and public authorities to maximise benefits not only for the people who travel but also for the communities they visit. STD and technology go hand in hand as ICT enhance both the dissemination of information and the channels of communication between tourism consumers, suppliers and communities.

It is with these understandings of networks, stakeholders and systems of connections in tourism that the discussion now moves on to review the role of ICT in facilitating these connections and relationships.

2.5 Tourism networks, ICT and government initiatives

The capacity of ICT to affect relationships, establish and build networks and communities (both virtual and real), and drive visionary business strategy development is the focus of considerable debate and discussion (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011; Milne, Mason, & Hasse, 2004; Surman & Wershler-Henry 2001; Ali & Frew, 2010). ICT is the backbone of the tourism industry and a vital enabler of competitive improvements (Buhalis & Laws, 2001; Applebee et al., 2000; Williams, 2000; Inkpen, 1998). These technologies offer STE the opportunity to get closer to the customer over a wider geographical area, improve

operational effectiveness, provide the prospective tourist with quality of service and access to information, and assist with channels of communication and co-ordination (Ndou & Petti, 2007; Braun, 2004).

Buhalis (2003, p. 31) claims that the real benefit of ICT lies in the linking and reconfiguring of business and organisational functions, resulting in a lowering of operational costs, improved communications with stakeholders and the ability to operate internationally. Customer-centric strategies that actively seek an inward flow of information from consumers of tourism products, underpin a strategic use of ICT to change an organisation's boundaries. In many cases, such an organisational change creates opportunities for growth (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2006).

The application of a broad range of ICT (i.e. including but not limited to the Internet) can help STE lower costs, enhance the development and quality of products and services, and improve STE innovation of products and processes (Nordin, 2003; Buhalis, 2001; Applebee et al., 2000). *Effective* use of ICT is defined "as the capacity and opportunity to successfully integrate ICT into the accomplishment of self or collaboratively identified goals" (Gurstein, 2003, p. 9). The effective use of the Internet and a set of related technologies calls for ICT to be used as a way to build relationships (Surman & Wershler-Henry, 2001). STE can use ICT to enhance network capabilities and transform external communications. ICT are important tools to improve the flow of knowledge between stakeholders within a region to share resources and exchange ideas, transform processes, and improve inter-firm co-operation (Castells, 2001; Nodder, Milne, & Hull, 2005).

Low uptake of ICT can result in STE being cut off from important online distribution channels and remain invisible to the increasing share of the visitor market who rely on the Internet to search for and purchase travel-related products (Minghetti & Buhalis, 2010; Collins, Buhalis, & Peters, 2003). While ICT offer STE the potential to build

relationships directly with consumers, and subsequently bypass intermediaries, there is a risk that STE in rural areas can fall prey to a digital divide caused by poor connectivity and lack of high-speed broadband, as well as a lack of knowledge and skills to use ICT *effectively* (Minghetti & Buhalis, 2010).

Ali & Frew's (2010) investigative study into the uses and application of ICT for STD asked destination managers and eTourism experts to rank the areas where they felt ICT would be most useful for STD. Both groups ranked 'information management' as the area where ICT were 'most useful' but differed in subsequent responses. Destination managers recognised ICT for gauging levels of 'tourist satisfaction' as the second 'most useful' aspect and 'transportation' as third in importance (most likely as interest in this area has increased due to the climate change agenda). eTourism experts identified 'transportation' as the second area where ICT would be most useful for STD. However, the authors found a distinct difference in opinion when asking about the potential of ICT to involve community participation in tourism planning:

In contrast to the destination managers, eTourism experts identified community participation as the third most useful area. Destination managers ranked this as their area of least importance. eTourism experts may have ranked this area highly because in the literature there has been much discussion on involving community in the tourism development process and the necessity of accomplishing this. However in reality this is rarely happening and destinations may have more other concerns rather than getting the community involved in the tourism planning process.

Ali & Frew (2010 p. 485)

In order to counter the effects of de-population and in an attempt to revitalise rural areas, the focus of local government has been on establishing RTOs to develop economically-driven tourism plans. In order to achieve successful outcomes for rural communities, local governments are actively campaigning to attract new businesses and industries to their respective areas as a means of both increasing revenue sources and expanding their economic base. With limited finance and intense regional competition

some regions have found it hard to be successful (Ateljevic, 2009; Doorne, 1998). There is also usually little alignment between local plans to create economic outcomes and those that set out to enhance community development.

The United Nations Expert Forum on ICT and Tourism for Development (UNEFICTD) deems that even in developing nations, ICT are the most effective tools for promoting the sector in a way that 'both supports national development priorities and keeps a much higher percentage of the profits at home' (UNCTAD, 2005). The United Nations Conference 'eTourism Initiative' (2004) focuses on the development and implementation of ICT-based tools that strengthen the capacity of developing countries to promote their tourism product but, more importantly, do so by promoting local involvement and ownership.

The NZTS 2015 (TIANZ, 2007, pp. 14–16) emphasizes infrastructure development and strategies to enhance competitiveness and improve yield. The key technology-related recommendations include the deployment of current and new technologies to develop and enhance relationships with visitors, and the use of ICT to reduce costs for operators and improve the quality and exchange of information (TIANZ, 2007, p. 69).

Increasingly, the exchange of information between consumer and provider takes place in a 'commonsense' (Surman & Wershler-Henry, 2001; Minghetti & Buhalis, 2010) that is the Internet. Part of the role of government is ensuring that the infrastructure is available to enable full advantage to be taken of the opportunities offered by ICT (Milne, Speidel, Goodman, & Clark, 2005b). Additionally, public sector policy needs to address areas such as training and network development (Collins et al., 2003; Buhalis, 2003; Minghetti & Buhalis, 2010).

The New Zealand Digital Strategy is a policy initiative that influences STE uptake of ICT. The Digital Strategy has three main goals: to enable *effective use* of ICT by communities, to encourage innovation by business, and to improve government service. Using

technology to enable communities and businesses to achieve their social cultural, and economic aspirations features strongly in the New Zealand Digital Strategy (MED, 2005b) where ICT is viewed as a mechanism to “enhance a sense of identity and connection to a particular place or group.”

ICT offers a variety of ways to support the development of STE networks. However, to date the role of ICT in rural STE network formation has been largely overlooked in the literature (Bras, 2010; Pease, Rowe, & Cooper, 2005; Braun, 2004, p. 232). While tourism SME networks are seen as a critical success factor in the support of these businesses (Beritelli, 2011; Polo & Frias, 2010), little has been written about the use and application of ICT in the *formation* of rural STE networks (Aylward & Kelliher, 2009). Pease et al. (2005) explore top-down and bottom-up approaches to use ICT to facilitate tourism SME collaboration and highlight the role of the tourist bureau (information centre) as a key node in the complex nature of business relationships. The authors suggest that a destination web portal offers a point of collaboration between DMOs, RTOs, tourism bureaus and tourism SME and this goes some way to describe how ICT can be used in the development of local and regional tourism networks. It is vital to raise the awareness of those in local government charged with the development of tourism strategies of the value of ICT to build critical mass, nurture co-operation and co-opetition, and facilitate specialisation (Minghetti & Buhalis, 2010; Nodder et al., 2003).

2.5.1 Community informatics for tourism

Community Informatics (CI) is the study of “how ICT can help achieve a community’s social, economic or cultural goals” (Gurstein, 2003, p. 3). CI is a relatively new area of research and practice that is concerned with the “use of ICT for the personal, economic, cultural and social development of human communities” (Gretzel et al., 2009, p. 2). It is an approach that involves both grassroot movements and action research, and “links economic and social development at the community level with emerging opportunities in such areas as electronic commerce, community and civic networks, electronic

democracy, self-help, advocacy, and cultural enhancement” (Gurstein, 2007, p. 14). CI privileges *information* and *communication* ahead of the *technology* because it “emphasises a grassroots perspective whereby community members are centrally involved in the application of ICT for community development” (Loader & Keeble, 2004, p. 4; Williamson, 2008).

CI brings together the concepts of information technologies and information systems with the concept of community development (Williamson, 2008; Wellman, 2001). In the case of tourism development, it is important to acknowledge that the industry has significant and complex social, environmental and economic implications that can both benefit and damage local communities and their environments. CI offers a valuable avenue for community members to participate in tourism planning and development as it opens up technology-enabled channels of communication, enables digital storytelling, and facilitates information sharing (Gretzel et al., 2009). In order to achieve equitable social, environmental and economic benefits from tourism, it is essential that participative planning mechanisms are provided at the business *and* community level to ensure that local and indigenous people have the opportunity to participate in tourism planning, development and operations that contribute to their well-being and that do not negatively impact upon natural and cultural heritage or affect what locals perceive to be their ‘unique’ lifestyle.

In rural areas, lifestyle entrepreneurs are often attracted to tourism and leisure industries with “a clear orientation towards non-economic motives for being in business” and subsequently can seriously constrain the development of the destination (Peters et al., 2009, p. 395). For various reasons – age, past work or professional experience, for example – many of these entrepreneurs fail to appreciate the opportunities to enhance business performance offered by ICT (Reino, Frew, & Albacete-Sáez, 2011; Peters et al., 2009). While they may be motivated to use their tourism business to create income, this is often little more than a desire to ‘pay the bills’ and maintain a modest lifestyle

(Komppula, 2004). Characteristically, lifestyle entrepreneurs in tourism have little real understanding of tourism, have limited product development and/or marketing expertise, lack a desire to connect with industry structures and organisations, and under utilise ICT (Peters et al., 2009; Reino et al., 2011;). However, it is the non-economic motivators of these lifestyle entrepreneurs that may offer the greatest opportunities for rural tourism (George, 2010).

Sustainability in CI projects is highly dependent on the enabling of meaningful engagement with local community groups and the promotion of universal participation (Day, 2004). STE are embedded within rural communities – they are both business owners and local residents. Peripherality has a significant impact on the economic sustainability of rural lifestyle entrepreneurs. Given the distance from the economic ‘core’ and sparseness of rural populations, there is a need to encourage bottom-up innovative approaches to better connect rural STE to each other, to those in public agencies, and to others in their community (Nilsson, Petersen, & Wanhill, 2005). The problem then becomes to find ways to encourage lifestyle STE to engage with ICT in a way that is useful and relevant to them. Wellman cautions that people will not necessarily engage with ICT, or even with each other, unless there is an element of actually enjoying the company of others:

Relationships are more selective. Networks now contain high proportions of people who enjoy one other. They contain low proportions of people who are forced to interact with each other because they are juxtaposed in the same neighborhood, kinship group, organization, or workplace.

Wellman (2002, p. 13)

Despite the community focused rhetoric of much sustainable tourism policy, it remains problematic to find ways and means of ensuring that all sectors of the community are able to participate in tourism development (Moscardo, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Minimising conflict that may arise surrounding the use of community resources is crucial in order to avoid tourists being deterred from locations they consider to be dangerous or

hostile because of the nature of the 'community' within (Hall & Richards, 2000). The NZTS 2015 (TIANZ, 2007, p. 49) highlights the need to improve the level of community understanding and interaction with tourism as well as the need to facilitate collaboration and strategic alliances amongst sector participants in order to encourage communities to embrace tourism. It is important, therefore, to find and work with the *community interest* – the 'glue' that will connect and meld the aspirations of individuals, community and tourism businesses.

Involving community members to make informed decisions about tourism development requires a free flow of useable, relevant and understandable information. The concept of bottom-up development presupposes that all sections of the community are adequately informed about the nature and consequences of tourism development and have an opportunity to 'have their say' on the course of that development. This flow of information can be supported by the use of ICT and is crucial to avoid excluding or disenfranchising segments of the community.

A key challenge with this [top-down] type of model is the fact the community must move beyond having things done for them, and become active participants in their own development.

Milne, Speidel, Goodman, & Clark (2005b, p. 121)

A common contention of CI researchers is that CI projects need a clear link to local economic development in order to be successful (Milne et al., 2004; Gurstein, 2003). These authors argue that strategies to use CI as an enabler of community development need to encompass three things: marketing for local business, linking resources of value to improving quality of life, and a system of connections that can assist the creation of new relationships and economic linkages (O'Neil, 2002, p. 82; see also Milne et al., 2004).

Milne et al. (2004, p. 185), draw on these core themes of CI research and contend that they "match closely with the linkage creation, stakeholder communication, and small business/community marketing that underpin the ability to enhance tourism's role in the

development process.” Presenting a CI approach known as ‘web-raising’ (Milne & Mason, 2001), Mason and Milne (2002) contend that the process of bringing people together to ‘talk tourism’ and establish how they would like to be portrayed to the outside world has the potential to strengthen these relationships. *Web-raising* is thus defined as:

The digital equivalent to a barn-raising – a community that works together to create a collective asset. While it may take several forms, web-raising generally brings residents and local businesses together to share experience and skills and empower one another in the creation of web documents. While an effective and unique web-site is developed, the building process itself allows different groups to learn more about each other, in the same way that barn-raising helped to forge important notions of communal trust and reciprocity in the American West during the last century.

Milne et al. (2004, p. 186)

The focus is on empowering communities through the use of ICT to build effective tourism marketing and development tools where a community-built website becomes a foundation, rather than an end in itself, “aimed at creating the nucleus of a self sustaining and appropriate industry that is owned and operated by local people” (Mason & Milne, 2002, p. 296, Milne 2011).

The Internet presence thus becomes a community resource with a tourism focus, one which promotes a region as a visitor destination, gives small businesses a web presence with their own individual web page and skills to manage this, and gives communities and community groups their own web page (and the skills to manage it). It is something that can act as a community resource, connecting businesses with their communities, and both with their wider stakeholder groups (Milne et al., 2008; Mason, Speidel, & Milne, 2003). The website gives communities a chance to present themselves to the outside world on their terms. The idea is to get the whole community together to develop the content of their web page(s) using open source community-building software. The process involves the young people who may be interested in computers and technology, right through to the elders who can tell their stories of the past. The website serves as a

digital resource for community heritage, and can also be used to inform visitors of what to expect, and how to behave when they get to a community. This approach embraces, and includes, a broad range of tourism stakeholders in the process of content development. It brings together a diverse set of individuals who participate in all aspects of the tourism value chain, including the host community, to actively participate in the tourism process, and creates and intensifies connections among STE (Milne et al., 2005a, 2005b).

Community-generated digital content may be from a community, artistic, heritage or economic perspective. It can include through poetry, church sermons, sports news of local teams, kids and youth activities, digital stories, community newspapers online, image collections (old and new), audio (Internet radio, oral history), animations, video and text. Usually participants need to learn new skills to engage in creating this type of rich media, (Milne et al., 2008). A set of related activities (e.g. by attending workshops or liaising with local schools to tap into Internet and information technology resources) also has people 'talking tourism' in the region. Tips passed on from locals on 'good places to go' are treasured nuggets for travellers (George, 2005, 2010).

Hasse & Milne (2005) argue that integrated and participatory approaches to tourism development are needed to achieve sustainable tourism in small communities. While it would be technologically deterministic to say that ICT on their own can engender transformation in rural communities, there is certainly potential for a socially determined model of transformation based on the will and motivation of STE and other citizens who believe that the economic aspirations of their communities can be achieved through tourism. As Chen (2007) observes, a citizen-centric approach allows participants to define the process and manage the delivery and outcomes. ICT therefore become useful tools to enable community processes, to influence planning and policy decisions for tourism development by creating stronger ties to democratic practice, to enhance STE business

performance, to build community and social cohesion, and to combat fragmentation amongst tourism stakeholders.

2.6 Summary

The Regulation Approach and Social Network theory are used as a theoretical lens in this study to explain the way STE, in a small rural destination in New Zealand, are motivated to respond in a flexible and dynamic manner to environmental forces, both global and local. The extant literature associated with these two bodies of knowledge are pivotal to understand both factors influencing and affecting rural STE network formation and the role of ICT as an enabler of those networks. The regulation approach, or more particularly the mode of regulation, is used to help clarify the complex web of social, cultural, political and economic factors that are central to the development of STE networks in a rural setting and explain the 'place' of STE in the global–local nexus. Social network theory is used as a lens to explore the *type* of social relations that underpin network development and to explain how the development of these forms of organisation actually 'works'. The review of the literature concludes by exploring the impact of ICT on tourism business performance and regional competitiveness and the potential of ICT to create and intensify systems of connection with various stakeholders. In the case of tourism development, it is important to acknowledge that the industry has significant and complex social, environmental and economic implications that can both benefit and damage local communities and their environments. Community Informatics offers a valuable avenue for STE owners/operators and community members to participate in tourism planning and development as it opens up technology-enabled channels of communication, enables digital storytelling, and facilitates information sharing.

Chapter 3: Research design and method

This chapter presents reasons for choosing the methodology of grounded theory research using a qualitative case study approach and describes the methods used. This is followed by an overview of the case study region and the web-raising programme.

3.1 Research framework

3.1.1 Determining a methodology

If more is to be known about rural STE networks – for example, how they form and are maintained, the *types* of social relations within them, and how STE gain entry to the network – then a method of enquiry is needed to explore issues, and uncover and explain certain phenomena to respond to the research questions. Similarly, in order to understand the role of and opportunities offered by ICT in network formation, the research approach also has to allow for the dynamic, fluid and ever-changing nature of technologies and, more importantly, their application in a social network context.

The philosophical, theoretical and design considerations of the research encompass an approach that addresses the emergent nature of this study. Qualitative case study research approaches a problem from a holistic perspective that allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation and the meaning for those involved (Cresswell, 1994). Grounded theory offers a rigorous process that enhances the researcher's ability to "systematically observe, conceptualize, and theorise without preconceived notions" (Toscano, 2006, p. 508).

An interpretive perspective was considered as being the most appropriate to this research as it allowed the researcher to take a holistic approach to inform understandings of a social phenomenon (rural STE network formation and development). As little extant literature exists on the topic, such an approach was well aligned to a

flexible and open research design rather than one that was highly structured and rigid. An interpretive stance “allows elicitation of data that is not constrained by fixed analytical categories and offers the researcher an opportunity to visit and re-visit the linkages between the data and the theory” (Ali & Frew, 2010, p. 481).

The choice of methodology relates closely to the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher who views reality as subjective and constructed by the individuals involved in the research process and who seeks close interaction with those being researched (Reason, 1994; Cresswell, 1994, 1998). Predominantly, this study is grounded in an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, but there are aspects of the study that pose questions of ‘What is ...?’ as well as ‘Why ...?’ in order to inform the development of a grounded theory. In other words there is a need for a breadth and depth of investigation that would be unduly restricted if one approach alone was selected. A mixed methods approach offers “a broader focus than single method design and gathers more information in different modes” (Giddings & Grant, 2006, p. 5). The study uses semi-structured interviews; secondary data (e.g. minutes of meetings, plans, press releases); a project-evaluation focus group; observations from meetings, workshops, informal interviews and conversations; and an evaluation of the affiliations and web linkages within www.westernsouthland.co.nz, all placed within a detailed case study and informed by the literature.

Grounded theory is a social research methodology developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) and is applied with a view to assessing future applications to tourism research. Grounded theory does not test a hypothesis; rather the researcher is called upon to discover the theory as it emerges from the data (Glaser, 1992; Hardy, 2005). The reason for choosing grounded theory (GT) is that it facilitates “the generation of theories of process, sequence, and change pertaining to organizations, positions, and social interaction” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 114). GT is also useful to understand the process of network formation amongst STE and the potential use of ICT to strengthen these

interactions with broader regional networks. GT has also been selected given the sparse amount of extant literature in this relatively unexplored area of tourism research.

Glaser (2004, p. 10) describes GT as “just straightforward conceptualization integrated into theory” and the product of GT as “a set of carefully grounded concepts organized around a core category and integrated into hypotheses. The generated theory explains the preponderance of behavior in a substantive area with the prime mover of this behaviour surfacing as the main concern of the primary participants.” In terms of this study, this involved the integration of insights from case study data.

Case study research enabled the researcher to explore the systems of connection of STE owners/operators in Western Southland through the gathering of detailed information using a variety of methods of data collection over a sustained period of time. Yin (1984, p. 23) describes case study research as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.”

3.1.2 Research design

A case study is the major source of empirical evidence for an analysis of the formation and development of a rural STE network. The case study location is a small rural farming community in the very south of New Zealand’s South Island. This makes the outcomes of the research particularly appropriate to understanding how STE social relations and networks form and contribute to the development of tourism in a rural context.

The benefit of using a GT method with case study data was that the case study yielded a great deal of rich information that allowed theory to be closely tied to evidence. The researcher was able to study STE network formation in a natural setting and generate theory from practice. One of the limitations of this approach was the sometimes conflicting processes involved in each method. For example, case study methods require

the researcher to examine the extant literature before entering the field (Cresswell, 1994). GT in its purest form does not begin with any preconceptions of what the researcher may find (Glaser, 2002, Glaser & Holton, 2004), be it through an examination of the literature or otherwise. Glaser (1998, p. 67) clearly states that in GT research the extant literature should *not* be reviewed in the substantive area and related areas *prior* to the research being done, as the literature is used in the final process of theory generation, and woven in as more data for constant comparison. Fernandez (2004) asserts that the reason for this is to keep the researcher as free as possible of any influence that could restrict their ability to independently discover theory. Fernandez comments on the role of literature and subsequent challenges in the PhD process:

Because emerging theoretical construction drives the literature review, the extant literature is incorporated into the study as data. Therefore, to be true to the method, most of the relevant reviewed literature needs to be presented as it finds its way into, and becomes integrated with, the substantive theory – “forcing” a typical PhD dissertation’s ‘Chapter 2: literature review’ would be methodologically unsound, detracting from the true role of the literature in grounded theory.

Fernandez (2004, p. 87)

While GT research starts with an accumulation of data from the very beginning of the study – one that is not grounded in extant literature – the PhD process requires the student researcher to follow a process that is more linear, one that begins with an examination of the literature and poses a research question or theme to be explored. Practical issues such as the need to complete a proposal of work prior to confirmation of candidature, and to follow ethical protocols and obtain approval of research instruments, are all common elements of a doctoral process.

To accommodate the PhD process, the GT approach was therefore adapted by using the literature as another ‘slice’ of data (Fernandez, 2004; Glaser, 1998) and used to inform the lines of enquiry throughout the study. This allowed for an ongoing and thorough

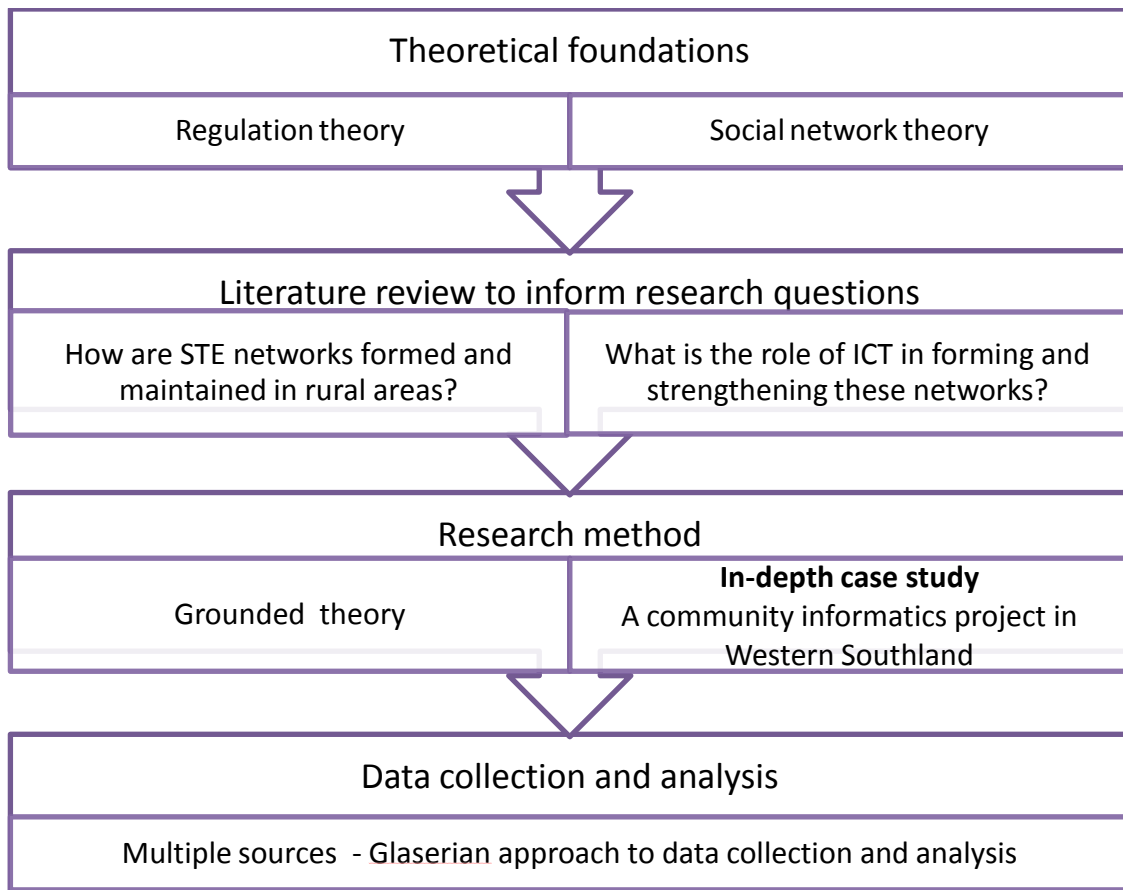
review throughout the research (not just at the beginning and end). The literature assisted in increasing the researcher's theoretical sensitivity to what was emerging from primary and secondary data collection and analysis, and forced a review of convergent and diverging literature based on the emerging conceptual notions.

Upon reflection, the early review of the literature was useful in strengthening the choice and understanding of the theoretical framework on which to base the thesis. Data collection and analysis techniques were therefore selected to be consistent with the adapted GT approach. This, combined with the resultant synthesis of analysis and coding, was a rigorous process and allowed the researcher "to remain flexible and creative when investigating new phenomena" (Pauleen & Yoong, 2004, p. 146; Baskerville & Pries-Heje, 1999).

Figure 3.1 gives an overview of the research design, highlighting the two main bodies of knowledge that form the theoretical foundations of the study (regulation theory and social network theory). A review of the literature provided a background understanding of the issues and themes that have emerged from previous studies in tourism SME network development and helped to identify the two broad research questions in this study:

1. How are STE networks formed and maintained in rural areas?
2. What is the role of ICT in forming and strengthening these networks?

Figure 3.1: Research design



An explanation of how the grounded theory methodology was applied in this study follows a discussion of the case used in the research.

3.2 Case study: Rural STE network formation in Western Southland

This thesis is primarily concerned with rural STE network formation, and uses a case study in Western Southland. Western Southland is a region that does not exist in terms of distinct political boundaries and is limited in its available resources for tourism development. It is a rural destination located at the very south of New Zealand's South Island and does not feature to any significant extent in the plans of local government or RTO in terms of tourism development, management or marketing (see Venture Southland, 2005).

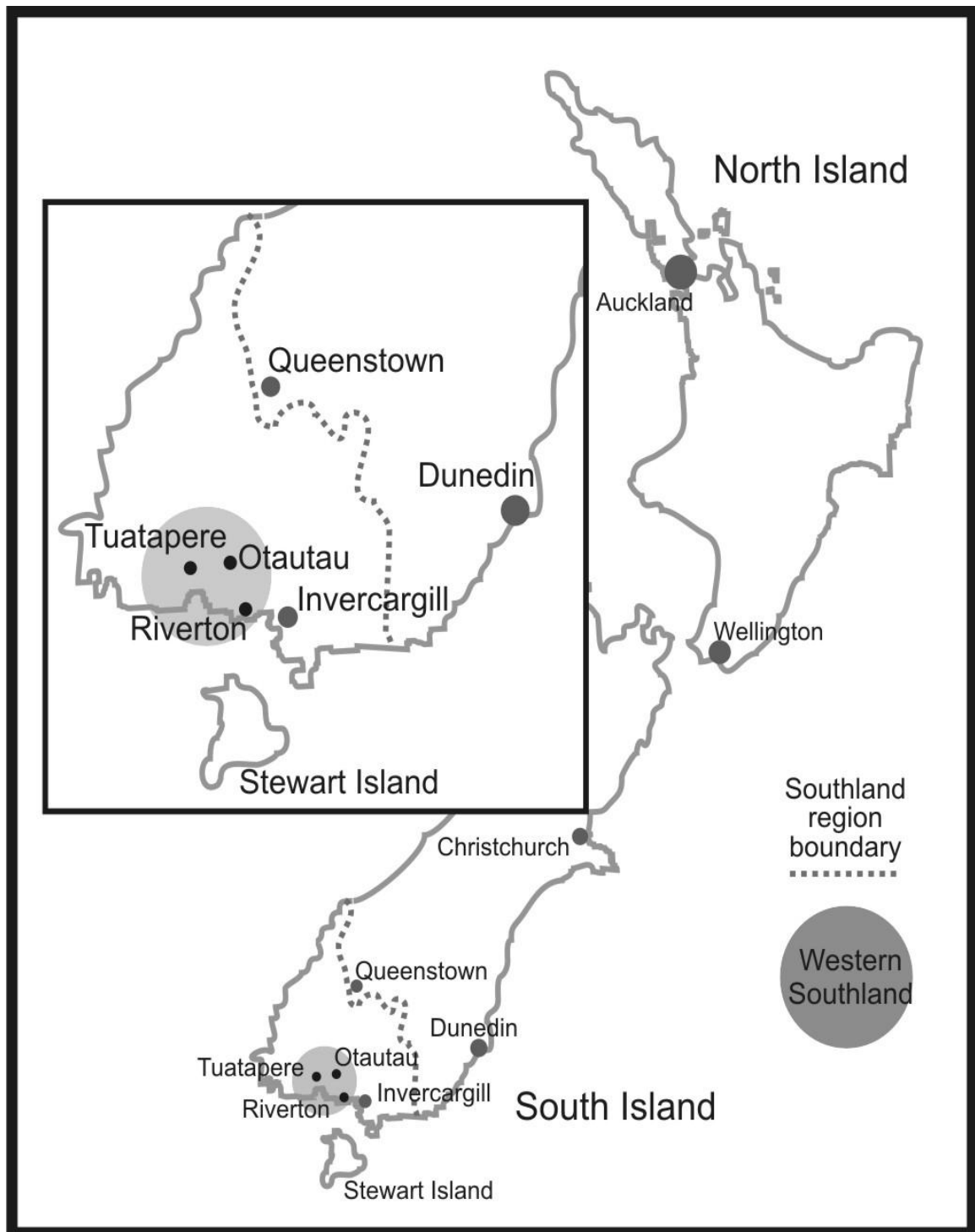
The chair of a local promotions association describes the region as:

“Tucked between the towering peaks of Fiordland to the west, the Takitimu mountain range to the north, and the wild Southern Ocean, Western Southland boasts spectacular unspoilt scenery, lush rolling farmland and an easy pace of life. Rich in Maori culture and early settler history, and built on a pioneering foundation of gold and coal mining, whaling and sealing, the region is a step back in time. Native bush and birdlife abound, and there are limitless opportunities for walking, hiking or tramping. The towns and settlements of Western Southland include: Riverton, Colac Bay, Otautau, Ohai, Orepuki, Tuatapere, Monowai/Lake Hauroko, Lorneville/Wallacetown, Nightcaps, Thornbury, and Drummond.”

Lex Wylie, Western Southland Promotions Association Incorporated

Figure 3.2 shows the geographic location of Western Southland.

Figure 3.2 Location of Western Southland, South Island, New Zealand



3.2.1 Situating the research

Southland covers an area of approximately 34,000 square kilometres, or 12.5 percent of New Zealand's land area. This makes Southland New Zealand's second-largest region, yet it accounts for only 2.6% of New Zealand's total population (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). The majority of visitors to Southland are domestic (62%), with only a small proportion of international visitors venturing to the region (MED, 2009). Visitors spent 877,600 guest nights in Southland during the year to June 2010, which accounts for just 2.5% of the national total (Venture Southland, 2010). The number of commercial guest nights in Southland dropped by 11.4 per cent to 389,892 for the year to September 2011 compared with the previous year (Statistics New Zealand, 2011). It is important to note that the figures referred to above are for the whole of the Southland region as sub-regional data is not available.

Western Southland is an area with a colourful human history of whalers and sealers, sawmills and a once vibrant timber industry – a sub-region where sheep and, increasingly, dairy farming remain substantial contributors to the economy. It is a rural destination that, in terms of touristic activity, is considered 'well off the beaten track'. Main towns (and approximate populations) of the region are Riverton (1527), Tuatapere (582), Ohai (351); Otautau (753), Nightcaps (303), Colac Bay (135) and Orepuki (45) (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). While there is no internationally recognised definition of a rural area, the New Zealand government defines distinct rural communities by using "workplace compared with address of usual residence as a proxy for both distance from, and the need to travel to, an urban area for employment" (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). Statistics New Zealand (2004,) classifies these centres predominantly as "rural areas with a low urban influence" – in other words, a region where the majority of the population work in rural areas although a number may work in a minor urban area.

The 'Southern Scenic Route' is a well-established touring route between Dunedin and Queenstown and runs through the region of Western Southland. Tourism enterprises in

the region are small, relatively isolated and affected by seasonality. Western Southland has three active tourism promotions groups made up of local tourism operators, and a “strong sense of identity and community pride in its settlements” (Clark, 2007, p. 18). There are approximately 118 tourism businesses in the area, providing accommodation, food and beverage, adventure activities and attractions, transport etc. The businesses are predominantly small owner/operated tourism enterprises and primarily cater to independent travellers.

Previous research in Western Southland has determined the profile and characteristics of STE, their level of formal business planning, their attitudes towards and use of ICT, and their perceptions of the value of collaborating and networking Clark (2007). Clark also considered the implications of STE attitudes and behaviour in relation to the goals of the NZTS 2015 (TIANZ, 2007) and the New Zealand Digital Strategy (MED, 2005). In terms of STE collaboration, Clark found that there is a very low level of collaborative activities in Western Southland. She comments:

Operators generally do not feel that businesses in Western Southland compete a great deal, yet they also do not support each other in an organised or comprehensive manner. There is some referring of visitors to other businesses within towns and around the region, but no specific arrangements or agreements (even informal ones) to work together are evident. Competition is perceived at different geographical scales depending on the individual and the nature of the business, being viewed as competition within a town, within a sector, or across the region. There appears to be a pervading sense that businesses compete for the limited numbers of visitors that come to the region, so collaboration between businesses is considered to be an unwise move.

(Clark, 2007, p. 102)

Clark (2007, p. 82) found that the majority of people involved in tourism businesses in the area did not rely solely on these activities as their main source of income. Two-thirds of STE surveyed indicated that tourism was not their main business activity, although under a third of respondents have no business interests other than their tourism business. ‘Lifestyle’ was an important motivating factor for being in a tourism business –

agreed to 'somewhat' or 'strongly' by three-quarters (77%) of Western Southland's STE respondents in Clark's study. Opinion was relatively split as to whether or not profit was a motivating factor for running a business: 20% 'strongly agreed' with this statement, and 16% of respondents strongly disagreed. While enterprise-to-enterprise collaboration is at a low level in Western Southland, Clark is of the opinion that STE have seemingly strong relationships within their communities.

3.2.2 Web-raising in Western Southland

The Western Southland web-raising programme is a rural tourism, small business and community development initiative that incorporates CI concepts. The first phase of this initiative (2005–2007) was to develop the community-built website www.westernsouthland.co.nz. This was followed by a second phase (2007–2009): the New Zealand Digital Strategy, Community Partnership Fund project entitled *Western Southland: Podzone Country*. The time frames here show an overlap between the two projects as one merged into the next.

Field work for this study coincided time-wise with Phase 2 – the *Western Southland: Podzone Country* project. The interviews conducted at that time also collected data on Phase 1: the initial web-raising of www.westernsouthland.co.nz. In other words, this PhD study analyses both phases of the web-raising programme, although the researcher's observational involvement in the field was during Phase 2.

The case of Western Southland provided an opportunity to explore how STE in small rural communities have used ICT to share stories and expertise and develop digital resources that contribute to their locality being able to engage more sustainably with the global economy. The processes that underpinned the development of the community-built website www.westernsouthland.co.nz offered a valuable seedbed in which to understand the catalysts that encouraged STE to engage with local networks. By observing the processes of consultation and co-ordination between STE, other business

owners, and central, regional and local government, the researcher was able to gain a better appreciation of the way STE engaged with the network, i.e. how the tourism network 'worked'. The case was also instrumental in understanding STE perceptions of the *value* of the emerging tourism network. The web-raising programme also offered an opportunity to observe practices that use ICT to encourage interaction between stakeholders and build STE networks in tourism. In simple terms, this initiative is about the creation of a community-building website with a tourism focus for the communities and businesses of Western Southland – a website built by locals, for locals.

The web-raising programme is the result of a working partnership between the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute (NZTRI) at AUT University, Auckland and the Western Southland Promotions Association Incorporated (WSPAI). A 'web-raised' (community built) website is one that promotes a region as a visitor destination, gives small businesses a web presence with their own individual web page and skills to manage this, and gives communities and community groups their own web page. The second stage of this initiative builds on the initial 'web-raising' through the creation of a digital audio repository (podcasts) of the region's oral and sound history, its attractions, sights and people.

This web-raising programme provided a rich context in which to explore the ways that STE in Western Southland 'worked together' and the subsequent role of ICT. The case study approach offered an opportunity to observe practices that use ICT to encourage interaction between stakeholders and are building the rural STE tourism network. Interviews with key individuals, STE, local residents, and community and public-sector representatives in Western Southland – many of whom were participants in the 'web-raising' project – provided research participants with an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the project on business performance, and community and destination development.

The researcher was involved with the *Western Southland: Podzone Country* project for four years, between December 2007 and November 2010. This was as part of her role as Senior Research Officer at the NZTRI at AUT University. In Phase 1, the website www.westernsouthland.co.nz was developed by the communities of Western Southland and co-ordinated by the WSPAI. The researcher's role in the podcasting project (Phase 2) was as an NZTRI staff member responsible for project co-ordination, as a trainer in the workshops, and as key point of contact for WSPAI and other tourism stakeholders associated with the project. As a researcher (for this PhD study), she was able to observe a broad range of interactions between STE owners/operators and others involved with the project, and the broader communities of the region.

The Western Southland community has a good track record in the uptake of new technologies, as is evidenced by the popular www.westernsouthland.co.nz website and the hard lobbying to be connected to broadband in the first place. The WSPAI worked with STE owners/operators, businesses and community members to develop a set of podcasts to upload onto the website, some with driving commentary on the region's history and stories with visitors and residents alike as a target audience. The podcasting project provided a rich insight into the dynamics and environment of tourism in the region on which to base this PhD research. As a participant in the podcasting project, the researcher's work on this project is featured in this thesis as are observations made during this time.

3.3 Collecting the data

Data collection follows a long period of engagement with key individuals, research participants and others associated with the project. This enabled a comprehensive understanding of the tourism 'milieu' that surrounds STE owners/operators of this small rural sub-region. The majority of data collection occurred between February 2008 and October 2009. Subsequent visits to the region in 2010 afforded the researcher an opportunity to discuss the original data collection and reflect on the outcome of the

work with key individuals. This offered another set of observations that are incorporated in this study. Building grounded theory requires an iterative process of data collection, coding, analysis, and planning what to study next. The researcher needed to be theoretically sensitive during the process of collecting and coding data to sense where the data was taking her, and to decide what to do next. As this iterative process continued, the researcher chose to refer back to as many participants as possible though this was somewhat restricted by the time she could spend in Southland and the people who were available for follow-up.

Qualitative data is extremely varied in nature and captures virtually any information that confronts the researcher from the time they enter the field (Fernandez, 2004; Glaser & Holton, 2004). Data that contributed to this study was collected in four distinct ways:

- 1) An initial review of literature and secondary data sources provided information about the background context of the research e.g. Southland Tourism Strategy 2005-2015, the NZTS 2015, policy documents, academic literature, newsletters, public documents, statistical information and analysis, industry publications, and findings from previous research in the area.
- 2) Observations throughout the project. Observations from meetings and workshops, combined with analysis of the westernsouthland.co.nz website, enabled the researcher to identify elements that make up the tourism 'milieu' in Western Southland and review interdependencies in the destination. Field notes were recorded in research journals. Observations were helpful in understanding the processes that lie behind the development and implementation of the CI project as well and to better understand the social interactions, social relations, social networks, and support structures among STE in this region of New Zealand.
- 3) Semi-structured interviews (25) took place with local STE owners/operators, key individuals and community leaders, members of community and residents, and

representatives of local government and public agencies. Formal interviews were used to explore the characteristics of the regional network and the perceptions of those involved as to how ICT has affected the regional network's development. These included interviews with 15 workshop participants.

- 4) Informal conversations (66) with tourism stakeholders allowed maximum flexibility to pursue topics and ideas as they emerged during the exchange.

Table 3.1 provides a summary of data collection, specifying the activity, a brief description of what was done, and a timeline. Research instruments used for data collection can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 3.1: Summary of data collection

Activity	Details	Description and timeline
Document analysis Industry and policy review	To provide background context of the study and to further inform the research questions (e.g. policy documents, newsletters, public documents, statistical information and analysis, industry publications)	Documents collected June 2007 to 1 October 2010 includes WSPAI newsletters, agendas, minutes of meetings, Venture Southland promotional materials, iSite brochure stocks, photographs, diagrams, marketing and financial/administrative documentation, and policy documents including Southland Tourism strategy
Literature review		Evolutionary process completed in tandem with the case study
Research journal and diary maintenance		Researcher reflective diary from December 2007 to 1 October 2010
Formal semi-structured interviews	25 interviews	February 2008–October 2009
Informal conversations	66 occasions	February 2008–February 2010
Presentations made and meetings attended		See Appendix 1 for presentations made and meetings attended
Observations from workshops for Podzone Country project	6 podcasting workshops	55 participants 4 February 2008, 11 April 2008, 11–13 June 2008
Observations from NZTRI project briefings	6 observations	NZTRI and one initial briefing with WSPAI October 2007

Table 3.2 provides a breakdown of those who participated in the formal semi-structured interviews and those with whom the researcher had informal conversations. Of the 25 formal interviews, 11 were with STE owners/operators. Of these, seven were

accommodation providers, two owned a cafe or restaurant, and two provided outdoor adventure activities. Of the 66 conversations, 31 took place with 17 STE owners/operators (most participating more than once), eight of whom had also participated in the formal interviews.

Ten formal interviews took place with key individuals and leaders from five communities in Western Southland (Riverton, Thornbury, Tuatapere, Otautau and Nightcaps). These included those who were involved with promotions associations, environmental groups, schools, healthcare, emergency services, community groups and residents associations, and local media. A further 24 informal conversations took place with 13 people from community (some participating more than once), five of whom had also participated in the formal interviews. Four formal interviews and 11 informal conversations took place with representatives from public agencies.

Table 3.2: Informants – interviews

	Semi-structured interviews	Informal conversations
STE owner/operator	11	31
Community	10	24
Public agency	4	11
TOTAL	25	66

Open-ended interviewing techniques were used to explore and understand the attitudes, opinions, feelings and behaviour of individuals or groups of individuals. Interview questions were also used to gauge a feeling or an attitude of the participant. Behaviour was observed and patterns that emerged were recorded (Tolich & Davidson, 1999; Bong, 2002).

While the interview technique proved to be a valuable research method, it must be said that some participants were initially anxious about issues of privacy and confidentiality. It was of paramount importance that these concerns were addressed before the participants gave their permission to participate in the study. A participant information sheet was emailed to each of the prospective interviewees, outlining the focus of the study and what agreement to participate would mean (time, focus of the study, etc). Participants were also informed of the steps that would be taken to keep any notes anonymous and private (see Appendix 3).

Each participant was interviewed in his or her own home or place of business, or at a location that suited them. Most of the interviews lasted between one and three hours. It was desirable to audiotape, *in situ*, the exchange between the interviewee and the researcher. Naturally, permission was sought (in writing, see Appendix 4) before the interview was recorded. It must be noted that some of the 'richness' of the exchange may have been lost when the participants knew that the conversation was being recorded. Indeed, 11 of the 25 participants requested that their interview was not recorded and expressed concern at the possibility of being quoted or of having sensitive commercial information distributed. Some interview participants also seemed a little reserved at first to provide commentary on local practices in terms of tourism. Data was also recorded in a variety of other ways – from well organised typed 'Notes' files and research journals, to ideas noted on serviettes in restaurants, scribbled notes in a pile of notebooks and diaries, or notes made from observations jotted on pieces of paper.

Glaser (2002) discusses the tendency of qualitative researchers to bring previous learning and experiences to a research situation, creating a predilection for certain possible outcomes. It would be unrealistic to suggest that no hunches or opinions had initially been formed in relation to likely answers to the research questions. In order to conduct the semi-structured interviews for this study, a series of topics for discussion were documented and later transformed into an interview guide (see Appendix 2). Glaser

(1992, p. 25) states that with a GT approach the research problem is emergent and not preconceived. He continues:

... the research question in a grounded theory study is not a statement that identifies the phenomenon to be studied. The problem emerges and questions regarding the problem emerge by which to guide theoretical sampling. Out of open coding, collection by theoretical sampling, and analyzing by constant comparison emerge a focus for the research.

Glaser (1992, p. 25)

Simmons & Gregory (2003, p. 8) elaborate on this further and contend that “above all, the research problem in grounded theory must be about the main concerns of participants in the scene/context.” The inductive manner of qualitative research enabled theory development grounded in information from informants.

3.4 Doing Grounded Theory

In order to minimise existing preconceptions before *entering the field* (the first step of GT), a research journal was used to create notes and memos, i.e. treating the literature as data. This feedback was used to inform the researcher’s perception of those people who were project advocates and champions encapsulated in the question ‘Who do I ask about ...?’ This uncovered a snowball sampling of people able to inform and influence the research as well as (and equally importantly) those who may be unaffected or even opposed to the development of tourism in the destination. Essentially, nobody was excluded from the research and all attempts were made to publish widely and invite participation (e.g. email to all subscribers of www.westernsouthland.co.nz; newsletters, and word of mouth referral). While every attempt was made to contact as many people as possible to participate in the research, there were some who did not want to get involved as they could not see the relevance or value of doing so (for example, they perceived that as they did not have a tourism business, that they would not have a lot to contribute). Others, who were seemingly opposed to tourism, expressed interest in growing the local economy or archiving heritage information and saw the value of

supporting this PhD research. A preliminary interview guideline was then developed to test various lines of questioning and five pilot interviews were conducted (four with STE owners/operators and one with a representative from a public agency).

Many hours were spent attending community meetings, visiting schools, chatting with locals in the pub, talking to people in shops and restaurants, discussing not only the research but also their aspirations for family, life, values, and generally pondering the potential to use tourism to revitalise a small rural community. As an outsider and an unknown but frequent visitor to the community, people were interested to know what the researcher was doing there and were willing to assist.

3.4.1 Role of the researcher

As a qualitative researcher situated in both the web-raising programme (through her employment on the AUT/NZTRI podcast project) and as a PhD candidate, the researcher was aware that she had an interest in a successful outcome from the Podcasting project and to some extent had an influence on that success. This had to be balanced with a need for a self-critical approach that questions how knowledge about the formation of the tourism network and those involved in it is generated, and how relations of power operate in this process. Key concerns in this process were how participants perceived the dual roles of the researcher and how they themselves could feel comfortable with participating in both the workshops and as participants in the PhD study. In order to address any concerns, rules about the confidentiality of comments made were clarified at the beginning and during the workshops. Comments from the participants indicated that they welcomed the opportunity to discuss issues and opportunities with each other in the workshop that they would not be able to discuss in their normal roles and activities.

The core concept of any definition of reflexivity is the idea of awareness—that researchers are reflexive when they are aware of the multiple influences they have on

research processes and on how research processes affect them (Bong, 2002). Being aware of the role of self and being aware of the need to remain impartial, the researcher kept a research journal and constantly engaged with the literature to explain something or help shape thinking and focused on the aims and objectives of the thesis and subsequent contributions. This technique is suggested by Watt (2007, p.82) so that researchers “may become aware of what allows them to see, as well as what may inhibit their seeing”. Strongly guided by two ethical principles i) beneficence or of ‘doing good’, and ii) of least/no harm, the researcher always declared the dual role (project facilitator and PhD researcher). In order to maintain a high level of reflexivity she kept focused on the purpose of this research – aims, objectives, processes, etc – as well as the ‘difference’ she was trying to achieve in an academic sense and to those who live, work and visit small rural communities. Sometimes this connection to the podcast project did impact on data collection positively and negatively – the latter being about being ‘associated’ to certain individuals. To overcome this, the researcher kept a research journal and was able to gain some perspective on where she was at in the study and take measures to evaluate the quality of the data. She reviewed the research questions and carefully assessed the nature of the data collected so far and pursued additional interviews knowing what was still needed in order to address the questions. The journal became a place to bring together participant data, notes on the methodology and literature, and the researcher’s thoughts and ideas (Watt, 2007).

The web-raising programme is about sustainable tourism development – local economic and community development. Thus, it is important to see the distinction between the PhD (STE network formation and role of ICT) and the fact that this PhD study happened to use a case study that adopted a CI approach. It is also important to understand how the web-raising programme began. An NZTRI staff member and her Uncle (Chair of WSPAI), were once rueing the fact that people seemed to just speed through Western Southland on their way to Te Anau, Queenstown in the west or Dunedin in the east, and

the question became how to slow people down, get them to stop and spend time and money in the towns and settlements of the area. The NZTRI staff member had been an integral part of a similar project on the east cape of the North Island and WSPAI invited NZTRI to make a presentation and share ideas and experiences from similar past work e.g. KiwiTrails and work elsewhere. NZTRI were invited to partner with WSPAI to not only establish the community-built destination website www.westernsouthland.co.nz but also to return to the area and work with them again to further develop content for the site.

The researcher first heard the word ‘we’ used in reference to her involvement as part of this community when she explained her background. Born and raised in a small rural town in New Zealand – Tokoroa in the South Waikato – small town ‘politics’ and values held by those in a rural community resonated with the researcher, and she could relate to many of the stories being told about growing up in challenging times in a rural farming service town in a farming region in the 1960s and 1970s. As many STE owners/operators were older residents who could be described as ‘lifestylers’ (see Clark, 2007), rapport was established easily. An explanation of her past employment in the tourism industry (having spent more than 12 years in the New Zealand travel and tourism sectors) gave the researcher credibility as she could use the ‘language’ of the industry and had a good understanding of the distribution channels, compliance issues, and challenges that STE owners/operators face.

When the researcher offered to work with WSPAI to help, for example, write funding applications, organise workshops for podcasting or do the dishes after the workshop, or to publish a newsletter to promote the project, the role of researcher became clear and accepted. At every stage of interaction (workshops, meetings, conversations, interviews, etc) participants were told about the PhD research and were very willing to participate in principle. On occasion, and dependent on the setting, during some of the conversations others even joined in to offer their thoughts. Participants were also offered a copy of the

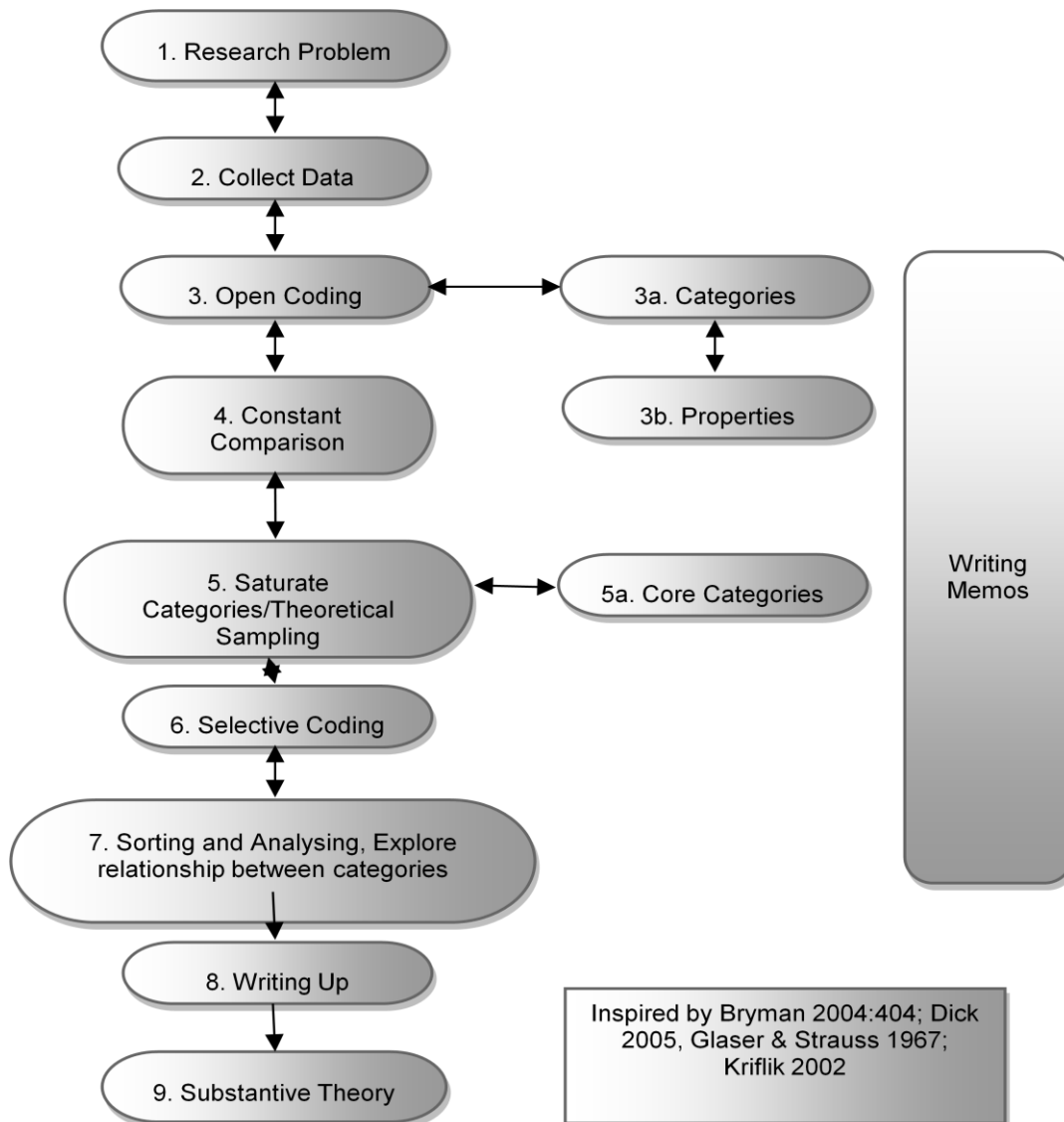
Information Sheet (Appendix 3) to learn more about the study. This acceptance by STE owners/operators and the community allowed the researcher to delve into what was important for participants in relation to this PhD study by defining how it could be of value to them and how they could add value to the generation of a resultant theory. The nature of the researcher's involvement facilitated a better understanding of the social fabric of the region through dialogue with community leaders and tourism entrepreneurs. It also enabled a better understanding of the realities of rural tourism at a very grassroots level, i.e. at the destination.

3.4.2 Analysing the data

As the process of data collection progressed, notes were made and interviews were recorded and transcribed. Where research participants seemed a little hesitant to have their interviews audio-recorded, notes and journal entries were made to record the outcomes of conversations. A similar process took place when reviewing secondary data (e.g. minutes of meetings, newsletters, email). The researcher attended meetings, workshops, informal community gatherings and events, and made notes for further analysis (after declaring her intention to do so before each meeting started).

Figure 3.3 provides a useful summary of the iterative processes involved in generating the substantive theory after the research problem had been established. This process follows the stages of analysis described by Glaser & Strauss (1967). *Codes* identified anchors that allowed the key points of the data to be gathered. *Concepts* are collections of codes of similar content that allow the data to be grouped. *Categories* are broad groups of similar concepts that are used to generate a theory. From there, *theory* emerged – a collection of explanations that explain the subject of the research.

Figure 3.3: The process of grounded theory



Source: Ambro, 2006, p. 29

NVivo software was used to assist the process of data analysis, mainly as a means to manage the large quantity of qualitative data. Initially a process of line-by-line coding (tree nodes) took place to identify initial codes and subsequent categories that emerged from the data. Memos were made, for example, to record notes of a reflective nature or comment on a divergent outcome from other means of data collection.

Glaser (1992, 1998, Glaser & Holton, 2004) does not recommend note-taking, or the practice of recording and transcribing interviews in the research process of developing a grounded theory. Glaser and Holton (2004, p. 13) state that “GT is rendered non-emergent through coding and memoing as the researcher tries to follow a non-emergent problem.” Rather, they focus on the researcher as interpreter to recognise and realise what is emerging from the data. However, for PhD studies the task of making sense of the vast array of information requires a methodical approach to the reduction and interpretation of data and this presents a dilemma for the PhD student researcher (Dick, 2003; Fernandez, 2004). There was a need to ensure a rigorous and valid approach that could stand up to the examination process. There was also a strong desire to allow concepts to emerge based on constant comparisons.

Despite Glaser’s (1992) assertions that line-by-line transcription and the process of creating memos undermines the ‘emergent’ nature of Grounded Theory, the researcher found that the practice of writing memos and notes was vital in the analysis process. Field notes recorded what was said by the respondent, along with any non-verbal clues that, for example, placed emphasis on a certain issue. Code notes were used to review field notes and interview transcriptions and were used as a mechanism to record initial interpretation of what was said and various relationships between data. Theoretical notes were made after quite an intense period of reflection – linking the initial data and interpretation to the theoretical foundations of the study and extant literature.

These four activities – data collection, note taking, coding and memoing – occurred simultaneously. The results were truncated again to create ‘*core categories*’ and the results were written up. Figure 3.4 offers a visual representation of this initial process:

Figure 3.4: Grounded theory – creation of core categories



Source: Dick (2000)

An audit trail (recorded in a research journal) of the research process noted developments in the design of the interview questions, observations and ideas, decisions, and experiences with the participants. For example, from observations at the Podcasting workshops, it soon became apparent that there was a need to explore the potential implications of the strong links between STE owners/operators and their involvement in community activities.

As the process of data analysis went on, it became necessary to attribute comments to the various participants, where possible, and establish links as themes emerged from the data. NVivo qualitative research software assisted with both the management of the vast amounts of qualitative data that were collected as well as the analysis of the data. The advantage of using this software is that it not only provides a way of reducing the number of categories and empirical material collected into a manageable quantity, but also clearly documents this audit trail.

A period of what can be called ‘chaotic confusion’ eventuated as data sets were compared and contrasted. In GT, this process is referred to as the constant comparative method of comparing one set of data to another to seek commonalities and divergences (Glaser 1998, Glaser & Holton, 2004). This requires the researcher to have a good level of theoretical sensitivity in order to allow concepts to emerge from data in order to develop theory. Maintaining an analytic distance from, and making abstract connections between data and emerging categories, in a methodical manner requires that the researcher

“remains open, trusting to preconscious processing and to conceptual emergence” (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 11).

The process of analysing data began with a thematic analysis which is a way of coding qualitative information and was initially done by hand. There are a number of ways this can be done (e.g. by colour or keyword) but a good coding system should clearly attach a label (in this instance to a cluster of comments and keywords), and note the characteristics or issues that make up each theme. The task of making sense of the vast array of information required a methodical approach to the reduction and interpretation of data. Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest a process of organising data and identifying any emergent patterns, categories and themes. The researcher analyses any recurrent events or comments and attaches a label to them. This process began with an analysis of responses to the interview questions.

Interviews that were recorded were fully transcribed. When the participant preferred that the conversation not be taped, notes were made during the interview and these added to within a few hours of the interview, to ensure that the exchange was recorded accurately while still fresh in the mind. These notes were recorded in two ways and followed the protocols recommended by Cresswell (1994, p. 152) for collecting information.

Initially interview notes were made and reviewed in a descriptive manner. Details of the time, date and setting, and a portrait or profile of the participant were recorded. Then the dialogue between researcher and participant was reconstructed using both notes made during the interview and observations of the event to develop a full record of each interview. Transcriptions and interview notes were read and notes made that related to possible themes. The interviews that had been taped were read through at the same time that the audiotape was replayed. In this manner, notes could be made on any innuendoes, tone of voice, emphatic statements and non-verbal messages. They were

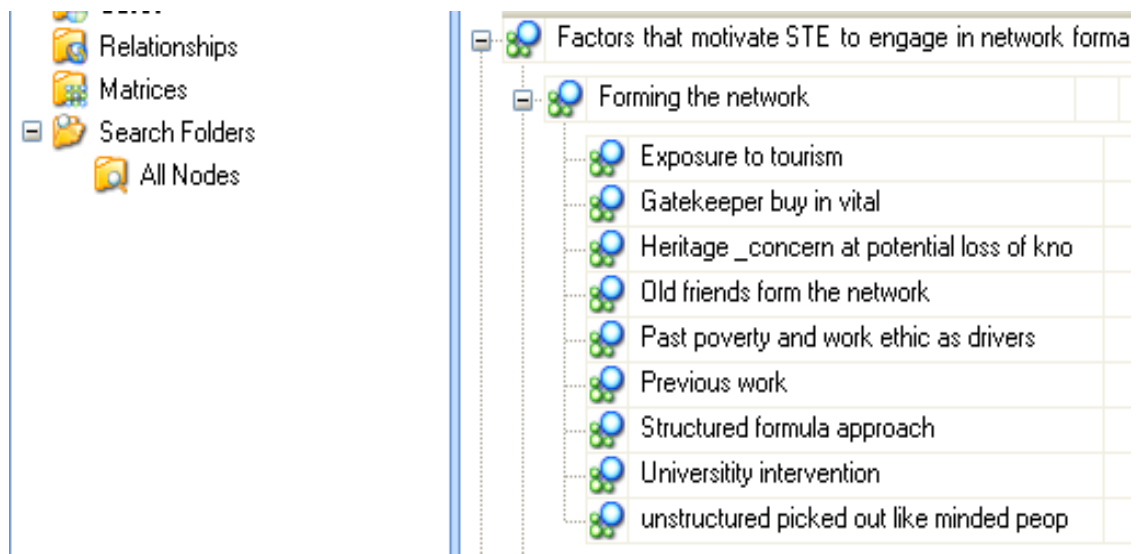
then sorted according to emerging themes and patterns. Clusters of comments and responses that were similar were noted under each interview question. They were then labelled with the participant's name – in other words: who said what. These clusters of comments were then truncated into a series of topics.

The interview documents were then read again in a reflective manner. Tolich and Davidson (1999, p. 112) argue that “the goal of any interview is to ask introductory questions so as to *explore* the research themes.” Multiple readings of interview notes and transcripts revealed different levels of analytical complexity and encouraged the researcher to engage in a process of critical reflection. A thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed a number of keywords after reading the passages that surrounded them. These keywords were clustered into codings that were then used to group passages of common statements from participants.

As the transcripts and notes were word processed, searches for keywords could be easily done. To improve consistency, revisiting the passages of text again and again allowed the themes and subsequent coding to be modified. Connections and overlaps could be examined and condensed where applicable. This process follows the approach discussed by Cresswell (1998, pp. 153–155). This “systematic process of analysing textual data” then requires the researcher to look for the most descriptive words found in the topics, facilitating the transition from topics to categories.

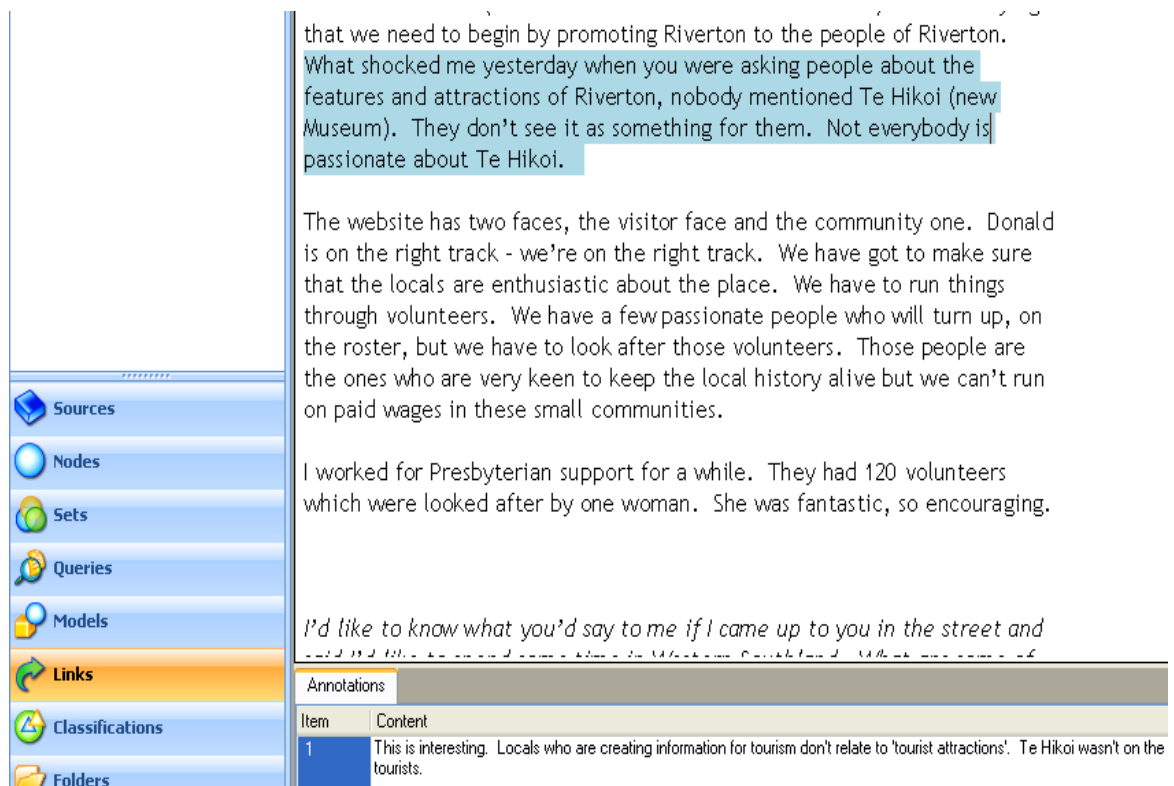
Figure 3.5 shows an example of the results of an initial round of coding using NVivo qualitative research software. The screen shot of the NVivo nodes and categories are given below as a guide to help others who may want to adopt a similar approach.

Figure 3.5: Examples of open coding



An initial thematic analysis of data enabled a set of ‘open *codes*’ to be developed that facilitated a form of organisation for the key points that emerged from the data set. For example, where the researcher was exploring the motivations of informants to engage with the early development of tourism in the area, she recorded notes such as ‘stoic’, ‘hungry’, ‘self-sufficient’, and ‘hard working’ which led to a code entitled ‘past poverty and work ethic as drivers’. From here, *concepts* began to emerge from a collection of codes of similar content that allowed the data to be grouped (e.g. pioneer background, values and attitudes). These were truncated again by comparison and contrast between data sets to look for divergences and commonalities and a set of core *categories* began to emerge (e.g. pioneer ideals, what it means to be Kiwi). As categories emerged, the extant literature was once again woven in to assist with the development of theoretical codes. In this process it was vital that all data sources continued to be constantly compared to generate concepts. These categories are the groups of similar concepts that were used to generate a theory (e.g. ‘motivations are values-laden’).

Figure 3.6: Example of category with transcription notes and memoing



that we need to begin by promoting Riverton to the people of Riverton. What shocked me yesterday when you were asking people about the features and attractions of Riverton, nobody mentioned Te Hikoi (new Museum). They don't see it as something for them. Not everybody is passionate about Te Hikoi.

The website has two faces, the visitor face and the community one. Donald is on the right track - we're on the right track. We have got to make sure that the locals are enthusiastic about the place. We have to run things through volunteers. We have a few passionate people who will turn up, on the roster, but we have to look after those volunteers. Those people are the ones who are very keen to keep the local history alive but we can't run on paid wages in these small communities.

I worked for Presbyterian support for a while. They had 120 volunteers which were looked after by one woman. She was fantastic, so encouraging.

I'd like to know what you'd say to me if I came up to you in the street and said that the new museum was a waste of money.

Annotations	
Item	Content
1	This is interesting. Locals who are creating information for tourism don't relate to 'tourist attractions'. Te Hikoi wasn't on the tourists.

A cross-check with the initial process of note making, memoing and coding, assisted in verifying initial coding of core categories. This process allowed a simple method of cross-checking by identifying overlapping data sets, and then seeking explanations for agreement or disagreement of subsequent and emergent themes (Dick, 2003).

Substantive codes emerged from this process of coding data, generating and truncating categories, and comparing groups of concepts. This, in turn, led to the generation of theory. The process drew on *all* sources of data (not just line-by-line coding of interview transcriptions). These sources include notes entered from, for example, research journals, observations, informal conversations and interviews, as well as notes made from secondary data and minutes of meetings. This approach to coding led to an enforced verification and saturation of categories. This meant that nothing was left out in

the process of theory generation. Glaser (1992, 1998) claims the dictum that "all is data". In other words he claims that whatever comes the researcher's way during the research can be drawn upon to generate theory. This explains why not all statements in the subsequent chapters can be quantified in terms of the number of participants whose comments led to a particular theme based on a limited line-by-line analysis of interview transcriptions. Thus the terms, 'some', 'several', 'many', a 'few', or the 'majority' indicate a sense of consensus when no definite statistic to reflect a finding can be given.

Chapter 4: STE network formation in Western Southland

4.1. The evolution of a rural tourism network

This chapter presents findings that focus on the study's first research question: *How are STE networks formed and maintained in rural areas?* Using the case of Western Southland, the chapter is divided into three sections: the evolution of the rural tourism network including the important role of the web-raising programme as a supporting mechanism to network formation; the factors that motivate STE to engage in network formation; and how STE owners/operators enter these networks.

Over the past seven years (2004–2011) the processes that have surrounded the evolution of the community-built website www.westernsouthland.co.nz have provided a fertile ground within which to understand the 'seed bed' of a rural STE network and the tourism milieu that exists in the region today (Milne et al., 2008).

4.1.1 The emergence of formal network structures 2004–2006

The Western Southland website www.westernsouthland.co.nz had its genesis in 2004 when a meeting of a local promotions group (Riverton Area Promotions Inc.) discussed the fact that the south-west of the South Island had scenery, infrastructure and history equal to, if not surpassing, surrounding areas and yet visitors were tending to 'pass through' the area to either get to the Catlins (east) or Fiordland (west) (see Figure 3.2). The meeting led to the development of a core aim for tourism development and marketing in Western Southland to encourage visitors to spend more time in the region.

A preliminary meeting of representatives from Tuatapere, Otautau and Riverton promotional groups was held in June 2004. Those at the meeting agreed that ways and means of attracting visitors and residents to the area were important. The meeting was advised of a web-raised site, developed with assistance from NZTRI at AUT University in Auckland, which promoted the East Cape area of the North Island.

On 11 July 2005 a gathering of people involved in local tourism, local government, the RTO and business met at Orepuki. NZTRI researchers were invited to attend the meeting and outlined the website proposal in greater detail. It was decided by the meeting that a working committee be set up to take action toward the establishment of an organisation that could work with NZTRI to develop an online resource to support tourism and community economic development. A further public meeting was held in Riverton on 12 September 2005 where the branding *Western Southland on the Southern Scenic Route* was agreed to.

The Registrar of Incorporated Societies registered Western Southland Promotions Association Incorporated (WSPAI) on 2 March 2006. Membership of WSPAI consists of:

- Riverton Area Promotions (Inc.)
- Tuatapere District Promotions (Inc.)
- Otautau Concept and Promotions
- Nightcaps Community Development Area Committee (of the Southland District Council (SDC)), and
- Ohai Community Development Area Committee (SDC).

The chair of WSPAI outlined the primary objectives of the Association and commented on several occasions during the data collection phase of this PhD study that the primary reason for the Association's existence was not solely to promote the area to visitors; it also encompassed all aspects of working, playing, visiting and living in this sub-region of Southland. WSPAI exists:

- To promote and encourage tourism and business within the district by way of information technology and other means in order to educate both the local community and the general public about the district.
- To raise funds sufficient to employ bodies, companies, societies, persons, local authorities, government departments, etc. to carry out promotional activities, publications, websites, merchandise, articles and all other kinds of goods and services for the purpose of promoting the district as a place to visit, set up business, and live.

- To liaise and work in partnership with other organisations providing promotional and educational facilities in and for the district

WSPAI Constitution (2006, p. 3)

That same year (2006), the Southland Community Trust and the Southland District Council (SDC) gave their support to WSPAI for the development, in partnership with NZTRI, of a Western Southland Tourism Promotions and Community Building Website. The website is operational on www.westernsouthland.co.nz and gives community organisations and businesses an opportunity to establish a web presence in the context of their home region. The website lists businesses, communities and places of interest geographically (by area and town), by attraction, by business category, and by themed trails. The site serves to help visitors with planning a trip around the region and, by so doing, raise the competitiveness of the region as a visitor destination. The site also acts as a focus for the community's online ambitions reflecting on what constitutes the community and what is happening there.

4.1.2 A point of collaboration: www.westernsouthland.co.nz

One of several aims of the site is to help visitors with planning a trip around the region and to gather more information both before they arrive and while they are there. This gives visitors more reason to stay longer and spend more money, thus raising the profile of the region as a visitor destination and building yield. It is a community site for use by community members and diaspora. The community-built website www.westernsouthland.co.nz creates a unique sense of place and communicates the passion of the locals for 'our place'. STE owners/operators can create a page to advertise their business, free of charge. They can upload text and photos, and 'affiliate' with other business that they are happy to recommend or support. They can also link to a business or personal website, or other sites that they may have an association with. Contributing content for the site also engages people in ICT. Attending workshops to learn how to create a page for the site, or the opportunity to add a local business as an affiliate, meant

that the website became not only an online presence for STE but also a useful point of collaboration.

Several informants commented that the web-raising programme (and the NZTRI team) brought much needed energy, passion and direction to the promotions groups. These groups are made up of busy local farmers, STE owners/operators, residents, and interest groups who work both in tourism and elsewhere or who are heavily committed to a variety of community organisations. Informants also commented that through the workshops (where they were taught to create their own page for the site), they met people they didn't know before or caught up with acquaintances. For STE owners/operators, the workshops allowed them an opportunity to get together and discuss operational aspects of owning a tourism business or formally acknowledge their appreciation of another business by affiliating with them on their web page. One owner/operator of a small accommodation business commented:

"I spoke to [name] who I haven't seen for ages. We thought it would be good to have a page on here for the church. We often get people on Sunday who are just visiting the area and like to attend a local service. We also don't mind lunch at the pub in Riverton so we can add a link there too ... (laughs) ... free advertising! ... it's having a natter that helps you think about these things ... well having the time is really what I mean."

The researcher's passion for food and cooking, and a genuine interest in the stories of growing, storing, preparing, and eating locally produced food, provided a shared area of interest with a range of people – from local cafe or bed & breakfast owners, to those who worked in the local Environment Centre where classes were held in 'how to build an outdoor cob oven', or 'preserving apricots' (for example). This was the first step in understanding the fabric of social relations and social organisation that existed in the community. Many of the contacts made in this way helped to fine-tune research themes, develop interview guidelines, identify key individuals in the area and identify nodes and actors in the network.

Informants were particularly interested in capturing the stories and heritage information of the towns and settlements in Western Southland. This they did by working together to generate digital content for their website (text, photos, etc).

The Western Southland area is rich in early settler history. There is a growing recognition that as long-term residents 'pass on', many of the local stories are dying out and need to be preserved. This recognition, combined with a desire to create and archive local culture, heritage and visitor information in an accessible way, was the starting point of Phase 2 of the web-raising programme. Due to the influx of new settlers, there was also a need to represent the community to newcomers, and to stay in touch with the diaspora. Earlier initiatives to do this were isolated, lacked formal local training infrastructure, and were largely unco-ordinated (Clark, 2007). The Podzone Country project equipped STE and the community with the seed technology and the skills to 'go podcasting'. The community-built website houses many of these stories and information for visitors and residents alike.

The web-raising programme provided a reason for various tourism stakeholders to get together, share ideas and work together on the logistical aspects of the projects. Therefore, these exchanges offered an opportunity to strengthen relationships among and between long-term residents of Western Southland as well as newcomers to the area, many of whom are tourism operators. These include the very early pioneers of the Southern Scenic Route and key individuals in the area who were often referred to as 'local leaders' who linked in people from their communities. The chair of a local promotions group was emphatic about the need to find a common interest to bring people together:

"We need to get people together, to find a way that they can work on something in which they have a common interest. It's the common interest that is really important. Many businesses are competing ferociously against each other, times are tough and that's what happens. In the 1940s and 1950s, we were coming out of the war and a depression – that was really tough. We HAD to work together if we

were going to achieve anything. There is not the same drive to do that now. New people don't really understand our history and what we did in the past – look at Clifden Bridge and the Southern Scenic Route. The 1960s, '70s and '80s were good times and that's when people began doing their own thing and becoming concerned about themselves. We were fighting for our community in those very early days; we were all in it together. We have to try and get the same thing going now or our small towns won't exist soon. It's about finding something that appeals to people, something they have in common."

Before examining the factors that led to the emergence of the network, it is useful to step back further in time to get a clearer picture about the evolution of tourism in Western Southland, "New Zealand's most peripheral region" (Stuart et al., 2005, p. 239).

4.1.3 The pioneers of tourism in Western Southland

New Zealand is a young nation with a history of European settlement spanning only the past 170 years, though early Maori settlement with arrivals from Hawaiiki is traced back to around AD 1350 (King, 2003; Dupuis, 2009). Small rural communities in New Zealand initially flourished despite adversity and hardship but many of these communities now face new challenges in terms of economic development (e.g. jobs and income creation), social development (e.g. health service delivery), retention and regeneration of population, and the possible loss of heritage and cultural information.

Pioneering ideals are still strong among the informants of this research and can perhaps be attributed to the short time span between the early pioneering days and settlement of the region to the present day (see Dupuis, 2009). Informants often referred to Western Southland as being part of 'heartland New Zealand'. Loosely defined, the term 'heartland' is applied to provincial and rural New Zealand (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2004), and is a reflection of New Zealand's strong agricultural heritage. Mackinder's heartland theory (1904, see New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2004), refers to a "central region, especially an area that is politically, economically, and militarily vital to a nation, region or culture". In heartland New Zealand, community spirit

is highly valued (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2004). It manifests in the way locals support and contribute to their community, look after neighbours and take the time to talk to people, and go the extra mile for customers in the businesses they run (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2004, 2011).

Activity in the tourism sector in Western Southland emerged from economic hardship, geographic isolation, and the recognition that there were significant natural resources in the area that could entice new residents and visitors alike. Interviews with the founder and promoters of the Southern Scenic Route reveal a pioneer spirit that originated from Tuatapere and which is still evident in the tourism network of the region today. Dupuis offers a set of keywords to describe these pioneering characteristics:

“... sensible, practical, pragmatic, stoic, responsible, grounded, down to earth, self-reliant, humble, capable and having great strength of will.” Dupuis (2009, p. 44)

One interviewee, a long-term Tuatapere resident and promoter of the region, reflects on the early days of the town and comments:

“Tuatapere people had to fight for its survival since its [the town’s] inception. It was originally marginal farm land and now it’s beautiful farm land – they had to fight to claim the land from bogs, forest and trees. Forestry has always had to fight hard to [sic] eek out a living. The transport was a long way from everything else. The railway was not economic and had to be closed.”

4.1.4 Western Southland’s iconic attractions

There are four ‘iconic’ attractions in Western Southland that the majority of informants mention when asked to reflect upon the early days of tourism development in the region: the Clifden suspension bridge; the southern viaducts and Port Craig; the Southern Scenic Route and the Hump Ridge Track.

Figure 4.1: The Clifden suspension bridge



Source: Photograph courtesy of the Southland Museum and Art Gallery
(History of Clifden Suspension Bridge on the Western Southland website)

Opened in 1899, the Clifden Bridge is the longest suspension bridge in New Zealand (Figure 4.1). The structure acted as a single-lane bridge for horse-drawn traffic, and later traction engines towed lime and wool over it. Trucks and cars traversed the bridge from the 1920s and it remained in use until 1978 when the new crossing was opened downstream. This is a category 1 Historic Place, registered with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. The Clifden Bridge reserves and limestone caves attract visitors as a rest stop on the Southern Scenic Route and offer easy access to the river for fishing and recreation. In April 2010, Clifden Bridge was closed to pedestrians as serious concerns exist for the structural integrity of the bridge. One informant rued the closure, given a subsequent negative effect on tourism and a feeling of helplessness given the lack of funds to repair it.

Figure 4.2: The Southern viaducts and historic Port Craig



Source: www.hikesouth.com

Another local tourism ‘icon’ referred to by informants is the Percy Burn Viaduct (built in 1923 and restored in the early 1990s), together with four other viaducts in the Waitutu area (Figure 4.2). The Percy Burn is the largest of these wooden constructions, and is reputedly the largest surviving wooden viaduct in the world. A former logging tramway, it is now a footbridge and the most popular feature of the Tuatapere Hump Ridge Track. Tuatapere & District Promotions Inc. was instrumental in the restoration and restructure of the viaducts between 1991 and 1994, working in conjunction with the Southland District Council.

Figure 4.3: The Southern Scenic Route



Source: Southern Scenic Route official website, www.southernscenicroute.co.nz

The Southern Scenic Route is, in the words of its founder Dr John Fraser (who at the time of developing the Route, was a motel owner and resident of Tuatapere), “a smile across the base of the South Island” that runs from Dunedin to Te Anau (Figure 4.3). During an interview he commented that a 20% decrease in population between 1971 and 1991 (statistic confirmed by Houghton, King, & Piper, 1996) motivated community leaders in Tuatapere and its surrounding district to consider ways to optimise the visitor flows along the newly formed scenic route.

“I foresaw from Dunedin to Milford Sound a big smile around the base of Southland was the way to go. I tried to identify the roads where the tourist would really want to go – I tried to identify the best way I could. Curio Bay and the Petrified Forest and things like that had to be included.”

The Southern Scenic Route concept and name were conceived at an informal gathering in Tuatapere in November 1985 and confirmed at a public meeting in January 1986. The promoters first planned the Route, erected signage and *then* negotiated with road and

tourism authorities and local government. At one stage, signs were installed in a clandestine operation by locals and subsequently removed by local authorities. The project was a first for New Zealand and approval was a slow process. The Southern Scenic Route opened officially on 6 November 1988, and initially went from Te Anau to Balclutha. The route was extended to Dunedin in 1998 and to Queenstown in 2010.

There was a distinct difference in the way the Southern Scenic Route was attributed as being part of Western Southland's important tourism attractions by interviewees. Those who lived along the coastal part of the Route (Riverton, Colac Bay and Tuatapere) mentioned the Southern Scenic Route in terms of tourism development in the area (15 of 25 interviewed) while those in the inland areas of Otautau, Ohai and Nightcaps (10 of 25) did not.

The small town of Tuatapere (population 582, Statistics New Zealand, 2006) is located in the south-west corner of the South Island in Western Southland on the Southern Scenic Route. The town has evolved from a farming and timber service centre into a small town with strong connections to tourism (Smith, 2009). It is the home of key individuals and pioneers of tourism who were very active in developing and promoting the 'iconic' attractions of the area, specifically the Southern Scenic Route, the Hump Ridge Track, the Southern viaducts and Clifden Bridge. The same individuals who were involved in these initiatives also contributed their time and energy to the web-raising programme and were strong advocates of this community and tourism initiative.

Figure 4.4: The Hump Ridge Track



Source: www.wonderwalkers.co.nz

Informants based in and around Riverton, Colac Bay, Tuatapere and the surrounding district saw links between tourism growth in Western Southland and the establishment of the Hump Ridge Track (Figure 4.4). One owner/operator of an accommodation business comments:

“The Hump Ridge is really what brings in the visitors. We are getting more ‘groups’ (ladies especially) flying down from Auckland or Wellington for the weekend. We pick them up from Invers, feed them, give them a drink or two, a clean bed and room and a great breakfast and send them on their way. We get a lot of international visitors, too. We’re trying to get them to stay longer and do more than just the track.”

Another STE owner/operator who offers support services for visitors on the Track agrees that the Hump Ridge Track is a major attractor in Western Southland:

“Oh definitely, the Hump Ridge. We’ve only ever had to heli [helicopter] out a handful of people who couldn’t do it. It’s a great drawcard ... I know [name] down the road does a good trade in spin-offs from the Track, too.”

Promotional material for the Track mentions the pioneer spirit that led to the development of the track in the first place:

“The very existence of the track is something quite special, a reflection of Kiwis love for tramping and the ‘can do’ attitude of a small rural community. Unlike many other track projects that are administered by the Department of Conservation (DoC) this track was conceived by the local community and then built with the same pioneering spirit and hard work that built the timber town of Tuatapere itself.”

The Hump Ridge Track (2009)

Key individuals and early pioneers of tourism who were involved in the development of the Southern Scenic Route were often somewhat ‘anti’ local public agencies, a legacy of their dealings with them in the past. This was also a reflection of the “bad taste left over from the early days of development of the Route” which had resulted in a reluctance to engage with public agencies in order to promote tourism in their region. There was recognition, however, that in order to overcome geographic isolation and secure much needed infrastructure for tourism (signage, roads, local beautification projects) that this initial push to develop these local ‘iconic’ attractions isn’t enough on its own.

Clark’s (2007) study found that there was little interaction between businesses and even less with public agencies including the RTO. While STE recognised the benefits that could be gained from working together, there is still very little real evidence of collaboration between these stakeholders in the area. Western Southland’s geographic isolation presents significant challenges for tourism development in the region. A restaurant owner commented that from her experience, it was a “big ask for a tourist to visit the very south of New Zealand’s South Island” and this was often a last stop for visitors who are completing an itinerary of travel throughout New Zealand. Eight other STE owners/operators, who participated in the formal interviews, mentioned that a visit to the western part of Southland is something that is often unplanned or an unexpected day trip, giving them little certainty in forward bookings. Added to this is a somewhat negative sentiment that the region is “ignored in terms of government and Council funding and improvement initiatives”. There was also a perception that other Southland regions have a lot more assistance in promoting or developing their towns, prompting a

move towards formalising a network structure in order to have a 'voice' in tourism development in the region.

4.2 Factors affecting network formation

Co-ordination and co-operation among STE, and between STE and local government, is at a very nascent stage in Western Southland. Informants exhibit the strongest linkages not as part of a group or unit that can be described as a 'tourism network' in the more traditional dyadic sense; but as part of multiple networks, with strong links to the local geographic community. STE owners/operators play multiple roles in their communities; for example, on school boards, with sports groups, as members of the coast guard or the ambulance service, with promotions groups, environmental groups, as artists and artisans, as farmers and conservationists, through faith and church activities, in clubs and interest groups, and through cultural and heritage events and activities.

In this rural setting the strongest linkages and relationships of STE are not between firms or with local bodies (RTOs, local government and public agencies) but with the community in which they are embedded (see also Clark, 2007; Milne et al., 2008). As such, there is a need to have a better understanding of the place of STE in the 'community social fabric', the nature of their social relations, their implicit knowledge of local 'lore' and, subsequently, their ability to enhance the tourism experience. More needs to be known of the broader environment in which rural STE operate, and this is at the core of enhanced STE business performance and STE network formation in rural areas (Aylward & Kelliher, 2009; Lynch, Holden & O'Toole, 2009).

The spatial boundaries of 'connectedness' varied from tight-knit local geographic communities with a high level of neighbouring activity through to highly connected locals with global connections. Thus the tourism network in Western Southland is not one particular group or unit that interacts with other groups or units. The term 'network' is therefore applied as a way to interpret the reality of a system of connections for tourism

in the region. To relate this to Owen-Smith and Powell's (2004) description of the types of networks that exist, it can be said that the system of connections is predominantly a social network that exists among individuals based on friendship and acquaintanceship. Reimer et al. (2008) refer to relations that are concerned with generalised reciprocity, identity and families as 'communal' relations. STE owners/operators in Western Southland also displayed 'associative' relations (Reimer, 2002) with others, i.e. relations concerned with shared interests, recreation, charities or religious groups.

There was little evidence of the market relations between STE or with other businesses that would exist if there were formal exchanges of goods or services, or supply and demand, or joint marketing efforts. Motivations for collaborating with others did not usually relate to business activities or making profit; rather they were values-laden and focused on those things that STE owners/operators held as important to them personally.

Clark's (2007) study explored the perceptions of STE owners/operators in Western Southland of the value of working together. The author describes two main motivations for STE owners/operators being in business in Western Southland. These are a 'desire to be self-sufficient' without the need to go to others for advice or resources, and 'being able to engage in a business activity that they feel strongly or passionate about' with a 'lifestyle' option. The latter links to the notion of community attachment, to showcase their 'place' and share their beautiful surrounds with others.

Research participants were mainly concerned with promoting Western Southland as a great place to live, work and visit, and their motivators for being part of the network were twofold. Primarily, there was a desire to optimise local resources and assets for community social and economic well-being. They saw tourism as a useful tool to stimulate local economic development through job creation and enhanced business

performance and also as a way to retain and regenerate population. They also perceived there was an opportunity to improve health and education services by, for example, creating web-based resources to attract health professionals and teachers to the area. Similar to Clark's (2007) study, there was a strong desire to be self-sufficient and "look after our own". Such a resource would support newcomers to learn more about the region and portray the values and resources of the local community. Secondly, they were eager to capture and archive important local heritage information for future generations and incomers to the area. The majority of interviewees were also aware that the web-raising programme would result in a community resource that was useful to attract newcomers and visitors to the region.

4.2.1 Pioneering ideals and what it means to be a 'Kiwi'

Key research informants include the chairs and board members of various local and regional promotions groups, STE and local business owners represented in each of these promotions groups, and long-term residents who were members of community organisations. They were predominantly aged over 65 years of age and expressed common values and folk images of what it means to be 'Kiwi' (expressions of New Zealandness) such as innovative uses of minimal resources and self-sufficiency.

A strong work ethic and the ability to persevere in challenging times are reflective of the pioneering spirit of many of the older informants. One individual (chair of a local business association) described his early life growing up in the region:

"If we go back to my upbringing, I think that's an important place to start. I had parents who weren't wealthy. So we had to have resilience of our own – I collected and sold beer bottles to get money to buy lollies, went possuming etc. As youngsters we were really quite rich – we learnt the only way to make a buck was to get off your butt and get going. That's had a real influence on my life."

The ability to persevere and “finish what you set out to do” is a quality much admired amongst older members of the network. Reflecting on the restoration of the Percy Burn Viaduct, a committee member of a local promotions group commented:

“You have to stick at things. Stay with them through thick and thin and boy it gets jolly tough but you have to keep on going.”

Hardship early in life was something that many research informants wore like a badge of honour. Folk images alluded to by informants (e.g. working the land, making ‘something from nothing’) indicate an importance given to self-sufficiency and a strong sense of independence. Their resourcefulness and resilience was something they had a sense of pride in and they rued “the loss of strength of character in younger generations”. Informants revealed a strong desire “not to be pushed around” and to “learn to stand up for yourself.” This thread of stoic self-sufficiency runs deep amongst STE informants but is lamented by a public sector representative who, in Clark’s (2007, p. 74) study comments “we need to change the mindset in order to develop the tourism industry in Western Southland.”

The Southern Scenic Route was initiated by one main *instigator* who worked with a group of residents and local STE owners/operators in the 1980s to set up signage and promote the Scenic Route. Collusion came before collaboration and was a strong ‘glue’ that brought STE owners/operators and the broader community together:

“The signposts were done by stealth because the Authorities wouldn’t fund them. The Authorities told us to back off and reminded us there was a \$5000 fine for illegal signs. That slowed us down for almost a year but we got going again. Then we got big signs at key corners. At night we put them up under spotlights with rapid fixing cement. We got some old railway lines at Tuatapere and someone with a gas torch cut them up so that people couldn’t come in with a chainsaw and cut them [the signs] down. It was really a mission. Some people just loved these vigilante parties ... putting up signs in the middle of the night.”

A lack of funding did not deter tourism founders who often used their personal financial resources or showed talent for making money to fund the development of the Route:

“Once the Southern Scenic Route was started we had to do things against the Authority’s wishes. Nobody would signpost it. We got no grants, no money, I spent about \$20,000 of my own money but we spent about \$50,000 before we got it [SSR] up and running before we let it go and we did this by ‘know your district’ trips. For example, we had the ‘Takatimu trip’ and we got 400 people to the top ... over there [points] paying \$5 each so that gave us a couple of thousand and they got a wee guide book and there was a bottle hidden at the top about 50 to 60 years ago and we tried to find the bottle. We got the boaties and had a day out, another 300 people on Lake Hauroko ... and a trip to one of the farms, another to gold mines. We got a few thousand for every trip and that all went in to do things, it went into advertising, to the AA to do maps, etc. I went to Wellington at my own expense and got the Highways Board Signage committee and addressed them. They refused me permission three times to go there. And I said how can I get there ... then they gave me 10 minutes at one of their meetings but it lasted for an hour and a half when I started talking.”

These network leaders eagerly told the researcher stories of the days when they and other residents colluded “to get things done” and believed that their disregard of rules and regulations and their ability to challenge authority “is what made things happen, otherwise nothing would have been done.”

Key informants who had a track record of “getting on with it and just getting things done” expressed frustration and confusion with a contemporary world full of red tape, policies and procedures. They continue to lead their communities and mentor incomers and future generations (Smith, 2009).

Other folk images referred to by informants include a liking for the ‘Number 8 fencing wire mentality’ – a reference to the fencing wire commonly used on farms and with which New Zealanders can reputedly fix just about anything; or make just about anything. It is often purported as the very core of Kiwi innovation, while others decry the mentality as nothing more than the ability to ‘make do’ and very much in line with the

'she'll be right' mantra of those who have the attitude of 'good enough' or 'good enough for me'.

The pioneer attitude of stoically 'getting on with it' and achieving something was evident when one STE owner/operator expressed dissatisfaction with meetings held by their local promotions group:

"... alot of the meetings are self-generated.... We have a report on something ... we are told how many visitors have come through ... then someone else might talk about the brochures and how/when we should get more pamphlets ... and then someone will give us a speech on something ... we talk about how much money we have ... and then we might have a drink and go home. They are all self-generated."

Another echoed these comments. These research participants sought a sense of purpose to the meetings and this affected the level of satisfaction they derived from being involved:

"I'd like to see the meetings progressing. The definition of work is force and distance moved ... so unless you move there is no work being done. The things I wanted to do was identify the things worth striving for. Workshop meetings [to do with the website project] were good. That gave us a direction."

Dupuis (2009, p. 51) examines how "highlighting 'Kiwi' identity characteristics that are supportive of desirable financial behaviours and performance outcomes contribute to the 'normalisation' of such behaviours and might increasingly bring financial well-being within the cognitive reach of more New Zealanders." Dupuis notes that:

"If this were just a matter of what we say to each other on the bus and in the pub it wouldn't matter, but there is more at stake. Our folk image of ourselves is tied to deeply held values about work/ life balance and work habits. These, in turn, are tied to our ability to succeed as we become more exposed to the world economy."

Dupuis (2009, p. 51)

One STE owner/operator spoke of 'community spirit' and a desire to welcome visitors to her town, not just the guests at her farm-stay. For her, the art of welcoming visitors is as

much a community responsibility as it is for individual tourism business owners. During the interview the researcher observed the informant greeting some hikers in Tuatapere who had just come off the Hump Ridge Track. While the woman thought it was the 'community spirited' thing to do, her motivations were also linked to the local economy:

"We need cash in the tills, it's not about tourism. We're not really into tourism. But we do want people to feel comfortable and spend their money when they stop here."

Perceptions of tourism held by research participants who were not involved in the industry (14 out of 34 formal interviews and informal conversations) were sometimes negative. On occasion, the word 'tourism' met with, at best, indifference and at worst, some hostility. One resident was particularly concerned with the impact of tourists in Riverton and commented:

"One thing we don't want is large busloads of tourists dropping their rubbish everywhere. Freedom campers have also made a heck of a mess and are on the lookout of something for nothing ... little more than bludgers."

Over the two years of the web-raising programme, the researcher adopted the word 'visitor' and this was more readily received. People could identify with having friends and relatives to visit, as well as visitors from out of town.

4.2.2 Pioneers, incomers and regional differences

The majority of research participants did not see themselves solely as part of a 'tourism' network; rather, they were making a contribution to their local community.

Other motivating factors included a desire to use existing resources of the natural and built environment, awareness of the benefits of tourism for local economic development (but this did to some extent depend on levels of education), an opportunity to overcome geographic isolation, and a need to diversify from traditional farming to tourism-related activities. Whether or not informants were long-term residents of the area or

newcomers, and whether or not they lived in areas where they had had previous exposure to tourism also had some bearing on their motivations. All informants recognised an unrealised regional potential offered by tourism:

“Because it is a fact that New Zealand and overseas visitors don’t realise that there is scenery and attractions between Catlins and Fiordland, both of which are well promoted by very active and successful teams of professionals. Each day in the summer holiday season at least 100 campervans and possibly 100 rental cars pass through Riverton and Tuatapere without stopping. A conservative estimate suggests that those visitors each have \$1000 spending money in their wallets. That is \$200,000 passing through each day and neither town gets a cent of it. That is one good reason why WSPAI was formed.”

Others also saw opportunities to optimise local resources in times of adversity and declining populations:

“Some of my friends said that – pardon the expression – ‘Tuatapere is stuffed’ there is nothing there, the forestry is going, the Post Office closed, the banks are going. This was the great crash of the mid-80s if you like in which everything was wound down. I said, ‘No it’s not.’ I think there is great potential through tourism and with that in mind we started motels. We ran them on a fairly frugal basis but when we sold them we actually made a bob. So the motels were a way to also give accommodation to my friends as well as create income. We knew that having accommodation on its own wasn’t enough for visitors so we’d try and encourage others to have a go ... take people fishing ... or out for a horse trek ... or show them how to shear sheep. So others joined in and we’d try and create an enjoyable itinerary – especially for the city slickers.”

“I really found that the Southern Scenic Route had at least 75% of the scenic features of Southland. It is an absolute gem. Go to Gore – there is fishing, bits of shopping – but it hasn’t got the wealth of things like the Chaslands for instance or Lake Hauroko – and the Southern Coast. Go to places like Lumsden, and they have got things like the steam train that used to go there and the fishing and the pine reserve – but there isn’t the wealth of things like Fiordland and Te Anau.”

Staunch pioneering ideals still valued by those informants who are long-term residents of Western Southland (‘long-term’ being defined as resident since the early 1970s) include valuing hard work, purposeful endeavour and perseverance, and being regarded as

someone who has ‘true grit’, is down to earth, not too emotional, self-reliant, a bit of a risk-taker and rather humble. Loyalty to the town and the people in it is also highly valued.

“Ours was a history of having to fight and having to be loyal to their community, to have a community spirit of being loyal to your neighbour. Some people were an absolute legend of strength. [location] people were all risk takers – they were always doing things.”

Driving distances between the small towns of Western Southland rarely exceed 30 minutes but informant comments often reflect a very *local* parochialism and rivalry:

“In Tuatapere, we don’t wait for the authorities to do things like some other areas we just get in and do it... [Name] isn’t from around here. You can’t just sit and wait for things to happen; you’ve got to get off your backside and do them yourself, that’s the way we’ve always done it.”

This small town parochialism can be a barrier to efforts to bring about prosperity, economic growth and job creation through collaboration at a regional level. While accommodation operators are happy to recommend another business if they were full or are willing to suggest a local restaurant or activity in their own town (e.g. Riverton), they are not so likely to recommend a business in another town – even if it is only 10 minutes away.

There was a definite disparity between the vision of the ‘pioneers’ of the iconic attractions of the region and ‘incomers’ (Tinsley & Lynch, 2008), newcomers to the area who brought business ideas from other regions. Tourism pioneers had a vision that was not solely based on their own town or small settlement; rather, they saw the benefits of broadening their efforts for the entire Western Southland sub-region.

“There’s a triangle that goes from Thornbury, along to Riverton, Colac Bay, Orepuki through to Tuatapere and Drummond, over to Nightcaps, Ohai, Otautau and back to Riverton. That’s Western Southland. We have to bring people to the area – not just to one of these small towns. We have to work together and give people a good

time in the region. I'm not talking about sharing them, I'm talking about getting them to stay longer and bring more money into the tills all round."

And:

"If there is one thing I learnt from the Southern Scenic Route, it's that we have to bring people to town, give them a good time and get their dollars, then pass them on, get them to stay longer and visit all our small towns. Most people nowadays don't understand that. It's got to be about the benefit of all, not just one or two."

Informants who were relatively new (less than five years) to the area were more focused on the community and town they had decided to settle in and less concerned with other parts of the sub-region:

"I don't really care where they [visitors] go as long as the bills get paid. If we keep them here [town] it's more likely they will spend up in other businesses we have, e.g. the chemists, the garage, the hardware store, the dairy."

Differentiation within the destination is also evident based on types of residency; for example, between those who live in town all year and those who own *cribs* (holiday houses) and visit infrequently. There is also a difference in the way long-term residents and newcomers are viewed. These issues are worthy of consideration in terms of tourism businesses and the way local networks are formed, especially the important element of referrals. Tinsley and Lynch (2008) consider social relations within a rural village context on the west coast of Scotland and differentiate between 'locals' and 'incomers' and find definitional issues between the two terms. Hierarchical divisions of 'how to be a local' range from those who are born and bred locally with both parents born and bred locally at the top of the scale, to those who have a holiday home in the area with no relatives living locally (at the bottom of the scale). In the case of Western Southland, one STE owner/operator had lived in the area for more than 40 years yet had difficulty in describing himself as a true local:

"Even though we have lived here for years, I wasn't born and bred in this town.

That makes a difference ... you're considered a real local only if you come from a long line of certain families around here. I'm often reminded that I'm the new guy in town [laughing]."

Similarly Tinsley and Lynch (2008, p. 169) describe levels of local acceptance of incomers. Those new people who live in the area all year round with a young family are at the highest level of acceptance by locals, and those who have holiday homes or own two or more homes are at the lowest level of local acceptance. Evidence of such differentiation exists amongst informants in this study. In particular, there is a distinct lack of acceptance of those from larger cities, especially who are buying houses in the small rural towns of Western Southland:

"A lot of people are buying property here – the Aucklanders especially. They rent out the houses to tenants or as cribs (holiday homes) really cheaply and people come here but don't want to do community things ... I guess you could say ... yes, they are NOT part of the 'social fabric' of our community. Our stories are important not only for us but also for visitors from other parts of the country and overseas. That's very sad; they are taking away what is good about being here."

An informant from a promotions group (who ran a small accommodation business) commented on attitudes towards joining the group from those in towns and settlements that had not been exposed to tourism and who did not share the desire to collaborate at either a business or community level.

"The difference is that we're on the Southern Scenic Route and people here in Riverton [and Tuatapere] know about tourists. We see tourists here. Sometimes they do stop and we meet them in the pub or on the street. In Otautau they don't see tourists at all (or rarely). Or we see people come here for the hunting and the fishing (Riverton and Tuatapere) and that's why I'm dead keen to get these trails, especially the golf, off the ground. You can play golf here for about \$5 and that's an amazing thing for the tourist. The Tuatapere Golf course especially."

In some cases, research participants from one town were seemingly suspicious or jealous of those in another. Family feuds that existed in the days of early settlement of the area spilled over to the present with three STE owners/operators specifically mentioning

disagreements between families from different areas. Despite efforts to involve all towns in the regional promotions group there was often reluctance, if not passive resistance, to join forces. In one case, it was hard work for several informants who tried to get others 'on board'. This was attributed to a variety of reasons ranging from government schemes to look after coal miners in some towns and settlements, to past conflict over road signage redirecting travellers away from the Southern Scenic Route on the way to Queenstown.

Other informants commented that this lack of desire to engage with the tourism industry at a regional level and lack of awareness of how tourism could benefit their local economy was due to "low levels of education or having little experience of *being* a tourist". Similarly, a local historian commented:

"Unfortunately people around here aren't very well educated. Some are: they have arrived from other parts of the country or parts of the world or they are locals who have gone away to the cities and been to university or worked in top positions and come back. But generally people don't understand systems of government, economics, and they don't really understand education other than it's 'good for you'. They still think of tourists as busloads of Japanese people with cameras who are somewhat alien in appearance around here. Well, there is one Chinese takeaway in Otautau but that's about it, that's the limit of their exposure to foreigners."

While key individuals and community leaders expressed some understandings of the economic and social benefits of tourism, these were as a result of lived experiences and 'self-informing' rather than formal education. More than one-third (37%) of STE owners/operators surveyed in Clark's (2007) study held tertiary qualifications, and a further 22% have trade qualifications. More than two-thirds (67%) of survey respondents indicated that tourism was not their main business activity. Informants who had food and beverage outlets had difficulty identifying themselves as part of the tourism industry. One owner of a food outlet really "couldn't give a monkey's about getting tourists through the doors" and when the interviewer probed further commented that "Well,

when you say tourist ... we're only talking about those who come from overseas, aren't we?" indicating a lack of understanding of what constitutes a 'tourist' (be they domestic or international). This lack of recognition of being part of the local tourism industry presented a challenge as it often became difficult to entice those in tourism-related industries to participate in regional initiatives, such as a regional tourism or promotions group projects.

4.2.3 Geographic proximity and value homophily

There is growing evidence that shows the effect of proximity on network formation (Whittington, Owen-Smith, & Powell, 2009; Powell, White, Koput, & Owen-Smith, 2005; Sorenson, 2004). Nearness in place or time, kinship, similarity in nature, proximity and familial relationships, are all factors that can influence the nature of information and resource flows through networks. Whittington et al. (2009, p. 1) conclude that "network effects persist both independently and interdependently with geographic variables, and regional characteristics influence the degree to which centrality enhances innovation."

Individuals who were long-term residents collaborated with long-standing trusted friends in the community as the 'pioneers' of the iconic attractions, founders of the promotions groups, and initiators of the network. A tourism business was not their sole source of income in every case, but commonly they were motivated by a desire to respond to a time of adversity or to exploit an opportunity. The idea of giving something back to the community was a key driver for the most prominent network leaders:

"In a previous life I was with the Automobile Association Southland, Service Side Supervisor for all of Western Southland, right from this side of the Orekei River right through to Kingston and Milford South. That was my territory. In the 16 years I worked in that job I got to know a lot of people. When I worked for the AA, I remember writing a report that the Automobile Association took to the County Council to see if they would put a bridge through there and they did and that road became reformed. So I feel that working and living around here I feel I owed something to the area."

Trust, reciprocity and co-operation are the cornerstone of social capital (McGehee, Lee, O'Bannon, & Perdue, 2010; Putnam, 2000) and underpin the motivations of the majority of research participants to collaborate in a common project. Reduced levels of these elements of social capital restrict the capacity of stakeholders to initiate or participate in socio-economic activities (Carmo, 2010) which, in turn, heightens the dependence on central and local government to intervene with 'top-down approaches' to tourism management, including initiatives designed to stimulate the development of local networks. If STE owners/operators are unable to exist in an environment of trust, they are less likely to co-operate with others or see short-term projects focused on increasing collaboration through to the end and the successful achievement of associated objectives. As older residents die, or if population decreases as a result of a large-scale demographic exodus, levels of trust and reciprocity between STE owners/operators, local leaders, newcomers to a region and other stakeholders will vary. It therefore becomes increasingly important to consider new ways to create opportunities for STE to generate social capital and build an environment of trust with other stakeholders. Bringing STE owners/operators and locals together in communal projects – such as the web-raising programme – is one way to lessen social fragmentation in rural communities and enhance the likelihood of local initiatives succeeding.

In order to establish the likelihood of people being able to work together, several authors place a high level of importance on understanding local customs, social networks and values, as well as the personalities of individuals (Albrecht, 2010; Smith, 2009; McAreavey, 2006; Carmo, 2010). This thesis offers an insight into what those values are and what underpins local social networks and customs, i.e. 'the way we do things around here'.

Long-term friendships and recognition that the full potential of tourism was not being realised contributed to the very first steps of network formation in Western Southland.

One STE accommodation owner/operator who was also a founding member of the Riverton Promotions Group and WSPAI reflects on the genesis of both groups:

“It all started when I met up with a friend here in Riverton, one from school days. He’s retired now and we got talking and we were both amazed at the amount of traffic that shot through this town and never stopped. One day we did a survey and found that what we thought was indeed fact. People were just shooting through the town and weren’t stopping – in fact, 186 camper vans went through town that day. Twenty stopped and two stayed overnight – so [my friend] and I called a meeting that day and included people from Tuatapere, etc. We had it in his home. It just grew from there.”

A former motel owner in Tuatapere and founder of the Southern Scenic Route commented on his recognition of a need to formalise a *group* of people to administer the Route:

“It had to be a ‘we’ and not an ‘I’. I called a meeting and from there we formed a promotions group to foster the interests of the SSR. As well as that we had things that came up – the first meeting was about the SSR – the hinterland, and the river and we identified all things that would make the SSR strong. We managed to get about 28 people at that first meeting – we got a secretary and set up an organisation. I had another friend who was just as enthusiastic as I was and he was keen that we should establish a liaison with Owaka – they had a group and we revitalised it.”

The chair of a Promotions Association speaks of times of extreme hardship and adversity in the 1970s and 1980s and how that was a catalyst to work together to move their geographically isolated community forward:

“The downturn in forestry and the closure of the mills were like a death and we experienced the same emotions as a death, we went into mourning and we were sad. We were isolated and we all had to pull together. Three people got together and called a meeting, we had to do something. I went to that first meeting and from there it [Promotions Association] just grew. We’ve focused on things like books for the library and minor matters but now we’re gearing up and getting strategic.”

Belonging to a group, or a team of developers and promoters, often provided an avenue to enjoy social activities while also being engaged in a purposeful endeavour. In other words, connecting to others to develop and promote tourism gave some (who otherwise felt they had poor social skills) the entry that they needed to engage with others in a social and leisure setting, especially those individuals whose strong work ethic and drive left little time for social interaction. Being part of a promotions group, or working with others, for example, to set stoat traps or lobby for native trees to be planted along a pathway frequented by many visitors, strengthened a sense of fellowship and social ties and provided a welcomed leisure activity.

“It’s really been a work ethic if you like. That’s been my social life. I very much enjoy a formal social life but I don’t have social life on a chit-chat basis – where you chat about nothing. I enjoy conversations of substance – not just chit-chat – that’s a thing I really regret in life. These meetings were good. I’m not good at chit-chat but I do like to work with people to get something done.”

There are various forms of human association and social organisation: family, kinship, fellowship, friends, neighbours, colleagues, associates, community, government and inter-organisational relationships (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Each of these is important in its own way. These relationships fulfil a human need to be connected, befriended and acquainted and are integral to individual well-being. Individuals are social beings who interact with others and form collective identities; these interactions and independencies can be called ‘the constitution of the social’ (Van der Maesen & Walker, 2005, p. 11). According to the authors, social quality is an important determinant of social progress and is defined as “the extent to which people are able to participate in the social and economic life and development of their communities – important aspects of individual well-being under the conditions that enhance their well-being and individual potential” (Van der Maesen & Walker, 2005, p. 11).

Four basic conditions determine how well social processes can develop and are a determinant of ‘social quality’. People must have “the capability to interact (social

empowerment); the institutional and structural context must be accessible to them (social inclusion); they must have access to the necessary material and other resources that facilitate interaction (socio-economic security); and the necessary collective accepted values and norms, such as trust, that enable community building (social cohesion)” (Van der Maesen & Walker, 2005, p .11). From this discussion it can be seen that the development of social connections, relations and networks are inextricably linked to the well-being of the individual and is a comprehensive concept of the quality of people’s daily lives.

The emergence of STE networks cannot be viewed simply as a desirable mechanism to enhance local economic and destination development. Rather, STE networks within a close-knit rural community must encompass other elements of daily life and social well-being; for example, to include schools, local residents and community groups. In essence, if developing and leveraging off systems of social connection are to positively influence tourism destination and local economic development; then these activities, interactions and interdependencies must work for the individual. In the case of Western Southland, what mattered most to individuals in the tourism ‘milieu’ was the opportunity to contribute to their communities, to leave a legacy of a thriving local economy that retained population through the creation of jobs and better infrastructure, and to pass on stories and local heritage information to future generations.

An activity/attraction provider found combining an opportunity to develop resources for tourism (e.g. podcasts) with an opportunity to get together socially appealing:

“Getting together and creating a sort of a quilt ... like a patchwork quilt in the US with stories of our place. [laughing] our version is a ‘stitch and bitch’ session. We could meet at the pub as a group, one group could record the stories and another group would be the editors and upload them.”

Participating in the network also ‘worked’ for the individual if it presented an opportunity to socialise and have fun during the often small amount of precious leisure time available to them.

4.2.4 Enhancing community attachment

Leaders and members of the promotions groups expressed a common desire to “promote and sell Western Southland to the locals – first and foremost”.

“I’m very impressed with [name and status withheld] and he’s saying that we need to begin by promoting Riverton to the people of Riverton. The website has two faces, the visitor face and the community one. He is on the right track – we’re on the right track. We have got to make sure that the locals are enthusiastic about the place.”

Underlying this was the thought that “If the locals aren’t shouting from the treetops about how good it is to live here, how the hell can we expect visitors to get excited about the place?” STE informants showed a strong desire to promote the destination as a great place to work, live and visit – in other words, not purely to market the destination for tourism.

“Right from the start it was made clear that this was not about tourism only. It is the objective of WSPAI to promote Western Southland as a great place to visit and a great place to live.

Free Independent Travellers (FITs), those without strict itineraries, need to know as much as possible about the area they are planning to visit; therefore it is important that they are informed about services as well as sights.”

One STE owner/operator provider was clearly proud of Riverton, the place he had called home for more than 40 years. He expressed a belief that values were different in rural Southland than in the North Island:

“Something that local people think is that what we do and how we live in this part of the world is of no interest to people from other parts. They fail to recognise that nothing could be further from the truth. Visitors, especially FITs, are eager to find

out about us. We do have different lifestyles and different values than those experienced in the North Island, let alone overseas.”

A long-time resident and key individual in Tuatapere recognises the opportunities that tourism presents for local economic development but also realises that it comes at a cost:

“We’ve always known that we’re a bit of a hidden secret. It’s our hidden secret and if it wasn’t for the current economic climate we wouldn’t be telling anybody else. But needs must ...”

STE owners/operators were concerned, as were other informants, with the potential loss of heritage information and local knowledge due to a lack of employment in the area and the subsequent loss of population and urban drift. The majority of informants viewed cultural and heritage information as rich assets of the communities of Western Southland and were motivated to join the regional network and participate in the web-raising programme as it gave them an opportunity to capture these stories for future generations.

“There is a lot of history here. There are the stories of the mines [Ohai, Nightcaps] and there are stories of the timber mills in Tuatapere. There are the stories of the Chinese in the gold mines and they are quite unique. The oral histories project has done a lot of good but the tapes are locked in the Invercargill library and nobody knows they are there. Borrowing them is like pulling teeth! There are so many stories to make sure the kids know ... and the newcomers to the district.”

One STE owner/operator credits the history of local roading and transport as his motivation for connecting with the network:

“Now this road, the road from Invercargill, Riverton through to Te Anau was the original road that the one-horse coaches used to go through. And then when the main road went through Lumsden and up that way to Te Anau that became the major road, this road was forgotten about and nobody came this way. We have to do something about that.”

4.2.5 Stimulating the local economy

The majority of STE informants had noted a gradual change in the last five years (2004–2009) from international visitors to an increasing number of New Zealanders who are looking for a short break, somewhere off the beaten track, where they may discover one of New Zealand’s ‘hidden treasures’.

“My customer mix is changing. It used to be more international visitors but now more New Zealanders are using B&Bs. More farmers from Canterbury are coming for short breaks ... lots of people are travelling without a booking – they don’t like planning their holidays too much in advance. They want to find something that others don’t know about.”

Tourism business owners were asked to reflect on any collaborative relationships they had with other STE. Specifically, they were asked to describe formal or informal interactions with other STE in terms of:

- reducing costs and improving operational efficiency
- creating new services or experiences, or customising tourism products for visitors, and
- sharing knowledge and expertise.

While the majority recognised that there was much to be gained from co-operation at an enterprise-to-enterprise, as well as sub-regional, level, STE owners/operators did not report *any* formalised interactions of the nature described above. While the *idea* of the small towns in Western Southland joining forces and working together appealed, ‘working together’ was not an approach adopted by the majority:

“... yeah ... it would be good to work with others but ... who gets the ball rolling? I spend a bit of money on advertising and marketing but I don’t share these costs with anybody but I’d like to.”

“We have to work together and we have to do it as part of Southland. I get that, but most of the time I’m just trying to get the bills paid.”

“We recommend local transport operators to our guests and that works well ... something in it for them and us ... but no I don’t go and look for other people to band together with to help the business.”

B&B owners were happy to recommend a restaurant to a guest or recommend a local tour if asked, but they did not link to other tourism businesses in any formal manner. One STE owner/operator commented:

“Businesses don’t work together. They are very singular about what they’ve got. They need to work together. It’s just hard to know where to begin.”

While an interest in collaboration exists for these STE, one of the challenges was to know how to start working together and, and more importantly, who would take the initiative to do so. Some participants referred to ‘cliquish’ groups of individuals who “always turn up at things and try to start calling the shots”. There was concern that certain individuals were organising or leading various associations purely for their own advantage. One outdoor adventure operator noted that the involvement of AUT University had brought a degree of impartiality to the project:

“You guys aren’t involved with anybody in particular. You must be careful not to be seen to be feathering anybody’s nest; [name withheld] says we can trust you not to do that ... There is a lot of small town mistrust and apathy around here. Most will sit and wait until Council or the government, or somebody else does something. So if nobody makes a move, nothing happens! If somebody does try and get something off the ground then others will either say ‘Well done’, or ‘Good job’ and then do nothing to help them, or they will knock them for being self-serving or trying to be something they’re not.”

Public sector representatives, including those charged with supporting tourism development in the region, comment that tourism business in Western Southland is fragmented. Two interviewees were somewhat frustrated at the lack of collaborative activities, and at the operating practices of local tourism operators. A lack of commissionable packages that could be promoted through the iSites, visitor information centres and inbound operators made it difficult to include the sub-region in various

promotional activities. This was compounded by the inability of “businesses to agree – and stick to – times that they will be open on any one day of the week.”

When discussions focused on the type of collaborative activities STE owners/operators *would* find value in, what *did* interest these STE was the opportunity to work collectively with a broad blend of stakeholders (including but not limited to other enterprises) to promote Western Southland as a great place to live, work *and* visit and to archive important local heritage information. In other words, motivations were not solely related to tourism development. Behind this was a desire to revitalise and regenerate the area and attract people to live and work there. Thus informants were interested in activities that would have a social and economic outcome (e.g. job creation).

The manager of an STE who was also on the committee of a local promotions group was very focused on job creation:

“Creating jobs. That’s my number one interest. We need jobs to keep the kids here and offer them a future. So whatever it takes to do that ... that’s what I’m interested in. Tourism businesses around here just don’t get that they need to work together so that we can attract people to Western Southland ... not just Riverton OR Tuatapere OR Ohai. They’re too competitive. If we don’t work together it just won’t happen.”

An accommodation business owner/operator expressed a need to offer visitors more local history:

“People come here to do the local thing, they look at the photos of the old hotel, they want to know about the railway station. We need more stories. That’s the sort of thing I’m interested in.”

Another STE owner/operator was adamant that any collaborative activities to archive heritage information and promote Western Southland had to be linked to regeneration of areas that were seriously feeling the effects of depopulation:

“... for heaven’s sake ... don’t let this [the web-raising programme] become nothing

more than a storage facility ... we don't want an online museum! We don't want this [local stories and information] to just sit there. They have to be used to get people to come here and spend money or to put down roots and live here."

While George (2005) warns of negative impacts that can arise when the intangible assets of tourism are commoditised (e.g. stories, folklore and local customs), there was not one instance in the current study where an informant hesitated in expressing the value of using local heritage information to promote the region.

"... the information [on the site] should give a very full picture of the facilities and businesses that make up the community of Western Southland. Someone contemplating moving south should be able to know what schools, medical centres, vets, mechanical services, recreational and social facilities, etc. are available. Visitors should know our stories, what makes us tick, what we love about our towns."

4.2.6 Impact of the local political climate on network formation

There was a split in opinion among informants when asked to describe the nature of the relationship between local government, tourism businesses and the community. The SDC impressed those who had fought hard to develop the Southern Scenic Route, the Hump Ridge Track and restore the viaducts in the Waitutu area. Tuatapere Promotions Association Inc. and its members had worked alongside engineers from the Council in the early 1990s to progress a Tuatapere and Area Concept Development Plan that had been prepared by community and council together.

"The engineers from Council used to come out and see us ... have a chat and spend a bit of time. They were good. They were helpful and we worked on things together. It's not the same with [withheld]; they want to dominate us and keep us at arm's length."

One STE informant told of a meeting with the RTO, where a suggestion was made to create commissionable packages by creating links with other businesses to offer a themed experience to the visitor. These packages could then be sold via standard distribution channels that the RTO incorporates in its marketing activities; for example,

New Zealand's official Visitor Information Network (VIN). It was suggested that until these were forthcoming, no real marketing support could be offered. While this may be sound advice, the informant felt that she had been given the "brush off" and revealed a quiet anger but a strong desire to push ahead, "on our own as we have always done".

"We often feel that we'll be successful despite them. We have to work together and stand up to those ... at [organisation]. They're all for the Caitlins but we don't get any support from them. We have to do our own promotion and marketing. It's always been that way around here."

A perception of a lack of support from public agencies was shared by STE informants in other settlements. One commented that the area was being generally overlooked by government in terms of tourism development:

"I have seen the new [RTO] website and have to say that it is a vast improvement on the previous one but as predicted we have been completely ignored. There is no real mention of anything in Western Southland. Te Hikoi Southern Journey, Longhilly Track, Templeton Flax Mill Museum, Thornbury Vintage Machinery Museum, Colac Bay, Cosy Nook, Monkey Island, Orepuki, Tuatapere, Clifden Caves, etc., etc. – all barely mentioned."

Nine of the 11 STE owners/operators interviewed viewed the [public agency] as being generally disinterested in tourism development in Western Southland, with one commenting on a rather "top-down command and control" approach. One STE owner/operator blamed the Council for their own poor business performance, due to a lack of street signage and limited marketing support. Another STE owner/operator was concerned that "tourism and hospitality businesses in Western Southland were overlooked when a group of 20 iSite staff visited Southland on a famil" (a familiarisation programme designed to increase awareness of the various products and experiences on offer at the destination). He added that the western side of Southland wasn't "in favour with [public agency] whereas other areas such as Stewart Island and the Catlins" were.

“It all boils down to this: Am I seeking their help or are they seeking mine? Half of the time I don’t even know what they are trying to do.”

The state (in this case, local councils and tourism organisations) plays an integral role in mobilising the private sector to implement various rural programmes and initiatives (Carmo, 2010). There is a need for public agencies to effectively articulate national, regional and local policies with private enterprise and communities. Similarly, there is a need for public agencies to understand the common interest, vision and aspirations of the rural communities they work with, and how these relate to the STE owners/operators embedded within those communities. As George et al. (2009, p. 171) argue, “tourism planners must become more schooled in the nuances of community development and organising, in order to develop projects that advance community goals as well as their own.” The problem seems to lie to some extent in the way tourism enterprises link to public agencies, especially when it comes to initiating linkages. The perception was that the RTO was (according to four STE interviewees) waiting for the operators to approach them and work with them, and the STE owners/operators were waiting for the RTO or Council to make the first move. One research participant thought that this reticence to initiate contact reflects a desire to determine who has the position of control and advantage (the upper hand) in the relationship.

In the case of rural destinations where STE owners/operators do not have well-established ties to the RTO or council, these public institutions would do well to set the example in terms of creating and intensifying connections with each other and with local businesses and communities (see Carmo, 2010; Cawley & Desmond, 2008).

4.2.7 Minimising resource dependency

Formal and informal discussions with STE owners/operators and community members reveal a desire to minimise dependency on already strained local resources (e.g. financial, human capital) as a motivating factor for connecting with network structures. A

feeling of solidarity also came from joining a promotions group or a business association. There was a common purpose to promote the region to attract people to visit, live or work, and this they felt could be achieved by developing underutilised resources that were potential attractors. Making the most of local resources was important:

“There are beautiful walks up in the hills, walking tracks made by local people. Also, there are gold fields – ones with Chinese – not the remnants towards the end – but the early gold diggers, the Chinese. Consider the drives; there are some beautiful trails – the Heritage one; the mining town of Ohai. We’re a rural community – mostly sheep. There are people in this country who don’t know one end of a cow to another to milk from. We should get visitors onto the farms. There are fishing charters, good fishing rivers. Te Hikoi in Riverton. Flaxmill museum; the environment centre with someone who believes we should be self-sufficient in Southland; we could take people deer stalking; golf courses.”

There was a strong desire amongst STE owners/operators, non-tourism business owners/operators, local residents and community groups to capture local stories and archive important local heritage information. This was the main catalyst for community engagement with tourism. They realised their local ‘lore’ was a valuable resource for residents and visitors alike. (Local lore refers to folklore, legends and storytelling, and includes tips for travellers, community values and local knowledge.)

Local stories, history and heritage information were recognised as resources that could be used for tourism:

“I’d like to see the gold fields really developed because of the history. The water races, people can walk up in the hills and see the shafts that the Chinese dug down 20 feet into the ground through rock. It has tremendous history, lots of artefacts that have been forgotten about. There are a lot of stories here ... for example, the Reverend Alexander Don was a Presbyterian Missionary to the Chinese and he would walk from here up to central Otago up these hills and say, ‘My days are so many miles long and so many feet high.’ It’s easy walking so visitors would find it interesting. If they listened to the stories before they go or as they’re walking ... well that must be good!”

Community lore is described in the cultural and heritage tourism literature as an intangible asset for tourism (Moscardo, 2011; George, 2005). In this instance, community lore is about community knowledge. It can be shared but it is often implicit knowledge. Community lore is about folklore, local legends, traditional knowledge, community values and traditions, and stories of the past. It is the sort of information that is rarely visible to the visitor. It can be as personal as family recipes, or knowing the best way to fell a tree (a remnant of the timber milling history of many towns in the region), or as simple as knowing where the best fishing is. To residents, community lore is a given and easy. Community lore also encompasses the community's interests, vision and aspirations for future generations. Used well, it can become a valuable resource for tourism to attract those who are seeking a values-based experience to enhance spiritual well-being in a rural environment (George et al., 2009, George, 2010). However, it can also be used to exclude and create a barrier to newcomers and visitors. When valuable information remains locked in the social networks of a rural community, visitors may not know how to access the layers behind the initial façade of the town or region. If we consider local 'lore' as a tourism asset, we see congruence with emerging trends for ICT use in rural tourism.

Driving through rural areas, visitors may only experience the main road of a town or a surface level of engagement with the community within by stopping at the local corner store. In a rural destination, STE are often the visitor's main link to community. They can be the main conduit through which visitors can unlock the secrets of the community's lore. As such, a *function* of rural STE is to play an integral role in linking visitor and community – arguably a strong point of difference when it comes to the ability of the firm to affect the quality of the tourism experience for both visitor and community alike.

Initiatives to enhance rural STE business performance through networks, alliances and partnerships would do well to explore the potential of enterprise relationships and linkages with communities as a primary stakeholder. This is a point of departure from the

majority of the literature associated with STE networks which is predominantly concerned with connections between enterprises, or with local government and public agencies. While these connections between stakeholders remain an integral element of developing regional competitiveness through partnerships between key stakeholders, a stronger focus on community not only has the potential to enhance the tourism experience and improve visitor yield, it also has the potential to enable community to play an increased role in tourism planning. Local folklore, stories, heritage information, cultural experiences and tips for travellers are all valuable tourism assets that allow the visitor to get a deeper understanding of the places they visit. The benefits of this approach relate not only to an enhanced visitor experience but also to a richer community experience of tourism (Milne et al., 2008). As community become more immersed in tourism planning, so too does their awareness of the issues and opportunities associated with the visitor industry increase and this offers a better sense of local 'ownership' of the visitor industry (Moscardo, 2001; Tinsley & Lynch, 2008).

An important element of the NZTS 2015 (TIANZ, 2007) is to sustain local values, culture and quality of life. In rural destinations that are affected by a decline in traditional industries (farming, forestry and mining, for example), the nature and strength of attachment to community may impact residents' perceptions of a growing tourism industry (Shamai, 1991). Community projects and initiatives associated with tourism development that engender amongst locals a stronger sense of identity and attachment to the place where they live, have the potential to build on the emotional attachments to place that are formed by both visitors and residents. For the visitor, the spiritual and emotional dimensions of rural tourism can be captured and turned into lasting community economic benefits. For local residents it is important that they are able to see the benefits associated with the tourism industry and to also feel that there is not a loss of control over the quality-of-life elements that attract them to the region in the first place.

Despite there not being a full complement of the necessary infrastructure for tourism (good public transport, plentiful accommodation and services for tourism, etc.) in Western Southland, informants expressed a strong desire to develop the art of welcoming visitors 'Southland style', with a focus on creating opportunities for visitors to better link with locals in unforced and natural ways. Suggestions ranged from holding 'pot-luck' or continuous dinners, to friendly rugby games between visitors and locals. STE owners/operators were driven by the need to create income but more so by their aspirations for themselves and their families.

4.3 Entering the tourism network

In the early days of network development, key individuals adopted one of two approaches to recruiting new members and establishing committees. The first was to create a formula to select representatives systematically from across the region:

"When we got to forming the Western Southland Promotions Association we thought, well we have got to get involved with existing promotions groups. So we formed a formula where we had to get two people from Riverton, two from Tuatapere, two from Otautau – but then we had Nightcaps and Ohai – towns which didn't have promotions groups but they did have what they call 'community development areas' as part of Council's structure."

The second approach was to self-select 'like-minded people' – a process of selection that leaves the organiser of the group in control of the social environment and of who participates with him in various initiatives.

"I realised no single person could start the SSR [Scenic Southern Route]. [names withheld] and I agonised over the name for the SSR. Nobody could decide what to call the SSR – we agonised over that for ages. Then I realised that we had to have an organisation and for that reason I went through the phone book and picked out like-minded people and I called a meeting and from there we formed a promotions group to foster the interests of the SSR."

Finding ways to work together was important because farming schedules in this rural community meant that informants were sometimes too busy to get involved.

“You have to realise that this is a farming community and lambs, calves and crop planting are top of the agenda.”

“One thing that must be remembered about Western Southland is that at certain times of the year lambing, calving, shearing, harvesting, etc. just about closes everything else down. All that is positive stuff, however, and we have to work around it.”

Governance structures for local business groups and associations were dependent on the time that locals had to volunteer for key positions in those groups. Many informants commented, often more than once, that they did not “have the time to give to the huge range of committees that need help.” Busy schedules left little time for leisure and recreation. STE owners/operators were more likely to engage with the network if there was an element of fun and social activity linked to meetings and activities. More often than not, monthly meetings of the various groups and associations were held at a local pub or at a private home and there was always a social aspect to the event. The combination of working for the ‘community good’ as well as enjoying the company of others was a powerful point of entry to the network for busy individuals.

Geographic dispersion of STE across the region also made it difficult for some to attend meetings or participate in project activities that would support network development. This affected the early stage of network formation for those STE owners/operators who were new to the area and those that had lived in very remote areas.

“It takes me about 40 minutes to get from the [sheep] station to Riverton and that limits the things I can get involved in. There are many committees that I sit on and it’s always a balancing act to know which ones to commit to each year. I’m not that great at getting to know new people so I tend to go to those where I know people.”

Organising public gatherings or simple tasks associated with the web-raising programme provided STE owners/operators – many of whom were long-term residents in the area –

with an opportunity to connect to newcomers and welcome them to a community meeting. Newsletters were prepared and telephone calls made to let people know about the project. STE owners/operators liaised with local residents, community groups and local schools to organise venues, refreshments and equipment, and to bring teaching staff and pupils into the project. The District Health Board made a meeting room available for the project-evaluation focus group, and other meetings, and this provided an opportunity for key individuals to advise this important stakeholder about the community and tourism initiative. Organisers also contacted tertiary education providers in the region to gauge the interest of journalism students becoming roving reporters at local events and publishing local news on the website. STE and local business owners/operators who were not able to come to workshops to learn how to create a page on the site were contacted and made aware of the opportunity to create content and, importantly, told that it was free to do so. Elderly residents were approached to verify content about certain places of historical interest in the area, and even though some may not have fully understood what a website was, they did understand that it provided an opportunity for the town or settlement where they lived to receive new attention and energy. The web-raising programme gave those involved a worthwhile cause to enjoy a social activity. Simple tasks with a tangible result gave a sense of satisfaction at having achieved something. One farm-stay owner commented:

“Most of the time I’m pretty frantic with the farm, the cottage, the grandchildren, the house, the swimming pool committee, WSPAI and a host of other things. But I love coming along, having a drink with a few people, catching up on a bit of local gossip and feeling that I’m doing something worthwhile at the same time. Getting the bookmarks organised ... yes, I could do that easily ... I also asked the milkman to distribute them on his rounds.”

4.4 Summary

An historical account of the evolution of tourism in Western Southland is used to understand the motivations of STE owners/operators that underpinned the emergence

of network structures. In the 1980s and early 1990s, key individuals joined forces with other members of their communities to respond to closures in local industries (timber milling, mining) and a need to diversify from farming as a single source of income, by creating a local movement to develop tourism attractions and optimise existing resources. Influenced by pioneering ideals and a desire to contribute to their communities, informants had a common interest in drawing on their history and heritage to attract newcomers and visitors alike to Western Southland. Central and local government decisions of the past (e.g. to thwart the development of the Southern Scenic Route, and to close local industries) left a legacy of suspicion amongst key individuals and resulted in a lack of network ties to local public agencies. This case illustrates the importance of identifying the global, historical and postcolonial context in which the tourism network in Western Southland is currently situated.

STE are not a homogeneous grouping. The commonality is that rural STE owners/operators reside and are embedded in host communities, but this does not mean they are socially cohesive or necessarily even know each other. The web-raising programme provided STE owners/operators with a point of collaboration, an opportunity to begin working together on a common interest, and a point of entry to the network. Phase 1 of the web-raising programme, the initial development of the community-built website, brought individuals from private enterprise and community together to discuss local issues and opportunities for tourism. This point of collaboration facilitated entry into the network for STE and other stakeholders. To retain the forward momentum, key individuals and network leaders were eager to advance to the next phase of the project: the development of community-generated digital media. Capturing local stories, heritage information and tourism information through the creation of podcasts was a logical next step in the web-raising process.

Chapter 5: Integrating ICT in rural tourism network formation

Chapter 5 focuses on findings to inform the study's second research question: *What is the role of ICT in forming and strengthening these networks?* This chapter is divided into three sections: an analysis of the web-raised (community-built) destination website www.westernsouthland.co.nz to explore the relationships and affiliations that lie within the structure of the web linkages; a discussion of motivations for engaging with the podcast project and the key lessons learnt in terms of co-ordination and logistics; and finally, informants' reflections on the achievements of the project and the integration of ICT in STE network development.

5.1 Western Southland: 'Podzone' Country

In 2008 the Western Southland Promotions Association Inc. (WSPAI) and New Zealand Tourism Research Institute (NZTRI) at AUT University continued to work as partners in the web-raising programme, while also advancing to Phase 2, the podcast project entitled *Western Southland: Podzone Country*. NZTRI representatives (including the researcher) conducted workshops and a series of 'road show' demonstrations that trained more than 55 community members (including STE owners/operators) in technical skills, to create a podcast for themselves or their organisation. Workshop participants were aged between 10 and 80 years old.

These podcasts have been integrated into the web-raised site and a mechanism developed that permits updates and additions to this site by the community. One of the goals of the project was to impart the necessary ICT skills to key community members and develop a group of 'podcast trainers' for their peers in the community. The aim was to create a self-sustaining environment where podcast production could become a widespread skill in the community.

With support from the New Zealand Digital Strategy Community Partnership Fund (CPF), the podcast project builds on and enhances the current broadband roll-out in Western Southland by promoting the use of podcasting in the local community. By involving key stakeholders, the project interlinks community members and organisations, tourism enterprises and other businesses, visitors and prospective residents of the region. Visitors have since come to the small towns of Western Southland – some attracted, for example, by a podcast of a local cafe owner's pikelet recipe. The podcast project introduced, promoted and fostered skills in digital voice-recording, editing and publishing. It also acted as an incentive for broadband uptake. The web-raised site www.westernsouthland.co.nz houses a series of 24 podcasts that were scripted, recorded, edited and uploaded by STE and locals who learnt the skills to do this through workshops, demonstrations and one-on-one training sessions. Podcast content ranges from local stories and history, through to family recipes, tips for visitors and commentary on native bird watching.

Once the podcasts were prepared and uploaded by community members, WSPAI actively promoted them within the western Southland community and through visits to key stakeholders in Southland (e.g. Venture Southland, and Southern Institute of Technology) and via local news media, newsletters and the circulation of flyers. The researcher and other NZTRI academic staff also promoted the site outside of Southland and internationally by publications and presentations at tourism industry and academic gatherings (Milne et al., 2008; Milne, 2011).

One focus of the podcast project was to extend existing relationships within Southland for ongoing support and sustainability of the site; for example, with the RTO, the Southern Institute of Technology, and local technology experts. The researcher and various research participants identified a number of people who had completed the podcast training and become 'Go To' people in their community. A 'Go To' person in this context refers to an individual whom people feel confident referring to for help with a

technical problem; for example, to set up a printer, learn how to use a new software program, or edit a podcast. 'Go To' people were perceived to be honest, reliable and credible, and can help to get a job done. Each community had 'Go To' people emerge from the website project:

"I've become a 'Go To' person. I know a bit more than they do but not enough. No matter how much I learn there's a whole heap of things to still learn [about computers]. My friends are coming to me – they thought, if she can do it I can. They go out and buy a computer. Then they find out it's not so easy so they come to me."

A key individual in the small town of Tuatapere comments:

"We have to depend on overseas doctors and midwives, we promote the area and encourage them to come for two years to fill in, the website and the podcasts help people know more about the place. The American midwives that come here all have American husbands with high technology skills. We could use that – they are so helpful. We've discovered a few after doing the workshops."

Engagement with technology following the acquisition of new skills varied from those who went on to complete other ICT training, to those who used their new skills but applied them in other ways, for example to develop Web content for their own business websites.

Throughout the web-raising programme, links to schools and tertiary education providers provided excellent back-up support in terms of technical advice and facilities (e.g. broadband for those who did not have it). NZTRI representatives provided a sense of security for busy locals who knew that there was access to a full-time Web development team as well as the ICT and technical infrastructure at the University. The involvement of the University also offered WSPAI the ability to draw on the expertise of a diverse range of community and tourism practitioners; for example, those involved with tourism marketing, and community tourism planning.

In terms of the CPF funding arrangement, there were four goals to be met. The first was to extend the existing www.westernsouthland.co.nz community website to accommodate podcasts, including facilities for end-user podcast upload and download, and a vetting facility and process. During initial development (Phase 1), the website was custom built to meet the needs of the community. NZTRI web development staff extended the existing website to allow for podcast upload and also developed a freely available online (and printable) training resource on the use of Audacity for editing podcasts. The second was the purchase and deployment of suitable recording hardware and software in the community to enable people without other access to modern ICT to record and edit podcasts. The CPF funding provided four 'podcast kits' complete with laptop, configured with audio recording and editing software (Audacity), and seven digital recording devices and microphones that were located at various locations (Tuatapere, Riverton, Otautau and Nightcaps). Feedback from STE and community leaders was that any purchases made for the project (laptops, recording equipment) should be from local retailers where possible. There also needed to be a consensus of opinion on the location of the equipment and this took quite some time to achieve. Workshop participants from each town in the area were most concerned that they received 'their share' of the podcasting resources and there was a great deal of correspondence and discussion about where the equipment should be stored and who was trustworthy enough to look after it.

The third step was to upskill 12 members of the community to act as trainers and mentors to others in the recording and editing of podcasts. The idea was to create a 'pay it forward and pass it on' approach to the acquisition of new skills.

Finally, 24 podcasts produced locally were featured on www.westernsouthland.co.nz, demonstrating to the sponsors that the project had been effective.

Project resources include a Community ICT Risk Management Plan to monitor the location and security of equipment and the quality and content of the podcasts. There is also a Wikieducator set of resources entitled *How to create a Podcast using Audacity*. The Risk Management Plan considered the security of the laptops and equipment purchased for the Western Southland Podzone Country project, as well as the quality of content and security of information assets for www.westernsouthland.co.nz. Uploaded podcasts are moderated by WSPAI before they go live on the website.

The website requires minimal ongoing maintenance and users are able to update their own content. This ensures that the project and website are sustainable in their current format as long as some ongoing hosting and support remains. Table 5.1 summarises the intended project outcomes and their implementation.

Table 5.1: Summary of goals of the CPF Podzone Country project

Goal	How this was met
To extend the existing www.westernsouthland.co.nz community website in order to be able to accommodate podcasts, including facilities for end-user podcast upload, a vetting facility and process, and download and feature facilities for podcasts.	The site was extended to handle podcast uploads by users with a login and page on the site. Uploaded podcasts are initially suspended until vetted by a WSPAI-designated administrator. The vetting process was designed by the WSPAI committee in consultation with NZTRI and forms part of the wider risk management plan of the project. Once a podcast has been vetted, it appears on the uploader's page on www.westernsouthland.co.nz , from where visitors to the site can listen to it via a player applet or download it. It can also be 'pulled' to feature in pages about the local community or on the site's main page.
Deploy suitable recording hardware and software in the community to enable people without other access to modern ICT to record and edit podcasts.	Four laptops with microphones and configured with recording and editing software (Audacity) were deployed at Riverton, Tuatapere, Otautau and Nightcaps. To permit recording in circumstances where carrying a laptop would be impractical, 4 hand-held recorders were deployed alongside. An additional 3 hand-held digital recorders were purchased to provide maximum opportunity to record the stories in a range of indoor and outdoor settings. The sites were chosen by the WSPAI committee, and a loan-out and usage policy and Risk Management Plan was formulated to ensure the equipment is not diverted to other purposes.
Upskill key members of the community to act as mentors to others in the recording and editing of podcasts.	Six podcast training workshops and numerous one-to-one sessions were held over a 10-month period. The original plan was to divide the target group into 'trainers to be trained' and people getting trained by the 'trainers'. This was abandoned in favour of a more graduated approach that took people's existing skills and availability into account.
Feature 24 podcasts produced locally as part of the project on www.westernsouthland.co.nz to demonstrate that the project has been effective.	Twenty-four podcasts are available on the website. Others were created, uploaded and archived because of date relevance (e.g. a podcast made for a particular Museum exhibition at Otautau was uploaded and archived when the exhibition finished.) Topics range from Riverton history and youth activities to jetboating and a pikelet recipe.

5.1.1 STE relationships and linkages: www.westernsouthland.co.nz

At the start of Phase 1 of the web-raising programme in 2006, promotions associations in Western Southland assisted in compiling a database of 341 records of tourism businesses, other businesses, community groups and organisations, and public agencies. By October 2010, there were 163 listings (individuals, businesses and organisations) on www.westernsouthland.co.nz. The largest number of listings is the 67 'community' listings, with 56 STE and 40 other business listings (see Table 5.2).

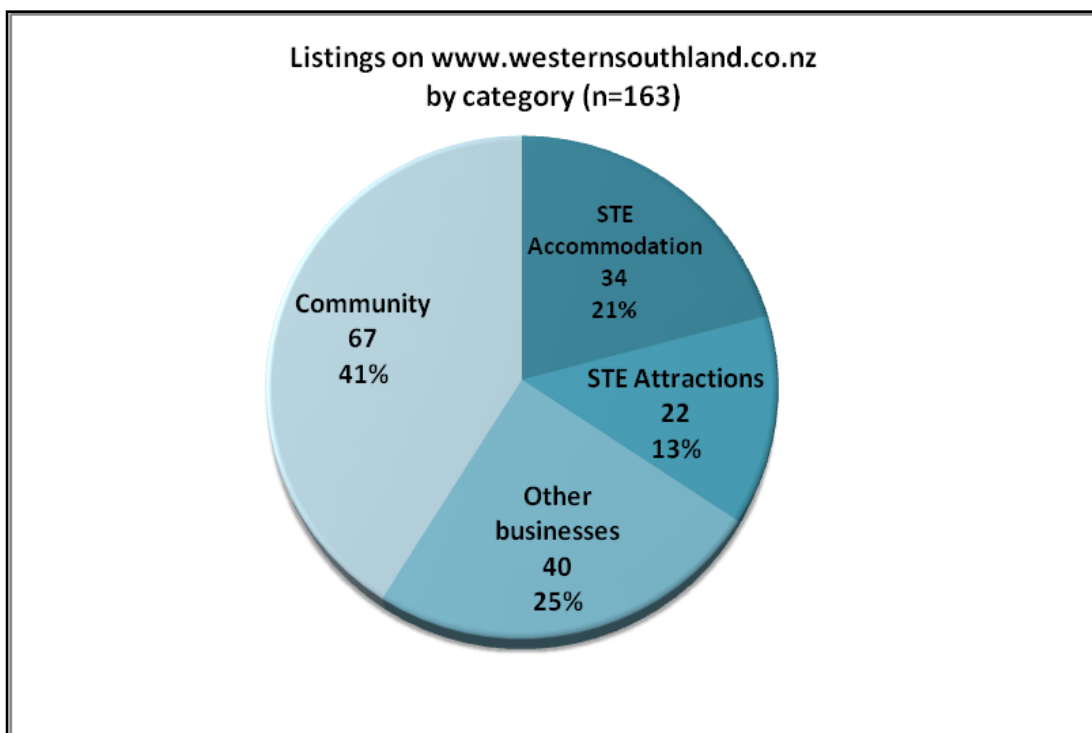
Table 5.2: Type of listing by place on www.westernsouthland.co.nz

Community	STE Accommodation	STE Attractions	Other businesses	Community	Total
Riverton	15	8	16	19	58
Colac Bay	4	0	2	3	9
Otautau	2	2	7	5	16
Ohai	0	1	0	6	7
Orepuki	0	0	0	5	5
Tuatapere	10	6	7	18	41
Monowai/Lake Hauroko	1	5	0	2	8
Lorneville/Wallacetown	0	0	3	4	7
Nightcaps	0	0	5	5	10
Blackmount	2	0	0	0	2
TOTAL	34	22	40	67	163

The total population in the towns and settlements of Western Southland (listed in Table 5.2) is approximately 3600 (2006 Census, Statistics New Zealand, 2006) with approximately 131 STEs and tourism-related businesses in the region. The total number of STE listings ($n=56$) on www.westernsouthland.co.nz represents an uptake of 43% by STEs in the region.

Figure 5.1 shows that user-generated content and listings for the community-built destination website incorporated four main components: STE Accommodation (21% of listings), STE Attractions (13%), other businesses (25%), and Community (41%, the largest proportion of listings on the site).

Figure 5.1: Listings on www.westernsouthland.co.nz by category



Small tourism enterprises (56 listings): STE listings fall into two categories, Accommodation (34 listings) and Attractions (22), and refer to providers of tourism products that form part of the tourism experience. Accommodation includes motel, hotel or tavern, bed & breakfast, lodge, lodges and huts for trampers, holiday homes (cribs), and holiday parks and camping grounds. Attractions include adventure, food and beverage, dining, tours, attractions and sightseeing activities.

Complementary businesses (40 listings): Complementary businesses include pharmacies, garages and service stations, shopping/retail, real estate, hairdressers, construction, farming supplies, vets, plumbers and private industry (e.g. manufacturers such as the paua factory at Riverton).

Community (67 listings): Listings made by individuals and community groups in the host community include:

- Education and learning institutes – from early childhood (Playcentres and toy exchanges), to primary and secondary schools, and tertiary education providers
- Environmental and ecological groups and agencies (e.g. DoC, South Coast Environment Centre, wildlife and fisheries, bird watching)
- Visual and performing arts: artists, crafts, floral art clubs, dancing, music
- Local ‘iconic attractions’ such as the Southern Scenic Route, Routeburn Track, Heritage Trail, bush walks, reserves
- Church groups
- Heritage groups (e.g. mining, timber mills)
- RSA, Lions, Rotary, senior citizens
- Sports clubs (golf, rugby, squash, etc.)
- Local newspapers and media
- Community halls and facilities (swimming pools, libraries, cemeteries, parks)
- Emergency and health services (coast guard, rescue and emergency services, and hospitals, medical practitioners, ‘wellness’ providers and maternity services)

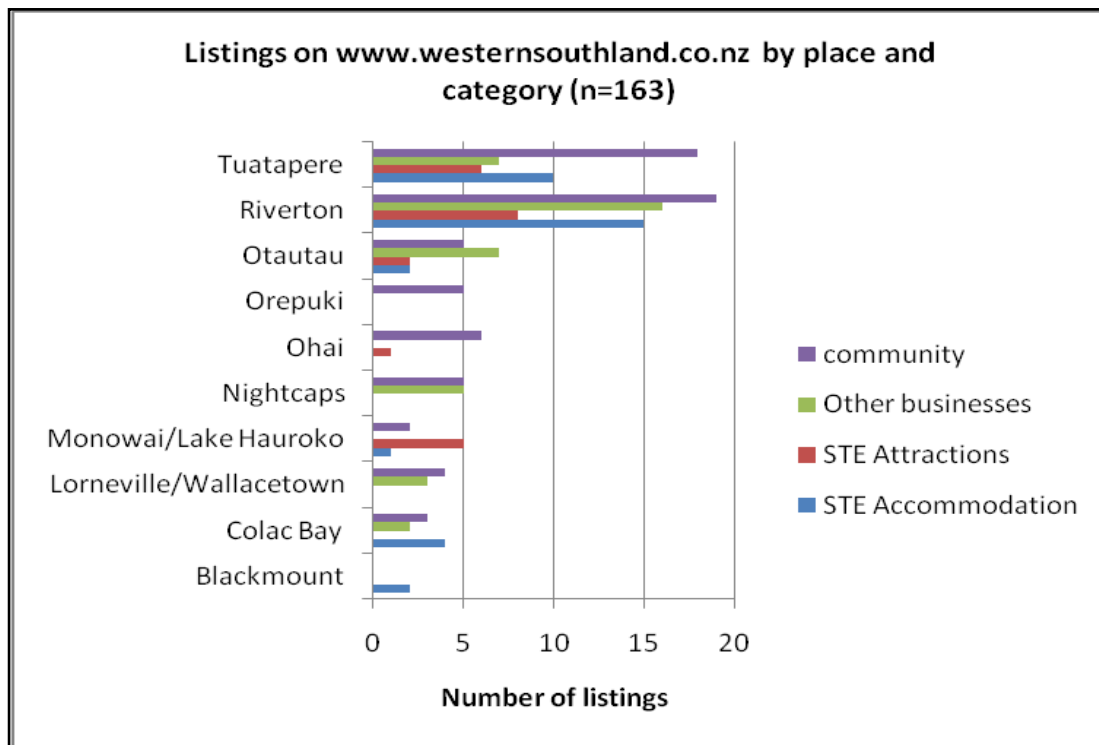
This shows a broad level of engagement with the web-raising programme by a varied range of tourism stakeholders. Tourism operators created pages for their own businesses and linked to other community-based groups and initiatives that they also were involved with. As STE owners/operators used this opportunity to intensify their relations with community-based organisations in their own towns and across the region, they grew increasingly aware of aspects of their communities that could be woven into the visitor experience. One accommodation provider from Riverton comments:

“I am heavily involved with local artists. Art takes many forms and it would be great to support [name withheld] who is a handweaver in Colac Bay ... try and get some of our visitors over to her ... she has been there for over 20 years and has some great stories to tell.”

While all towns participated in the web-raising of the www.westernsouthland.co.nz, Figure 5.2 shows that uptake was greatest in Tuatapere (48 listings) relative to population (582). The larger town of Riverton has a population of 1527 people and is the home town of the founding members of WSPAI. There are 58 listings based in Riverton.

Otautau has a larger population (753) than Tuatapere (Statistics New Zealand, 2006) but has significantly fewer listings (16 compared with 41), with only two accommodation providers. This reflects the lack of visitor accommodation and other tourism products in the town as well as an overall lack of interest in the project. Key individuals who tried to engage with Otautau Promotions reported little interest in their getting involved. Four interviewees, including one from Otautau, attributed this to past conflict associated with the development of the Southern Scenic Route, and the mining heritage of the settlements of Otautau, Ohai and Nightcaps meant residents were less affected by the close down of the timber mills around Tuatapere.

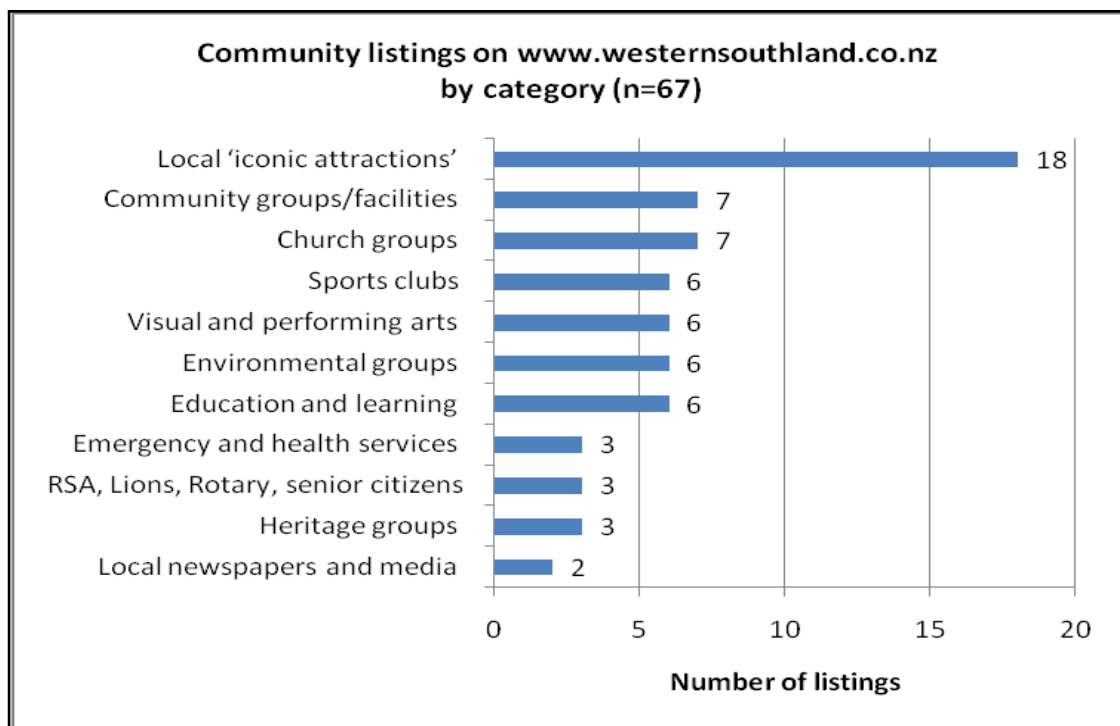
Figure 5.2: Listings on www.westernsouthland.co.nz by place and category



Interviews and observations revealed that by far the greatest interest of those on the site, or who participated in the podcast workshops, was to promote the local ‘icons’ they were most proud of. These iconic attractions were part of the natural and built environment (e.g. bush, tracks, viaducts, bridges, beaches, Southern Scenic Route, parks, Hump Ridge Track, reserves) as well as of a cultural and heritage nature (e.g. gold mines, coal mines, and the timber mill and other museums).

Figure 5.3 shows that the largest number of listings in the *Community* category are about or linked to the four ‘iconic’ attractions (Southern Scenic Route, the Hump Ridge Track, the Southern viaducts, and Clifden Bridge). Church groups and other community organisations also created pages on the site that featured the facilities and events on offer to locals (e.g. rooms and halls for hire, and equipment that could be borrowed or hired out).

Figure 5.3: Community listings by category



As the podcast project progressed, research participants outlined ways that they could connect with visitors as well as their own community. One pastor comments:

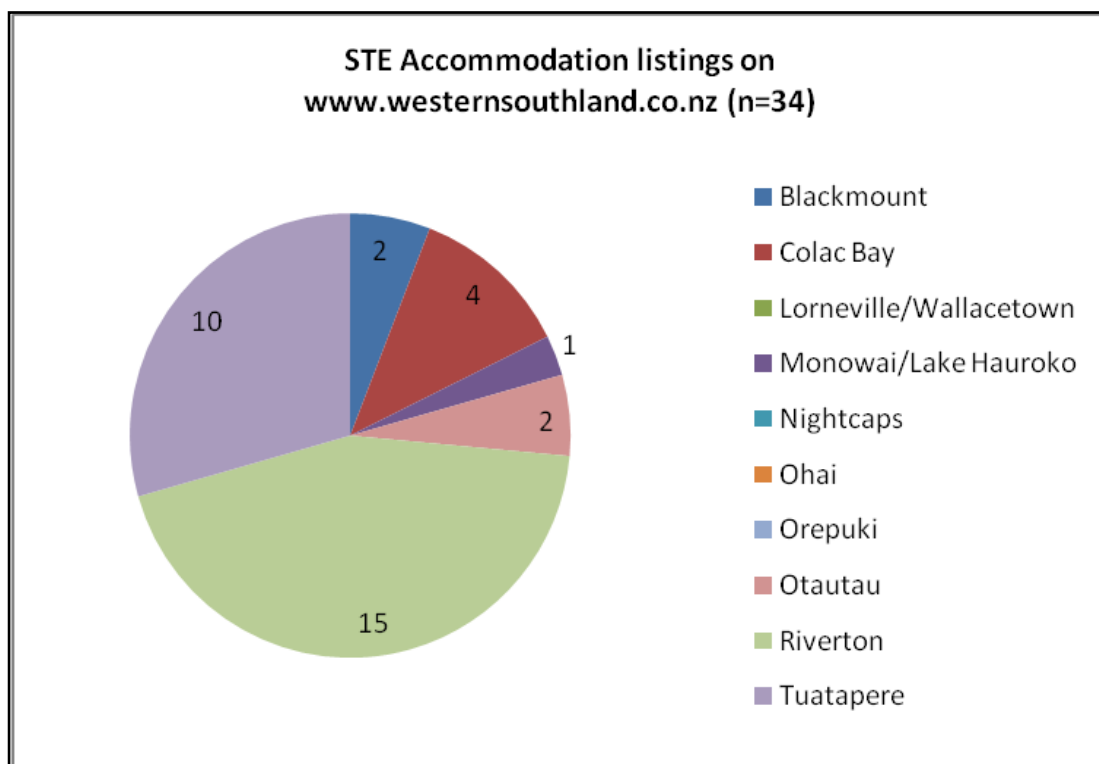
“It would be good to start recording our weekly services and put them on the website for people out in the sticks (living in isolated areas) to listen to. There are elderly people who would really like that. We’d also like those passing through to know when our church services are being held, and that they are welcome to attend.”

An STE owner/operator (accommodation) from the Ohai/Nightcaps area who is involved with the local swimming pool fundraising committee, the museum and the local primary school, thought that weekly results from inter-school sport matches would be good to ‘broadcast’ through the website.

Uptake by STE accommodation businesses located along the Southern Scenic Route (Riverton, Colac Bay, Orepuki and Tuatapere) was higher than in towns and settlements

not located on this route (Otautau, Ohai and Nightcaps) (see Figure 5.4). Riverton had the largest number of STE accommodation listings on the site ($n = 15$). The reason for this is simple: Riverton is the largest town in the area and subsequently has the highest number of accommodation businesses. There are fewer tourism-related businesses in the smaller towns of Otautau, Ohai and Nightcaps. As one STE owner/operator comments these towns simply “do not have the same history of being exposed to tourism as those on the Southern Scenic Route.”

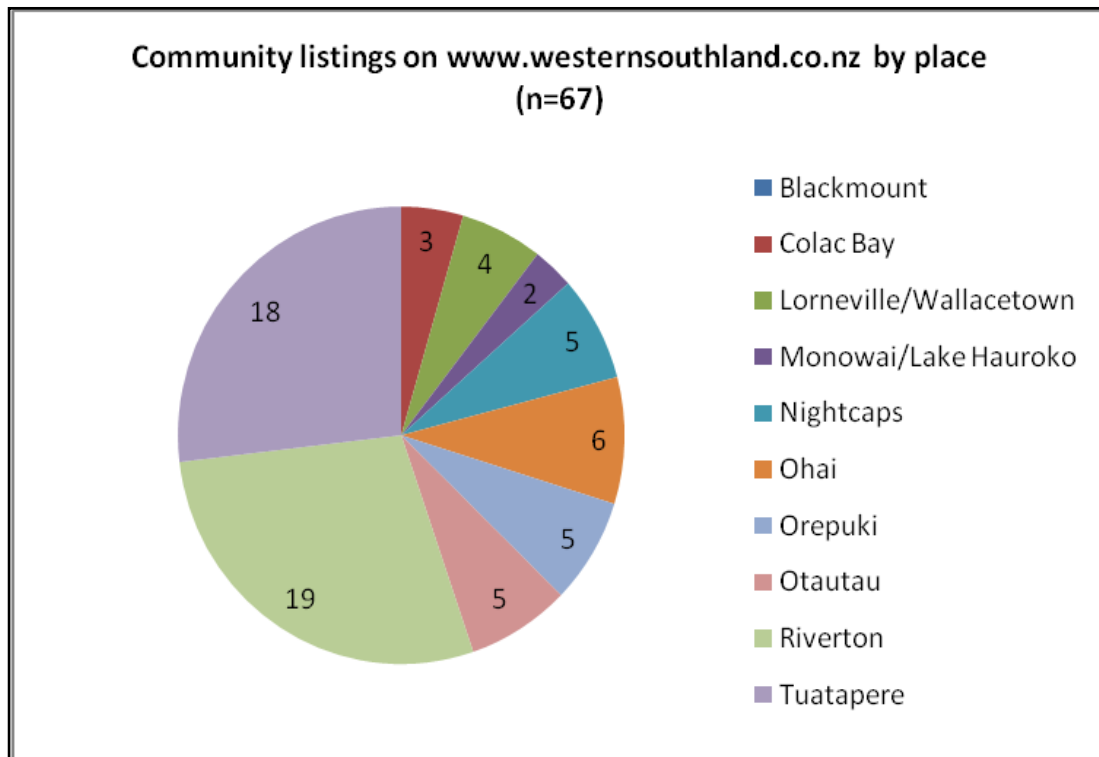
Figure 5.4: STE accommodation listings by place



While STE listings for those locations not on the Southern Scenic Route were lower than those on the Route, all parts of Western Southland were represented in the ‘community’ listings (see Figure 5.5). This involvement reflects the participants’ interest in the ‘community’ aspect of the web-raising programme project. However, there is one exception: Otautau is the second largest town in Western Southland in terms of

population (753) yet it had only five community listings. This figure is particularly low when compared to Riverton (19) and Tuatapere (18). Given the ‘community’ aspect of the project, the low level of engagement with this regional initiative at a community level reflects the legacy feuds, arguments and resistance of the promotions group in Otautau to get involved with the web-raising programme.

Figure 5.5: Community listings by place



5.1.2 ‘Affiliates’ on STE listings

While the majority of research participants (including 9 of the 11 STE owners/operators formally interviewed) did agree that working together as a region was a good idea, this was not reflected in the way they chose to link to others in other areas. Affiliates are the businesses and places of interest that the ‘lister’ (website subscriber) supports or is happy to link themselves with. Affiliations tend to be locally based and businesses or attractions based outside of the immediate location are linked to relatively infrequently.

Businesses in Riverton, for example, are happy to recommend or 'affiliate' only with other businesses in their own town or those within a few kilometres of Riverton. Affiliations also tend to be only with businesses in a different business category. For example, bed & breakfast owners/operators did not 'affiliate' with other accommodation providers in their town or in the Western Southland region. In other words, they were happy to 'affiliate' with complementary tourism businesses (e.g. restaurants, adventure tours, a sheep-shearing experience) and with 'other' businesses (e.g. the local garage or pharmacy) but not with other accommodation providers who may present competition.

STE accommodation listers were also affiliated with community groups and local attractions (bush, parks, reserves, walk, trails, bridges, rivers, viaducts, etc.). In contrast, those listed in the 'STE attractions' category did 'affiliate' with other 'attractions' or listings of interest in other towns that would expand the visitor's experience of the region.

Riverton is the home of the project champion and founders of the WSPAI who worked tirelessly to connect to others in the region and also to encourage individuals in their own town to do so. Despite their efforts, affiliations in Riverton were predominantly with others in the town. Groups that have listed in the 'community' category have affiliations only in Riverton; businesses in the 'other businesses' category have affiliations with attractions and other businesses in Riverton, but few have affiliations outside the town; and businesses in the 'STE attractions' category affiliate with one another in Riverton, while businesses in the 'STE accommodation' category affiliate mainly with 'STE attractions' in Riverton and not with other accommodation providers.

The small coastal settlement on the Southern Scenic Route at Colac Bay (population 135) had proportionally the highest number of listings (9) of all the locations. They also linked to others across the region – mostly with Riverton, Otautau, Orepuki and Tuatapere.

In Otautau, those listed under the 'STE attractions' and 'other businesses' categories affiliate with all categories in Otautau yet have only three affiliations outside the town (all with Tuatapere).

Tuatapere is the home town of the founder of the Southern Scenic Route. This is where there was evidence of the greatest potential to develop collaborative activities based on the likelihood to affiliate with others. The majority of those in the 'STE accommodation' category affiliate with each other and with the 'STE attractions' in Tuatapere. The 'STE attraction' category has affiliations with the three other categories in Tuatapere. Also the 'other businesses' category affiliates with all the other categories. Community listings affiliate with other community groups in Tuatapere, Monowai/Lake Hauroko, Riverton, Otautau and Nightcaps. This shows a greater emphasis placed on 'working together' by those listers in Tuatapere than in any other small town or settlement in Western Southland. Drawing on the previous discussion of the development of tourism in the area and the role of people from Tuatapere in the development of key 'iconic' attractions (Southern Scenic Route, Hump Ridge Track, Clifden Bridge, and the viaducts at Port Craig), it could be said that this small geographically isolated town had the greatest understanding of the importance of tourism to respond to an economic downturn (Smith, 2009) by working with others in their region.

Despite being a very small settlement (population not separately recorded), Monowai/Lake Hauroko has seven listings. Businesses in the 'STE attraction' category affiliate with each other in their own towns as well as with 'STE attractions' in Tuatapere.

In the inland settlements of Ohai (population 351) and Nightcaps (population 303) there are seven and ten listings respectively.

These outcomes support Tinsley & Lynch's (2008) findings that STE tend to affiliate or collaborate with tourism businesses in 'different' categories to their own and are, in the main, parochial and focused on their own rural town or settlement. Despite this, the

'affiliate' function of these user-generated web pages is a useful tool that could be used by tourism developers to build various packages, experiences and trails. The 'affiliate' function shows exactly who STE are happy to be associated with and who they would consider collaborating with in order to create marketable packages for distribution through a variety of channels.

While independent travellers form the largest source of business for STE (Stuart et al., 2005), traditional channels of distribution for STE in New Zealand include travel agent distribution networks and overseas buyers, wholesalers and inbound tour operators. Packages are also sold through the VIN network, direct channels through the Internet and by word of mouth. STE informants generally preferred direct sales as they were loath to pay the commission taken by the VIN or other distributors. Some used their social connections to market their business and sell their product. For example, an accommodation provider created one listing on the site for his business and another to give contact details for the local Scouts group. He commented:

"We are involved with Scout groups in Southland and all over the country. We also have a lot to do with clubs in Australia. We get a lot of business from those contacts."

Another STE informant affiliates with a variety of environmental groups and local conservation areas (Fiordland). She created pages on the website for her business as well as listings for local iconic attractions, conservation initiatives she is involved with, and affiliates with transport operators, accommodation providers, and local restaurants and cafes.

STE affiliations on the site offer an understanding of the multiple social connections that exist within the tourism network. However, while there was much talk of improving connections to those in other towns, these findings reflect a level of fragmentation and lack of cohesion through the very parochial nature of the affiliations. It must be remembered that the majority of listings on the website were made during the first

phase of the web-raising programme, before the second phase podcast project. One of the aims of Phase 2 (the podcast project) was to strengthen the social relationships of STE owners/operators and community within the region by bringing people together to talk 'tourism'. The workshops, meetings and a variety of social gatherings associated with the project provided opportunities for this to occur.

5.2 Engagement and logistics – key lessons learnt

At the workshops, participants received an overview of the web-raised www.westernsouthland.co.nz that would host the podcasts they made. Three workshops ran for one day, one for an evening, and two for a half-day. NZTRI research staff were present at each workshop on the background of the web-raising programme to ensure participants were familiar with the concepts behind the website, i.e. a community-built website created by locals for locals, including businesses and residents. This created a good deal of buy-in by STE and other business owners especially; who were often giving up valuable time to devote to what they perceived was essentially a community project. Workshop participants then discussed what would make a good podcast and brainstormed topics for podcasts. They worked in groups to learn how to use the laptops, digital recording equipment and audio editing tools to create, edit and review podcasts. Workshop participants were then taught valuable IT skills relevant to recording and editing audio files, and basic techniques (selecting, cutting, copying, pasting, storing, inserting, uploading, etc.). After the technical aspects of the workshop were completed, participants identified others in the community they could train or pass their new skills on to, as well as thematic areas for further podcasts by creating a list of podcast projects that could be developed.

When asked what motivated them to engage with the web-raising and podcast project, informants expressed two common motivating factors. The first was to promote Western Southland as a great place to live, work and visit.

“I like what [WSPAI’s] workshop notes say about recording our daily life ... I never thought my life was that interesting! If doing that helps to get this place back on the map ... then I’ll do whatever I can. There used to be more than 100 sawmills around here but that changed in the ’50s and ’60s... when all but four of the mills closed and the population began to decline. Shops closed... the bank and the post office closed... we fought hard and kept the maternity hospital ... and in the ’80s some people got into tourism. The same thing happened in Ohai and Nightcaps with the coal mines [restructured in the late 1980s] ... Tourism and horticulture is the future for us. It used to be farming and timber milling. It’s how we will bring people here and hopefully get them to stay here and raise their kids. We have to get the word out ... what this place is like ... we want good people, people who appreciate what we have. We also want to get the backpackers, and campers doing more than just sleeping here ... Having good local information helps people to get to know us.”

There was no charge for being listed on the site. STE and community groups alike appreciated the ability to have a web presence that was free and part of a portal for the region. Informants also appreciated that the content was written totally by locals.

The second motivating factor was to capture the rich heritage information of the region. Research participants felt that there was a sense of urgency to do this as long-term residents (first and second generation of early pioneers) were getting older and passing away.

“I think that history is our way forward in this region. Riverton is the oldest town – definitely in the South Island, perhaps the oldest town in all of NZ. So that history has to be recorded and put out there. It doesn’t exist ... it’s crazy not to have it, people are getting older. Our information lies in our community and we have to go and seek it ... we’ve got our 150-year anniversary coming up ... we need to go out and seek people out and bring them back into this community.”

“I’ve interviewed a coal miner for a podcast. He is in his early 90s and he’s not well. I’ll figure out how to edit the podcast later ... it was more important to record his story ... *now*.”

There was strong demand from both STE owners/operators and others in the community to acquire the ICT skills necessary to create podcasts. This is evidenced by the number of

participants who attended podcasting training ($n = 55$) compared with the number planned for (36) – a 55% increase on the original ‘budget’. While the demand was strong, very few workshop participants were available to become actively involved as podcast trainers. As a rule, they were happy to be ‘Go-To’ people (people that others ‘go to’ for assistance) rather than trainers. It became apparent even after the first workshop that a different approach was needed that was more tailored to the needs of the individual and the role in which they could best contribute. The format of delivery of the workshops subsequently switched to a ‘roadshow’-type approach where NZTRI researchers visited STE and local stakeholders in very small settlements and held one-on-one sessions, which worked in with participants’ schedules. Small groups and ‘roadshow’-type workshops suited STE participants rather than large community workshops. NZTRI trainers focused on going to the communities rather than expecting people to congregate at one point some distance from home.

Informants gave their time freely to promotions associations and community groups. Volunteer activity in a rural area constitutes a major time commitment, not least because of the long driving distances involved – a theme that resonated with the preference to be ‘Go To’ people’ rather than trainers (a role that several perceived as being time consuming). Rural people are busy and this project relied heavily on volunteer time and initiative. While interest and motivation was high, a few informants commented that they had too much to do to attend workshops. Several informants suggested that projects of this type would benefit from paid community facilitators.

“A facilitator is vital – to go around and help them with the whole process – put on their page on the website – if they find someone very helpful get them to be a local facilitator, but you will need to pay them or it won’t happen. Time is the biggest resource and it’s very scarce.”

While the concept of ‘training trainers’ who would then go on to train others seemed feasible, the term ‘trainer’ implies someone taking a proactive role. This proved to be

problematic as many operators attending the workshops felt that they lacked the time to be proactive as running a tourism business constituted only a small proportion of their income generating activities.

“The volunteers who came along to the ‘train the trainers’ workshop had skills and could be good trainers so they were interested in podcasting, but they are busy and they didn’t have time to train others ... if it was a part-time job, it would have been more successful. The cottage and farm tour is just part of what we do here – there is family to look after, livestock to look after, property to maintain ... lots of people around here have dairy on their farms now and dairy brings quite a different schedule ... people are time poor.”

As a result, many people came along to the workshops just to learn. It became increasingly clear that while they were happy to be reactive mentors, few were likely to be sufficiently proactive to provide the desired uptake. Remedial action was taken and this approach was substituted with one that would work. NZTRI increased the number of visits to Western Southland and subsequently held more workshops to train people how to podcast. WSPAI and NZTRI personnel ‘hit the road’ and took more of a ‘roadshow’-type approach and travelled to see people in their places of business, their homes or gathered smaller groups in a wider variety of locations than originally anticipated.

Many informants viewed the Western Southland: Podzone Country project as a starting point for using social media to portray ‘their place’ to the outside world. There was a desire to consolidate what had been achieved and build on it. The technology was new to many people and they sought ongoing workshops for beginners and for advanced podcasters.

“You’ve given us an introduction to podcasting and new technologies – we wouldn’t have known about it for years otherwise ... I’ve done something I haven’t done before, I recorded a podcast on my own laptop, and I’ve told other people about it ... We need the site rebuilt to do what we want *now*; Western Southland is a new emerging place on the visitor map ... I like what we talked about in the workshop ... ‘Slow tourism’, come stay, get to know us longer, find out about us, the podcasts can help with that. The functionality of the website has been

upgraded to accommodate the podcast, podcasts have been created, people have been trained, and we have the equipment. We want to learn more, don't just stop here."

Most workshop participants expressed a desire to optimise the outcomes of their initial ICT tuition by receiving further training and to keep on learning. STE owners/operators (including 8 of the 11 formally interviewed) wanted the chance to consolidate what they had learnt, apply their skills, find things that are useful for them in their daily lives and build on those skills.

"You've got to remember this is all very new to us. Around here on the farms, well people just don't know much about computers and the Internet. It's all very new. We need time to consolidate, use the technology, attend more workshops and get more training and then use it ... again and again. You can't just do one workshop and then think we'll all be using computers more, we need to consolidate and build from here."

Research participants were enthusiastic and willing to create digital content for the website after the podcast training, but there were difficulties getting people to edit and upload their podcasts. There are several possible reasons for this. The first is infrastructure, namely lack of broadband access to upload 'big' audio files. Access to broadband connections was not as widespread among participants as had been anticipated. On the one hand, this created an incentive to 'get broadband', but on the other it also led to delays between podcast recording and upload. To counter this, local schools were only too pleased to offer assistance. For example, Tuatapere Community College offered their wireless broadband, ICT equipment and staff to assist.

A second possible cause was that while interviewing and recording was regarded as "great fun because it gives us an excuse to get out and talk to people", some informants were reluctant to put themselves in the public domain or be seen as providing commentary on behalf of their town or community. As one local resident commented,

“It’s not the done thing to be seen as ‘blowing your own trumpet’”. A STE owner/operator from Riverton adds:

“Sometimes I think it’s a bit of a city thing to do ... we don’t really do things like that around here. I don’t like to put myself ‘out there’ too much.”

Social presence is an important antecedent to collaboration (Williamson, 2008; Williamson & Nodder, 2002). The use of pseudonyms and virtual personas is adopted by many in a virtual social network realm. However, this common practice was not known to most participants and discussions around this need to take place in further work to assist with anonymity.

Finally, most workshop participants did not feel technically competent and perceived uploading the content would be difficult – so they didn’t bother trying. Despite very simple instructions to upload podcasts being given (written and demonstrated at workshops), the majority of informants commented that they “just didn’t have the time to figure it out”. However, in a community where people are used to helping each other out, a local ‘Go To’ person emerged who rendered assistance to upload the podcasts. The schools and the school children were also active in offering support, strengthening the links between generations and between schools, community and business. A primary school teacher comments:

“We can help with equipment – especially the recording equipment ... I loved seeing [in the workshop] the kids get excited about creating their podcast and then scooting off to the beach to get some sounds of waves. That’s what they thought about first when you asked them to talk about Riverton: the beach. They had their podcast finished before any of the other people in the workshop and enjoyed helping others with theirs. [name withheld] spent ages talking to that lady from the museum who wanted to create a podcast about various events and activities coming up at Te Hikoi.”

An IT teacher at a secondary school comments:

“Sometimes the kids think that life would be more exciting in the cities. When you

took the class this morning and got them brainstorming ideas for podcasts, they thought they had to find something exciting that would be interesting to others who lived in larger towns or cities. When you told them what you loved about the place, I could see them sit up and want to tell you some of the really cool things they liked about living here, too. They hadn't thought about tourism much before ... it's a subject that the [less capable] kids tend to take ... I was interested when you asked them to talk about tourism businesses in the area, they knew about the jetboat and the camping ground and the [Hump Ridge] Track and people with backpacks. But they hadn't thought about visitors who come and visit their families, or the money that they spend."

A research participant who was a local health worker comments:

"... well what I saw was that young girl talking to [name withheld] who is 94 and knows a lot about the history of the timber mills around here ... the kids thought they were being helpful as he didn't want to use the computers or the microphone. He was just happy to have an audience for his stories. They are good kids and come from homes where it's generally cool to be helpful and respectful to elders. So I see them having the chance, and the excuse, to meet and listen to the older people around here. It's so good for our older people ... that contact is just brilliant."

Age did not present a barrier to older workshop participants learning ICT skills. To complete the podcast training, participants received training to use laptops, web technologies and Audacity (an audio editor and recorder). The older members of the community were more motivated to learn (and had more time to do so) because they could see the benefits of recording stories, tips and heritage information. There was also a desire to record community information and updates. For example, results from the school rugby games at Takitimu Primary School through to health information to disseminate to the broader community from the Tuatapere Maternity Centre and the Waiau Health Trust. The idea of children training older people may appear sound, but most of the older people encountered wanted to learn by themselves and not be 'taught' by a child.

Among older participants, motivation to learn how to podcast was based on the desire to digitise local cultural and heritage content for future generations and not, primarily, on

the desire to learn a new skill or advertise a tourism business. While the philosophy of the New Zealand Government Community Partnership Fund is to upgrade ICT skills amongst business and community, this was not the driving factor for the vast majority of research participants to engage with the podcasting exercise.

The 55 participants in the podcast workshops ranged from those who own and/or operate tourism businesses (18) or other businesses (8), and teachers and support staff from local schools (10), through to school children, members of community organisations and residents (19). Only four STE owners/operators created and uploaded podcasts to advertise their business. There was no parameter on the type of podcasts that could be developed. In fact, STE and other business owners were actively encouraged to advertise their own organisations in whatever way they wished. While uptake was high to create a listing on the website, few STE used the podcast training to create podcast advertisements to load on their web page. They were predominantly interested in digitising historical and heritage information for future generations or drawing attention to local landmarks, and this was their motivation to learn the ICT skills. While this may have been because STE owners/operators preferred to use (or be seen to use) the project resources and the opportunity for community purposes, in future there needs to be stronger encouragement to businesses to use the functionality of the site to advertise products and services on offer.

The workshops were certainly seen as a social activity. Food was prepared and shared, interested people called in to see what was happening, and there was often a suggestion to move to a local pub after the podcast training. The workshops in themselves were an opportunity for tourism stakeholders to get together and network. To get busy people to engage with technology, informants emphasised the need to “keep it relevant, useful and fun”.

“I think it becomes a living thing, a living active thing where locals become involved in their own website ... the living ‘funness’ of it is there ... recording podcasts at the

Santa Parade, for example. Make sure you keep it fun and light. People have enough to do.”

When the new chair of WSPAI took over in 2009, there was a discussion at a committee meeting about handing the site over to a local web developer. It was not the first time that this issue had been raised. The Auckland-based NZTRI team was sometimes asked why they were even involved in Southland and they referred back to the early discussions of previous web-raising experiences in other parts of New Zealand that sparked NZTRI’s involvement. This combined with a familial link between an NZTRI employee and her uncle in Riverton – the former chair and founder of this regional promotions group – gave NZTRI credence and a level of acceptability by locals. The familial link of the NZTRI staff member, and the impartiality of the University, lessened any mistrust of the project team.

Many (18 out of 25) of those interviewed indicated that they thought the web-raising programme was simply about building a website and then uploading some texts, images and podcasts. This view was shared by the RTO, who said they would “offer advice on how to build a better marketing site” should the website be redesigned in a Web 2.0 environment. In some ways, this misses the point of the web-raising exercise. While the immediate outcome of the web-raising provided an online presence that can be used by businesses, community and as a tourism resource, a critical element of the concept of web-raising is to enhance the processes that underlie tourism network development and build community (Milne & Mason, 2001; Milne, Speidel, Goodman, & Clark, 2005b; Milne, Clark, Speidel, Nodder, & Dobbin, 2008). These are primarily concerned with strengthening STE relational capabilities and building social currency amongst participants. Project activities included stakeholder identification; co-ordination and logistics; communication between public agencies, STE owners/operators, residents and community groups; information gathering and sharing; training and capability building; and promotion and dissemination. Discussions with informants explored the network

processes that the technology supported; predominantly these processes related to communicating, resourcing, linking and promoting.

There was a lot of activity and discussion around the logistics of the web-raising programme; for example, designing logos, organising venues for workshops, recruiting local participants, getting flyers printed to promote the project, and deciding on where to situate the equipment. The question of where to situate the podcast kits and the desire to keep the equipment safe bordered on making them underutilised. The Risk Management Plan assisted to rectify this by putting in place a 'loan' scheme for equipment. The new computer equipment was viewed by informants as a useful resource that needed to be looked after.

Informants were happy to be involved in project activities that related to logistics (booking venues, printing flyers, etc.). This reflected a desire to be able to participate in something that was good for their community but that was also short-term with a clear set of tasks and expectations attached to it. A common question was: "How can I help? Just tell me what you want me to do." As long as the task was simple, clearly defined and achievable, then it was done. Logistics were in the comfort zone of many.

However, when it came to a discussion about how the project related to the tourism sector, there was a distinct lack of tourism-related knowledge and expertise. As the podcast project was an initiative of WSPAI, those on the committee who did not have a tourism business viewed it as a community project rather than a tourism one. Workshop participants who were STE owners/operators predominantly viewed it as both.

The purpose of the New Zealand Digital Strategy Community Partnership Fund is to "support community projects that realise community aspirations through using ICT and to increase people's capability and skills to use digital technologies" (MED, 2005). Findings from this research suggest that while the project did support the small communities of Western Southland to achieve a common goal (i.e. to promote the area

as a place to work, live and visit), building an individual's capabilities in terms of ICT skills would take a longer-term, sustained programme of work rather than a one-off project. These are useful outcomes to inform government initiatives that foster local capacity development through programmes designed to build computer skills. If STE owners/operators are to enter networks and participate in collaborative activities, they need to find value in those activities and not simply be 'educated' on the benefits of network development. STE owners/operators need to be resourced and provided with opportunities to collaborate that are aligned to their own aims and aspirations, are social and fun, and involve short-term simple tasks and project activities that are part of a broader programme. This, in turn, strengthens the skills, capabilities and capacity of STE owners/operators as implementers of, for example, a regional tourism strategy.

5.3 Web-raising and tourism network development

Web-raising in Western Southland was a useful tool to help manage the complexity of effectively engaging all stakeholders in tourism processes by providing a point of collaboration associated with a common interest, one that supported STE owners/operators and community to work together on a common project towards a shared vision. The processes that underpin the development of the community-built website promote and sustain small firm networks in tourism by facilitating connections and partnerships, creating an inventory of tourism and community assets, and integrating and regionalising efforts to optimise the social and economic benefits of destination development.

Informants were asked to reflect on what they considered the achievements of the web-raising programme to be. Informants described the achievements of the web-raising programme in three main ways. First, as providing a valuable community resource, one that would be of immediate use to locals and those who were considering a move into the area:

“Right from the start it was made clear that this was not a tourism-only site. It is the objective of WSPAI to promote Western Southland as a great place to visit and a great place to work and live. The information on the site gives a very full picture of the facilities and businesses that make up the community of Western Southland. Someone contemplating moving south can now find what schools, medical centres, vets, mechanical services, recreational and social facilities, etc. are available.”

Second, as providing a valuable resource for tourism, one that would present a compelling case to someone who was considering their next holiday and entice them to choose to visit Western Southland:

“FITs, those without strict itineraries, need to know as much as possible about the area they are planning to visit; therefore it is important that they are informed about services as well as sights. A good example is [name withheld]. He looked up the website before he came out from America. He heard Helen’s pikelet recipe [podcast] and he wondered what they were.”

Third, as strengthening community cohesion and community attachment:

“It’s brought people together. People are busy. This brings people together to talk about these stories ... and supports our volunteers who always turn up for things... it’s got our interest. It’s like [name withheld] said at the workshop, it’s like we’re building a quilt with the stories of our community, to build the website.”

An important first step to enhance the collective process of building community was to develop authentic relationships between residents and tourism businesses and to find common ground that would assist these relationships to flourish. Most informants (including 9 of the 11 STE owners/operators formally interviewed) felt that this had been achieved:

“The podcast project is bringing the ‘local feeling’ out with the words and stories that belong to the area. Not just the picture or the text, but the spoken word. Western Southland has been neglected because of the high profile of Te Anau and Milford sound. We have to promote ourselves because there are people up there who consider we’re not worth it ... I met people who I knew are in the same game [in this instance, backpacker accommodation] over in [another town] and this allowed us to get together and think about the place we live and not just what

business we were in. ... Podcasting is another spanner in the toolkit. Podcasts help us do this.”

The ICT system that supported this initiative provided a digital ‘place’ for the preservation of cultural and heritage information as well as a place to present business, tourism and community information. Informants’ comments also reflected a feeling of an energised community that enjoyed the opportunity to once again rally (just as they did for the development of the Southern Scenic Route and other iconic attractions) by using a novel ICT integrated and participatory system to create listings for the website, as well as upload and store local stories.

5.3.1 Web-raising: Impact on STE business performance

STE owners/operators were asked to reflect on the way the web-raising programme overall had affected business performance. While some reported receiving bookings that they could directly link to the web-raised site, the perceived benefits of the web-raising programme were more about networking than visitation.

By 2009, STE informants had already seen an impact of the web-raising programme on their own business performance, albeit to a somewhat limited extent. Of the 11 STE owners/operators formally interviewed, all had a listing on the website. Six (54%) reported that they had received enquiries and bookings that they could directly relate to the site. All 11 commented that they thought visitors were obviously using the site to find out more about the region.

Of the 31 other STE owners/operators spoken to during informal discussions and conversations, 23 had a listing on the website, and 17 of these reported that they knew of visitors who had used the website to find out about Western Southland. The remaining eight (i.e. those who did not have a listing on www.westernsouthland.co.nz) did not think the website had much impact at all on their business performance but they did consider the web-raised site provided a useful marketing tool for region.

All of the 11 STE interviewees and the majority of the 31 STE owners/operators with whom the researcher had informal discussions felt there were networking and social benefits to be gained from the web-raising programme.

The workshops provided an opportunity for newly arrived STE owners/operators in the area to get to know other operators more familiar with the local tourism industry and operating environment. Informants who were involved in the podcast workshops saw the common goal of using technology to create an online resource for locals as a way to bring the two groups together and strengthen social ties. The workshops were one way to get together, get acquainted and upgrade their existing knowledge.

“Lynette and Susan [pseudonyms] are new to the area you know – they both own businesses: Lynette and her husband operate the jetboat up the river, Susan owns the butcher’s – so it’s good to get them talking and recording stories from those of us who’ve lived here forever.”

The podcast project provided an easy and accessible activity that STE informants could participate in to intensify their attachment to community and get to know other tourism businesses in the region. By participating in the project, STE could identify local resources and expertise that could be used in the future. One STE owner/operator of an adventure activity comments:

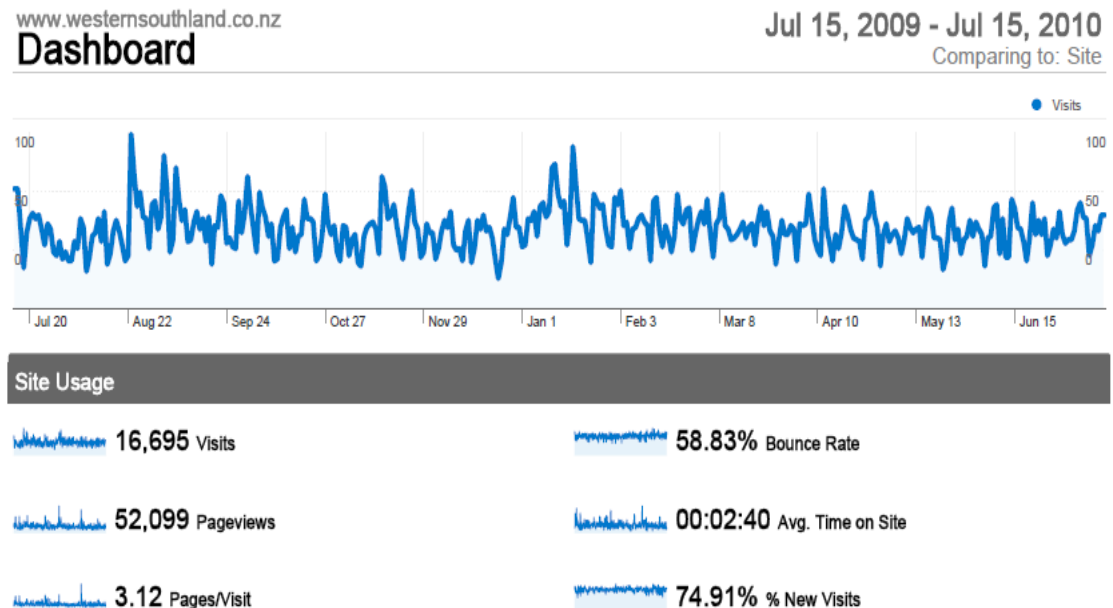
“We really should now set up a local directory of people who can help us now. I spoke to [name withheld] and she had some really good ideas on how to put together a really good brochure. I have only ever thought of putting the brochure at the iSite but she had some good ideas for getting it into Queenstown as well.”

These outcomes are useful to understand ways that STE owners/operators optimised the opportunity to ‘get together’ afforded by the web-raising programme in order to gain entry to the network in the early stages of network formation.

An analysis of website statistics shows that during the period 15 July 2009 to 15 July 2010 there were 16,695 visits to the site (see Figure 5.6); 12,903 of these were from unique

visitors, the rest being repeat visits. This averages out to slightly more than 1000 visitors per month.

Figure 5.6: www.westernsouthland.co.nz site usage July 2009–July 2010



While the majority of these visitors were on the site for a short time (60% were only on for 'up to 10 seconds') 12.9% of visitors stayed on the site for 3–10 minutes (see Figure 5.7). The analysis also shows that nearly 25% of visitors viewed 3 pages or more (see Figure 5.8), indicating that approximately 4000 visitors were interested to learn more about the Western Southland region.

Figure 5.7: Length of visit to www.westernsouthland.co.nz July 2009-July 2010

www.westernsouthland.co.nz
Length of Visit
 Jul 15, 2009 - Jul 15, 2010
 Comparing to: Site

Most visits lasted: 0-10 seconds

Duration of visit	Visits with this duration	Percentage of all visits
0-10 seconds	10,028.00	60.07%
11-30 seconds	558.00	3.34%
31-60 seconds	822.00	4.92%
61-180 seconds	1,872.00	11.21%
181-600 seconds	2,149.00	12.87%
601-1,800 seconds	1,055.00	6.32%
1,801+ seconds	211.00	1.26%

Figure 5.8: Depth of visit to www.westernsouthland.co.nz July 2009-July 2010

www.westernsouthland.co.nz
Depth of Visit
 Jul 15, 2009 - Jul 15, 2010
 Comparing to: Site

Most visits tracked: 1 pageviews

Pageviews in the visit	Visits with this many pageviews	Percentage of all visits
1 pageviews	9,821.00	58.83%
2 pageviews	1,881.00	11.27%
3 pageviews	1,595.00	9.55%
4 pageviews	732.00	4.38%
5 pageviews	586.00	3.51%
6 pageviews	357.00	2.14%
7 pageviews	336.00	2.01%
8 pageviews	219.00	1.31%
9 pageviews	188.00	1.13%
10 pageviews	109.00	0.65%

Keywords used in Google searches that brought visitors to the site related to place names – with ‘Tuatapere’, ‘Colac Bay’ and ‘Otautau’ receiving the highest attention – reinforcing the focus on communities and towns of Western Southland. This indicates

that it was not a particular tourism 'product' (e.g. accommodation or transport) that was sought; rather it was to know more about the various places in the region, places that receive scant attention on other national and regional portals. This indicates that although there is little investment in the development or promotion of Western Southland as a tourism destination by public agencies, there is interest in the 'places' in the area. This stresses the need for a focus on place in order to develop and promote the distinctiveness of different and unique places and communities in rural environments rather than individual tourism businesses or packages of commissionable products (Nørgaard, 2011). This focus on place does, however, present a challenge for the competitive and parochial nature of STE owners/operators whose listings on www.westernsouthland.co.nz show affiliations predominantly within the boundaries of the lister's town or settlement, whereas those looking for information are interested to know about the region as a whole.

Visits came from 93 countries, with the majority (81.5%) coming from New Zealand, followed by Australia (6%), the United States of America (4%) and the United Kingdom (4%). Within New Zealand, the majority of visits come from Auckland (37%), followed by Invercargill (17%), Christchurch (17%), Dunedin (9.9%) and Wellington (8%). A very low number of visits came from Queenstown (2%), highlighting the potential to improve promotion of the site to visitors to Queenstown and inform them about Western Southland. Other than the home page (62.6%), the most popular pages on the site were those that gave information on accommodation (8%), Tuatapere (5%), things to do (4%), Riverton (3%) and Colac Bay (3%).

The key individuals and leaders of the region were focused on the need to retain population and regenerate areas that were underperforming in terms of economic outcomes (e.g. job creation through tourism) and social outcomes (e.g. improved access to education and health services). ICT has been shown to be a useful tool to bring people together for a common goal and achieve community social and economic aspirations.

The potential economic implications of the web-raising programme were also well understood:

“Each day in the summer holiday season at least 100 campervans and possibly 100 rental cars pass through Riverton and Tuatapere without stopping. A conservative estimate suggests that those visitors each have \$1000 spending money in their wallets. That is \$200,000 passing through each day and neither town gets a cent of it. We need to slow them down and get them to stop and spend money. They need to know more about us if they’re going to do that.”

Regional identity and community attachment are two measures of place attachment used to understand residents’ perceptions of tourism (Murphy, 1985). Several studies show that long-term residents express more concern about the effects of tourism in terms of the impact on community and social ties than newcomers, who identify more with the physical environment (see Williams, McDonald, Riden, & Uysal, 1995; Jamal & Stronza, 2009; Wang, Bickle, & Harrill, 2010). The workshops, meetings and activities associated with the web-raising programme offered a point of connection to bring community and tourism business together, with a common vision of leaving a legacy to the younger generation of the region.

5.3.2 Linking to schools and the broader community

The majority (34 out of 42) of the STE informants who had created a listing on www.westernsouthland.co.nz during the initial site development (Phase 1 in 2006/07) of the web-raising programme, indicated that they originally had done so in order to promote their business first and the region, second. Those who participated in Phase 2, the podcast project in 2008/09, did so with a desire primarily to promote Western Southland *to the people of Western Southland* as a community resource and then to use ICT as a tool to attract newcomers and visitors. While informants expressed pride in the natural assets and ‘iconic attractions’ of their own neighbourhood, town or the Western Southland region as a whole, there was a strong desire to link the generations and involve local children.

Informants spoke of the benefits of the schools and children being involved in the podcasting and website projects, especially the way it linked the generations. Using the podcast project to increase interactions between young and old was particularly encouraged:

“It’s hugely beneficial for the kids to work with adults to create podcasts. We bring in interviewing skills and ideas. I’m always keen to link the generations and it’s important to get the elder and the mokopuna [grandchild, or young] together – to show that each generation is linked to another.”

As an incentive to school pupils to become involved, three research participants who were teachers suggested incorporating National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) credits into the project:

“We are a smaller school but I can still see the benefit of linking community tourism information to school curriculum. Think about the role of the schools in that network – what are we doing already that tourism networks could tap into? The kids could do an iTour of the town by school kids – of local attractions; podcast and/or video – just make sure there are NCEA credits.”

School principals and teachers in the area (five research participants) were eager to connect to the project and freely offered resources, especially venues, equipment, technology and technical expertise. Underlying their support was a sound understanding of the educational benefits and capability development that could result from their students’ involvement in the project.

“The children would have to do research (social studies and English); reinterpretation of written history in a new and exciting way; interviews for podcasts; graphics and animations for the website; drama and multimedia depiction of the history of Riverton; writing reports and scripts; make a video of the kids acting this out and put it on the website – imagine if they did the whole thing. We could do podcasts of best practice, for example; we have a marine specialist ... stuff we do well. Like a skite book [a small photo album with pictures of a new grandchild is an example of a skite book].”

While retaining the younger generation in the area was a goal shared by informants; educators also spoke of the potential to expose and promote their school to an international audience. In order to engage the children in a way that had immediate benefit to them, one principal mentioned the need to formalise the process by linking to national qualification standards.

“We need to attract foreign students here also. We’ve given the website over to the kids (with adult supervision) – there are huge crossovers between the education and tourism sectors. For example, someone in Japan finding out about farming in Southland: What’s everyday life like in another part of the world? It has to be curriculum based and it has to get the kids credits for NCEA. It’s a huge ask for our students to do something that is not related to credits. These kids help on farms, have part-time jobs, play sport, etc. – there has got to be something in it for them too.”

Geographical isolation is a challenge for many of the small rural communities of Western Southland. Informants used a range of settings in which to interact with local and non-local connections. A local environmentalist thought of the ICT project as an ideal way to involve young and old, and also ‘to simulate the personal grapevine’ and improve communication but this did not relate to communication among and between tourism businesses – rather the focus was on improving local channels of communication in general. People in rural communities rely heavily on word of mouth to not only pass on community information and neighbourhood events, but also in times of emergency:

“The Riverton grapevine works incredibly fast. We had an incident when a couple of kids got caught in a whirlpool ... within minutes everybody knew and someone raced down there and pulled them out. It’s the same with the website, we all started talking about it before we received any invitations to participate in the workshops. ...One of the things this project has done is to help us find community information. I wanted to know what time the Takitimu pools were open ... I just jumped on the website ... it was easy.”

When asked how the network could be strengthened and how to get more people involved in the podcasting project, informants favoured one-to-one, face-to-face

communication rather than one-to-many. One interviewee commented that several people in her own personal network were unaware of the project and that some thought those involved were 'a bit cliquish'. To overcome this, she also suggested that ICT be used to replicate the local grapevine:

“Communication has to be person to person and not person to group. It doesn't always have to be face to face but it's better one on one ... [laugh]. We have to simulate the personal grapevine and strengthen word of mouth; we have achieved what we set out to do, but this is the beginning point – everything is now in place and we need to move forward. It's up to the community themselves; it would be good to set up an even stronger network to tell each other what we're doing.”

The potential to use ICT to disseminate important community information was also a draw-card for busy health professionals who considered the project was successful in providing a channel for this to be done:

“We are in dire need of having something we can show potential health professionals what it's like to live here. We also need to get health information out to people in remote areas ... I'd like to see a section of the website and of the podcasts dedicated to doing that.”

5.3.3 Volunteering and support for network development

There is a long history of volunteering in Western Southland. The geographical positioning of Tuatapere, in particular, combined with a period of government restructuring during the 1980s, led to a strong resilient community used to implementing various initiatives in order to maintain a livelihood during difficult times (Smith, 2009). Smith finds a solid commitment to volunteering linked to this self-sufficient community, but notes that as the older generation passes on, people are becoming less inclined to volunteer their time or are unable to do so given other commitments. One of the limitations of the web-raising exercise was the availability of volunteers to co-ordinate local activities. Volunteering depended on a core of hard-working individuals who hoped that the project would entice more people to offer their time and skills:

“For the future I hope the website will help more people get involved with volunteering – they don’t have to be confident enough to turn up and speak. There are many who live their lives and don’t contribute to their community at all and it would be good to get them contributing.”

A school principal could see a role for schools in supporting volunteers through the project as well as providing an opportunity for children to engage with tourism:

“The energy comes from the local people and it has to be inclusive. It’s always a limited number of people doing a lot of jobs and the website might be a vehicle to expand that [pool of people]. The other way to provide that energy is to use the schools. Schools can assist to broadcast the need and offer help. The school can be a pivotal part in moving us forward. The kids can also learn a bit about their own part of the world and get a bit more cluey [sic] about tourism at the same time.”

A newcomer suggested that it was not always long-term residents who volunteered:

“It’s not the sons or daughters of the ‘pioneers’ we talked about before who volunteer and push things along now. Most of them have moved away. It’s the newcomers to the district who have a vested interest in getting things working. It will be that way as the kids all go away when they’re 18/20. There are a lot more foreigners here.”

Others were concerned that the ‘same old group of volunteers’ influenced outcomes of various community initiatives:

“I also volunteer at the [organisation withheld]. Then I got involved with the oral histories project. Everything is based on volunteering – nothing happens if you don’t do it. Few people volunteer and therefore those people tend to dictate what happens.”

“I like the idea of building a repository of events that any group can add to – the events are a great drawcard. We have talked about employing an events co-ordinator/fund-raiser but we don’t have any money. It’s always the same volunteers and they influence what does – and what doesn’t – happen.”

Albrecht (2009, 2010) highlights the importance of the role of community and volunteer groups in terms of the successful implementation of tourism strategies. She suggests that

while those in community promotions groups are passionate about promoting their locale to visitors, they were not concerned with tourism management, nor did they have the skills and expertise to do so. During the time of the web-raising programme (from 2006 and ongoing today), those who belong to promotions groups in Western Southland are a mix of individuals who have tourism businesses and those who do not. For the first three years, the project 'champion' and chair of WSPAI (Lex Wylie) was a tourism business owner/operator. He had a strong focus on using the web-raising programme to improve the performance of small tourism firms in the area and was concerned that all in the region be involved; or at the very least be invited to participate. He understood how the local industry worked at an operational level and wanted to see linkages expand beyond "the usual suspects (tourism businesses); we have to get schools, churches, farmers all involved." In early 2009, Lex passed away and it took some time before the WSPAI group re-formed and regained traction with the project.

Social networks are rarely static – rather they are dynamic structures where nodes, links and entities emerge and disappear (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In times of crisis in the network structure it is important to not only understand the degree of centrality of the leader - or in this case, the project champion - but also the level of communication between other humans in a social network (described as 'betweenness' by these authors). The past interactions between other actors in WSPAI provided a strong foundation for potential substitute(s) to appear and take a leadership role in the network. A temporary chair was appointed who was more focused on community and the environment and was not a tourism business owner/operator. While his willingness to step in and take on the job of chairing WSPAI during this difficult time was pivotal to the continuation of the network, this promotions group became less focused on tourism and more focused on the logistics of maintaining and promoting the website as a community resource.

In 2010 a new chair was appointed who does have a good understanding of ICT, and social media. He is a newcomer to the region and also a local business owner who is keen to archive local stories, as well as heritage and cultural information. While he does not have an extensive knowledge of tourism management and development, he does have a background in business management and enjoys the values and way of life of the locals. This individual is motivated to build stronger relationships with and integrate the schools. His aim is to use the podcast project to enhance local identity and an improved sense of community attachment with local school children. Teachers could also see the potential of the project to instil a sense of local pride in their students:

“The kids have a vision of Riverton that is so different from ours [adults’]. When we asked the kids about Riverton they talked about the beaches – and their love of the beach and the freedom to wander; that’s what they love but they don’t even know they have that freedom and that others don’t. While some promote Riverton by a rather large paua shell in the main street! The kids don’t identify with a paua shell.”

There was a hierarchy in the ways STE informants identified with ‘place’: first and foremost, they were highly attached to the town they were from, then the sub-region (Western Southland), then as Southlanders, then, finally, as South Islanders.

“It’s about revitalising and celebrating what’s wonderful about being here. My line of interest is that I got involved in the historical site – recording people’s stories and histories which have been lost in the past. The problem is that they [the recordings] are hard to find or perhaps they’ve been recorded but haven’t been made public – or even worse, I’ve heard that some older people have made a recording on a little tape recorder and it seems they are sometimes chucked out when somebody died.”

Universities, especially those who provide programmes in Tourism and Hospitality studies, offer excellent resources in terms of research capability, access to funding, much needed time and energy, and skills and expertise (Murphy & Murphy, 2004, p. 393). In order to create a better enabling environment in which collaborative activities can take place, STE need to be able to effectively develop the *weak* ties to external parties who

can assist them to create that environment. The authors argue that “such partnering efforts can greatly lower costs as well as providing a cross fertilisation of ideas between academics, students and practitioners.” While this appears a somewhat simple conclusion to draw, informants were sometimes anti-academic in their thinking and suspicious in the way they viewed those from larger cities.

The researcher lives in Auckland (Aucklanders are sometimes referred to as JAFAs, or ‘just another [expletive] Aucklander’, by those living in other parts of New Zealand) and there was good-natured joking about allowing a “token Jafa into our midst – especially from one of those fluffy universities”. Friendly as this may have been, it was clear that informants considered that those who lived in Western Southland had different values to those in the cities – more particularly, those cities in the North Island.

“We do have different lifestyles and different values than those experienced in the North Island, let alone overseas ... my son has a farm a couple of miles from here and he has just lost a hell of a lot of lambs with the late frost and snow ... it’s local folk who go and help him pick them up. He will sell them to the slinkskin factory in Thornbury and they will make gloves and hats that the tourists and the JAFAs will buy next winter. But they don’t know the heartache of losing stock.”

To cement the link to tourism, many informants recommended that the podcast project be extended with a more rural and farming perspective. One suggested taking the idea behind a popular television programme (‘Country Calendar’) and combining it with the podcast project to create an imagination on how ICT could be used to promote community identity as well as build a useful resource for tourism:

“The idea of ‘Country Calendar’ is what I can imagine as ideal – people talking about their way of living. We are losing vital access to a way of life that doesn’t exist anymore – people are dying and we can play a role in reminding other New Zealanders about the country’s agricultural roots.”

To do this she suggested that school children who were studying English, Media Studies, ICT and Communication-related courses create a portfolio of digital artefacts (podcasts,

video, images and text) along the lines of the 'Country Calendar' programme. 'Country Calendar' is a popular television programme made in New Zealand which has been on national television for 45 years. Promoters of the show advertise it as *bringing the country to the city, showing suburbia what happens just beyond the back fence and further into the heart of the interior* (The Press, 2010). Each programme covers rural themes and agrarian pursuits such as everyday life on a farm or in a rural location, sheep mustering, dairy milking, dagging, sheep dog trials, and A & P shows (agricultural and pastoral show days). Such an idea has considerable merit given its potential to grow a stronger sense of local identity and attachment, thus enhancing a sense of place amongst the local population and visitors alike.

5.3.4 Intangible assets of tourism: Community lore and local champions

Local culture and 'sense of place' embraces everything that is unique about a particular location. They are those special and memorable qualities that mean something to local people and resonate with visitors alike. They involve a set of personal, family and community stories that include features of 'place'. Taken together, these stories constitute an attachment to place and that is something that can add real value – economically, socially and culturally (George, 2010; Williams et al., 1995).

Informants expressed a desire to develop digital media and content to contribute to the community-built website resource, but few thought that their daily lives would be interesting for visitors. Only a few participants were aware that their everyday life could be somebody else's visitor experience, or adventure. In response to this, the chair of WSPAI circulated an overview of the podcast project to all those who had listings on the website, the Council, as well as to tourism and other business owners, community groups, key individuals, neighbours and friends. During one interview he gave the researcher a copy of this document and outlined the importance of giving people practical suggestions for podcasts (his examples are below).

Podcast suggestions:

A fisherman tells about the best rivers for trout and if he is available as a guide

A golfer(s) tells of the 6 nine-hole courses in Western Southland, and local accommodation and eating-house providers tell where to stay and eat as visitors play the golf 'trail'

A North Island dairy farmer tells of his shift south and how it has worked for him/her

A long-time resident of Orepuki tells it as it was when almost 3000 people lived there

The Riverton Pest Busters group tells of its success in ridding the area of rats, possums and magpies

A farmer explains what those large green bales are that dominate the farmscape in autumn

A local historian outlines a walk around places of interest in Tuatapere, Otautau, or Riverton

A land owner explains about life on a sheep station near Ohai (e.g. Mt. Linton)

The story of the Ohai Railway Board, the only private railway in NZ that paid its way

How Drummond became famous through the manufacture of Begg racing cars

How a worker at the Underwood condensed milk factory invented a way of capping cans without the use of solder, a process now used worldwide

A farmer explains how and when sheep and cattle are sold at Lorneville sale yards

A group of primary school pupils from Tuatapere tell visiting kids how they spend their free time

A jetboat operator tells about NZ's longest waterfall and how to travel on it

These are only a few possibilities. You are now invited to use your imagination for further ways of promoting Western Southland as a great place to visit and a great place to live.

He added:

"Local people think that what we do and how we live in this part of the world is of no interest to people from other parts. Nothing could be further from the truth. Visitors, especially FITs, are eager to find out about us. The podcast project is one way of telling them about what we do in a day ... at the same time we can preserve stories that might otherwise be lost forever."

The New Zealand Digital Strategy 2.0 (MED, 2008) relies heavily on the concept of 'champion' for community-driven ICT projects. This commonly refers to those who actively promote a vision for using information technology, pushing the project over or around approval and implementation hurdles to achieve success. In a business context,

IT champions are rarely people who are working on a volunteer basis, whereas in community organisations, people who contribute time and energy are more often than not working as volunteers. Different people played a variety of roles, at various times, and these were integral to the success of the web-raising programme. For community ICT projects, *champions* are rarely one key individual who lasts the duration of the project; rather, they are people who get involved in various phases of the project. They will emerge, be active, and then others will appear (Williamson, 2008; Gurstein, 2010). The idea of 'IT Champions' is outdated. Instead, these people are *Influencers* and *Project Advocates* who emerge at various phases of the project life cycle and then pass the baton to those involved in the next iteration or phase of the project. Similarly, governance structures are not static but evolve and develop, much the same way as the web-raising programme developed.

The former chair of WSPAI can be described as the *champion* of the web-raising programme. The initiator of both WSPAI and web-raising programmes, he was a visionary and active leader. He was tireless in his activities to muster support and participation for the project. While not a technologist, he was visionary in what ICT could do to encourage community and civic participation in tourism development, management and marketing for Western Southland. Such visionary pioneers of tourism are important actors and key influencers in rural tourism development, but they also require central and local government support in order to marshal resources and stimulate local networks. Tourism planners would do well to nurture and harness the creativeness and drive of local influencers through strategies and initiatives designed to emulate their energy and visionary leadership. This view is shared by Bramwell and Lane (2009, p.4), who argue that:

“While the state will be a highly important actor, industry and markets are likely to have a major role in implementing policies; the most dramatic changes are likely to emerge from the activities of far-sighted individuals and from the engagement of tourism markets in particular and civil society in general.”

The evolution of tourism in Western Southland was the result of the collective efforts of a handful of tourism leaders who provided strong structures of governance, organisation and leadership at a grassroots level to use tourism to propel their communities forward, in often challenging times. During the period of the research (2006–2009) all but one of these key individuals either left the area to retire or passed away, and this loss took a toll on network development:

“It’s taking us a long time to recover from the loss of our chair. We are all busy people and nobody really has the time to commit to the next phase of the partnership [an upgrade to a Web 2.0 environment to allow for a richer set of community-generated digital and social media]. We have decided to consolidate and work with what we have got. ... It’s already a very useful site to use to promote the region.”

5.4 Summary

Western Southland is a rural destination that does not feature to any significant extent on national or regional portals, or the regional tourism organisation’s ‘radar’ in terms of tourism development, management, promotion or marketing. Using the web-raised site www.westernsouthland.co.nz as a unit of analysis, it is evident that there was a high level of uptake by STE owners/operators and others in the region who engaged with the web-raising programme given the tourism *and* community nature of the initiative. STE affiliations on the web-raised site offer an insight into the social and market relations of STE, and they also reveal a good deal of local parochialism as businesses or attractions based outside of the town or settlement of the lister are linked to relatively infrequently. Research participants were motivated to engage with the web-raising programme to promote Western Southland as a great place to live, work and visit, and to capture the rich heritage information of the region. Processes that underpin the development of the community-built website promote and sustain the STE network by facilitating connections and partnerships, creating an inventory of tourism and community assets, providing a point of collaboration between STE owners/operators and community

associated with a common interest, and integrating and regionalising efforts to optimise the social and economic benefits of destination development. The main achievements of the web-raising programme were described by informants as providing a valuable community resource, while at the same time creating a resource for tourism, and strengthening community cohesion and community attachment. The perceived benefits of the web-raising programme in terms of STE business performance were more about networking than visitation. Various activities associated with the web-raising programme provided a useful point of entry to the tourism network for STE owners/operators. The workshops were one way to get together, get acquainted with other businesses and upgrade existing knowledge, and to identify local resources and expertise. The web-raising programme provided a central focus for these rural communities to link the generations, get school children involved with tourism processes, and offered potential benefits for education and capability development in the younger generation. Research participants could also see the value of the web-raising programme to encourage volunteering and to identify those people in the community who could play a role as key individuals in terms of community, and as tourism network influencers and advocates.

Chapter 6: STE network formation through a theoretical lens

This chapter brings the regulation approach, social network theory and the broader post-Fordist debate together with the empirical study of the emergence of a tourism network in Western Southland. The regulation approach is used to explain the 'place' of STE in the relation between large-scale external forces and local conditions. Regulation theory, or more particularly, the mode of regulation, is used to help clarify the complex web of social, cultural, political and economic factors that are central to the development of STE networks in a rural setting.

Drawing from social network theory, this discussion focuses on the beliefs, values, cultural practices and individual attitudes of STE owners/operators as part of their communities, and how these dimensions contribute to the development of social relations with tourism stakeholders so necessary for STE network formation (Tinsley & Lynch, 2008; Beritelli, 2011; Ateljevic, 2009). The main point here is that social network theory as presented in the literature has predominantly looked at STE networks in terms of the extent and structure of the network – density, centrality, nodes and with complex maps recording frequency of exchanges – and the benefits to be gained from these types of organisational structures.

The following discussion will provide a richer and broader context to understand how a sustained enabling environment to foster STE network formation can be created to place key individuals, local champions, influencers and advocates in a strong position to guide their citizens' participation in local economic development through tourism. Murphy & Murphy (2004) contend that such an environment has an impact on the ability of the destination to successfully adopt a collaborative approach to tourism planning and development. This discussion weaves in case study findings to propose an alternative method of understanding the processes that underpin rural STE network formation to enhance the regulation of tourism and tourist spaces.

6.1 The regulation approach:

The regulation approach applied in the context of networks of small tourism firms has predominantly been used to explain the pattern of industrial organisation through *flexible accumulation* (see Van der Duim, 2005; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Flexibility is found in the way small firms organise themselves; for example, through their processes, the way they develop new products and/or enter new markets, the way they adjust their labour force to respond to the various demands brought by seasonality, and the way they respond to global forces and changing patterns of consumer behaviour (consider the new 'moral tourist') (Mowforth & Munt, 2008). Flexibility is also concerned with the complex processes of ordering people and resources into networks (Van der Duim, 2005), though this is often described at the level of the firm and the linking of business processes that activate networks. The outcomes of this study show that rural STE processes of 'ordering' are more related to the systems of connections and social relations of the owner/operator at a personal level, rather than those associated with their business activities alone.

Nations and regions are in a state of flux as they respond to the hegemonic forces and influences of the global economy; at the same time these global influences impact on the way a firm navigates, at a local level, through the global economy (Amin, 1994; Reisinger, 2009). In tourism, global trends in tourist behaviour are increasingly characterised by demand for authenticity and a desire to customise the tourism experience according to personal taste. These demand-side factors contribute to the shift from demand-oriented to supply-oriented tourism (Costa & Martinotti, 2008), a clear sign of an emerging post-Fordist regime of accumulation. New tourists seek opportunities to engage with host communities and promote the experience of 'travelling like a local' (Butcher, 2003); thus the counter-hegemonic potential to reduce the impact of globalisation by strengthening capacity and capability of STE to respond to changes in tourism demand at a local level becomes obvious. What is less obvious is the way STE owners/operators become aware

of changes in trends and tourist behaviours that affect them, and how STE engage with processes to regularise tourism at a local level. Localisation is a move to self-sufficiency, local food production, local manufacture, locally sourced goods and services, local energy resources and so on. Key individuals and STE owners/operators in the tourism network in Western Southland were self-sufficient, resilient, stoic and used to working together as a community to counter the effects of peripherality and geographic isolation. This is evidenced by the evolution of the tourism network in Western Southland and what can be described as a local social movement to develop four iconic attractions in the area. Thus, rural STE are seemingly well placed to participate in the global economy through tourism activities at a very local level. While local self-sufficiency does not mean that all needs for goods and services can be met by local production, it does mean that most of what is needed can be produced locally. In this way, 'local' is flexible and can refer to a neighbourhood, town, city, region or country (Massey, 1995). Localisation is, after all, about putting control back in hands of locals (Wellman, 2002). However, in order to grow tourism productivity in Western Southland and realise the potential of the visitor industry to generate economic growth directly and indirectly, stronger links between stakeholders at a regional and subregional level – and with the RTO in particular – are required beyond those that exist currently.

While potential exists to intensify and extend network ties with public agencies and those charged with destination development at a regional and subregional level, STE owners/operators in Western Southland had become used to what they perceived as a lack of support from local public agencies, including the RTO. Because they are part of the community, STE owners/operators can articulate local interests to tourism planners; however, case study informants were reluctant to do so due to past experience where they felt their efforts had been thwarted or ignored. Their approach was one of parochial self-sufficiency which limited their ability to realise tourism's full potential for the region.

An essential element of regulation theory is the mode of social regulation – norms, societal expectations, cultural practices, habits and customs, laws, relations and forms of exchange – that bring stability to an economic system (Amin, 1994). Van der Duim (2005, p. 136) comments that “local social networks are crucial for the functioning of small enterprises, and while their basis for building up these networks varies (kin, caste, clan, and ethnicity), their deployment turns out to be quite similar across regions.” While this may be so in Western Southland, the case study shows that there are strong social ties and a sense of social cohesion through STE communal *and* associative social relations (see Reimer, 2002 for a definition of these relations). With these important modes of social relations in place, there is potential to intensify *weak* (external) ties across a diverse range of tourism stakeholders. In this way, STE can better access network resources. Important market and bureaucratic social relations (see Reimer, 2002) can be enhanced and strengthened by leveraging off existing communal and associative relations. Where communal or associative relations do not exist at all, the task of encouraging STE to work together is that much harder. This was sometimes the case in parts of the region where newcomers had not yet established those relations and had little opportunity to do so. The web-raising programme provided an opportunity for STE owners/operators and members of the broader community to meet and get to know others in the area, as well as exchange ideas, expertise, and experiences.

Fordist (both pre- and post-) regimes of accumulation and the global/local discussion occur across different social and spatial boundaries. People and organisations negotiate their way through global influences at every geographical scale and this places importance on place and locality and the differences that result in terms of economic activity embedded in those locations (Massey, 1995). Many of the small tourism firms in Western Southland exhibit elements of the small, family-run pre-Fordist (or artisanal) travel industry, (Ioannides & Debbage, 1998) where STE owners/operators have partial membership in both tourism and community networks. Community has become

embedded in social networks rather than in groups (Wellman, 2002). Therefore, STE and community social networks impact on capital accumulation and should be considered as useful for both social *and* economic development.

To offer a better understanding of the social factors that lead to the formation of STE networks, the following discussion looks at the mode of social regulation. In particular, it focuses on the elements that are crucial for developing networks: processes involved in the social ordering of relationships of STE, their relational capabilities, and ways that they create social currency (Reimer et al., 2008; Dredge, 2006a).

6.1.1 The place of STE in the global–local nexus of tourism development

Rural STE owners/operators are individuals, and they are also part of families, neighbourhoods, voluntary organisations, and community groups. They are artists, members of sports clubs and work in organisations, on farms, in industry associations and interest groups, as environmental advocates and consumers, and they interact with others online and offline. Many of these individuals and organisations have networks, and people in those networks have networks of their own. In small rural communities it is important to understand the individual personal network of STE owners/operators (Reimer, 2002, 2009; Reimer & Bolman, 2006). These networks are changing, informal, dynamic and flexible. Individuals tend to flit from one network to another with differing levels of intensity at different times (Wellman, 2002). From the case study, informants were heavily involved in community projects; for example, in one case a farm-stay STE owner/operator was working to get additional funding for the ‘personal beacons’ project on the Hump Ridge Track and for an upgrade of a local swimming pool, as well as working on a committee to organise a celebration of a local centennial.

STE informants worked alongside other business (including but not limited to STE) owners/operators in these community activities and had strong communal and associative relations. Reimer (2002) contends that identifying whether or not a good

stock of social capital exists depends on how 'rich' the network is in terms of each of the four modes of social relations (communal, associative, market and bureaucratic). It simply did not often occur to STE informants to move beyond existing communal and associative relations or to transform these into market relationships, i.e. those that are concerned with, for example, the exchange of goods or services, trade, or collaborative marketing. Past experiences with public agencies had also left STE owners/operators very wary of strengthening bureaucratic relations. The challenge arises in finding commonality and taking the first small steps that slowly build levels of trust and social currency to meld one category of social relations into another.

By celebrating what each individual has in common with another – the place where they live – community attachment and place identity grows (George, 2010). Beginning with activities, events and social interactions within the boundaries of the specific town (Tuatapere, Riverton or Ohai, for example); network actors have an opportunity to strengthen local connections and promote the destination *to* the destination. As a sense of place and local pride evolves, social relations can then broaden to other towns, communities and regions. It is about strengthening the place of STE within their communities at an extremely local level, perhaps in some cases even within neighbourhoods that is important. In order to expand the geographic boundary of the network, various 'paths' need to form that are both horizontal (across agencies and sectors) and vertical (between individuals, communities and agencies). Intensifying these interactions enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to weave social fabric (Putnam, 2000).

Every day, rural STE owners/operators in Western Southland engage in a broad array of activities that encompass a diverse range of interests, business dealings and social interactions. These engagements can provide a powerful stimulus to collaboration. Their motivations to do so are not solely based on profit or creating income. The 'Western' view of a network can best be described by three variables that are commonly found in

'hard' network structures: actors, activities and resources (Forsman & Solitander, 2003). This approach generally argues that firms or individuals enter co-operative relationships with others so that there is a better opportunity to get access to the valuable resources of that network in order to enhance their own business performance (Ngugi, Johnsen, & Erdélyi, 2010; Gulati, Nohria, & Zaheer, 2000). This was not the case in Western Southland, where working together was simply considered the 'community spirited' thing to do and this was primarily because of what emerged as the main goal of the project in the eyes of research participants: to build a community resource of heritage information that was also useful to promote the destination.

The general body of SME network literature went some way towards explaining the motivating factors for network engagement and the perceived benefits derived from it (Morrison & Teixeira, 2004; Powell, White, Koput, & Owen-Smith, 2005; Whittington et al., 2009). However, the literature does not often take into account the differences between urban and rural, or between developed countries and less developed countries, or account for the way the size of the firm affects network development. Several authors contend that many SME engage in networks with the primary objective of increasing profit (Delgado et al., 2011; Ngugi et al., 2010; Whittington et al., 2009). While the literature associated with SME network and cluster development is useful to inform initiatives to foster collaboration in a rural area, it is largely concerned with knowledge-intensive industry sectors (e.g. manufacturing, Information Technology) where the focus is on the production of goods and services and motivations to collaborate are predominantly driven by profit (Forsman & Solitander, 2003; Delgado et al., 2011).

Local government initiatives to enhance collaborative activities amongst small tourism firms are often just one of a variety of strategies to overcome the isolation of STE and to develop some sort of critical mass. Profit for the individual was not the main motivating factor for STE owners/operators to work with others and create social currency through collaborative activities in Western Southland. Rather the value of the collaborative

activities was primarily seen as advancing the 'community good', with the benefits of networking described in different ways that are linked to social *and* economic outcomes. The nature of the social relations was highly dependent on the individual's interests and values – seeking those with similar interests and values with whom to associate.

Researchers who provide definitions of STE partnerships, networks, ecosystems and 'destination webs' (Pollock, 2001; Morrison, Lynch, & Johns, 2004; Denicolai, Cioccarelli, & Zucchella, 2010), have characterised the network by levels of co-operation, co-evolution and collaborative activities all aimed at improving yield and enhancing business performance. This in itself indicates a belief that STE engage in networks with each other and have a shared or common goal and a desire to co-operate with each other at some level, albeit often a very elementary level of engagement. This study of a rural STE network adopts an alternative approach: one that focuses on understanding the social conditions (*milieu*) in which STE are embedded and also looks in depth at the processes and outcomes of the network. Such an approach is marked by the potential to develop capacity to leverage social relations as a competitive advantage for the community as well as the individual enterprise. Empirical evidence highlights a grassroots 'bottom-up' network formation process, one that is best understood by a chronology of phases of tourism development in the region linked to four different local iconic attractions.

Observing STE network formation during the study (2005–2011) has reinforced the researcher's belief that a broad blend of stakeholders (public agencies, private enterprise, community and individuals) contribute to the tourism experience, and that each one of these actors play an integral role in the tourism network. This challenges the importance several authors have placed on the visitor experience of tourism (Denicolai et al., 2010; Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006, 2006; Nylander & Hall, 2005). If the visitor experience is to be privileged as the focal point of endeavours to stimulate regional and local economic growth, this should not come at the cost of the STE owners'/operators' and the host community's experience of tourism. The visitor *and* community experience

of tourism are equally important (Milne et al., 2008). If tourism does not 'work' for community, then community will not 'work' for tourism (Milne, 2011). This research places the community experience of tourism as the focal point for rural STE network development and suggests that promotion of the destination needs to start first and foremost by intensifying the bonds that citizens feel towards their town or place, celebrating the unique local identity of each of the small towns and settlements in a rural area. The web-raising programme not only provided a point of collaboration, it also provided the broader community with an opportunity to focus on what they loved about 'their' place. Thus, the first step of network formation is to create opportunities for rural STE owners/operators and community to highlight what they want to share and promote about the destination. This first step starts with 'selling' the destination to those *at* the destination. When STE owners/operators, as part of community, gather to share their stories and commit to building a website to portray their area, they are also discussing their own needs for infrastructure, conservation, capability building, marketing, distribution, product development, supply chain, and so on. As these supporting mechanisms are identified, STE can then work with public agencies to prioritise needs for infrastructure (Spencer, 2008). This approach places the focus on developing good infrastructure (roads, signage, utilities, etc.) at the destination for residents first, before the infrastructure is developed for tourism.

This research offers valuable insights into STE systems of connection and what affects their social relations with other tourism stakeholders. The thesis also examines the motivating factors that drive network formation, and provides a better understanding of STE relationships and 'place' in the formation of tourism networks. Of most interest is the idea that in rural areas STE are a valuable conduit between visitor and community. This is because STE possess the greatest assets for tourism of all: those associated with local knowledge and expertise embedded in the social relations with, and within, their own communities (George 2010; George, Mair, & Reid, 2009).

In the case of small rural communities, much can be learned from literature emanating from social network researchers with another world view. Silvia and Choudhury (2006, p. 804) argue that contextual elements of Islamic teachings highlight the need for values and ethics to be incorporated in socio-economic development planning through private sector participation. To avoid the “rude tradeoffs between economic growth and social well-being” that can occur with privatisation, the authors contend that it is “the social well-being criterion that must be pursued.” In other words, these authors recommend using indicators of social well-being to guide the direction of economic growth and socio-economic development. This PhD research adds to this line of reasoning by highlighting the need for activities and initiatives to encourage rural STE co-operative business relations to consider social well-being criterion and to link these activities to the interests and aspirations of community.

STE owners/operators in Western Southland did not engage in collaborative relationships with other small firms to create a set of commissionable packages to be distributed through agencies such as visitor centres and wholesalers. The value they found in working with community and others was to bring benefits for the collective good. These benefits were associated with the desired outcomes of social well-being indicators in New Zealand (see New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2011) including the need to:

- i. ensure residents have access to health and education services for the acquisition of knowledge and skills – at the core of the concept of web-raising is the goal of community and economic development through increased collaboration. The web-raising programme supported the provision of information to attract teachers and health workers to live in the area
- ii. strengthen cultural identity and community attachment – the web-raising programme gave local residents the ability to share stories, and archive heritage information for future generations
- iii. ensure financial security through employment – tourism has the potential to regenerate the area and attract new residents through the creation of new jobs

- iv. connect with others in the community and strengthen systems of support – the web-raising programme brought individuals together and identified local experts and ‘Go To’ people in the community.

It makes sense, therefore, for tourism planners to chart the direction of STE collaborative activities by the indicators of social well-being. In New Zealand these are categorised in 10 social domains: Health, Knowledge and Skills, Paid Work, Economic Standard of Living, Civil and Political Rights, Cultural Identity, Physical Environment, Leisure and Recreation, Safety and Social Connectedness (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2011).

STE owners/operators in Western Southland play a variety of roles in multiple social networks. STE systems of connections encompass various patterns of relationships among individuals and entities in a self-selected social space. Network ties are most apparent in informal social networks involving individuals, neighbours, friendships and kinship; across organisational boundaries; and within local and subregional geographic communities. STE may also share memberships in and affiliations to local promotions associations and other professional societies, and with community groups, schools and other small businesses. The strongest linkages are not as part of a group or unit that can be described as a ‘tourism network’ in the traditional sense (e.g. between private enterprise and/or with public agencies); rather, their linkages are part of multiple networks, with strong links to the local geographic community. As such, STE are networked individuals (Wellman, 2002) with good levels of human capital (knowing how to network) and social capital (relevant and supportive networks) who switch between networks (personal, special interest, business, professional), not as part of a group but as part of various social networks. In other words, it is the individual, rather than a work group or organisation, who is the organising unit of the network.

This raises an important question: What are the dangers of assuming that a STE owner/operator has tourism as all they do in a day? This research shows that collaboration within tourism may not be between firms but is associated with the types

of things that regularly happen in a rural community. STE collaborative activities in the case study location were as local residents participating in, for example, school events, rugby clubs, with firewood drives and the development of heritage trails. STE were also owners of other business; for example, hardware stores, pharmacies, or farms. This brings in the very important community dimension that is currently missing in much of the tourism SME network literature and highlights a need to examine the 'social threads' of a particular destination. In order to intensify STE collaborative activities, several issues then need to be addressed.

In New Zealand, prior to 2010, the development of the tourism industry used to sit within the mandate and agenda of the Ministry of Tourism. In July 2012 the Ministry of Tourism merged with the Ministry of Economic Development. In July 2012, the Ministry of Economic Development merged into the new Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Initiatives to foster collaboration and cluster development by past Governments have, over the years, been introduced but then discarded due to a lack of measurable economic outcomes that can give a clear indication of return on investment. (For example, The Cluster Development Programme was disestablished in 2006). A somewhat narrow focus on the economic return from STE networks may actually impede the development of the desired collaborative activities. Where authors have described a holistic approach to the development of alliances and partnerships in tourism (see Moscardo, 2011; Nordin, 2003; Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004), the focus has been on a variety of factors such as government support, policy setting, improvements in infrastructure, and joint marketing efforts where the interdependence of related products and services (attractions, transport, accommodation, information, etc.) highlights the need for collaboration. In the case of network development in rural regions, a shift in the way 'outcomes' are described would do well to encompass the important dimensions of community and well-being. Where tourism management is devolved to local councils and RTO, this study highlights the value of ensuring that

economic development, social development and community development go hand in hand. As much as it is important to consider ways that STE owners/operators gain entry to tourism networks, it is as important to consider ways that tourism planners access and gain entry to community.

6.2 Social network theory: STE networks and the role of the state

From both an academic and policy perspective, a good deal of the tourism network literature is focussed on understanding how to improve STE performance. How can STE be encouraged to work together, and how can this be linked to processes of economic development (e.g. job creation)? Traditionally there is an emphasis on the dyadic relationship between private tourism enterprise and public agencies (Thomas, 2007; Thomas & Thomas, 2005; Bramwell, 1994; Bramwell & Lane, 2009) and developing dense transactional networks between small firms (Denicolai et al., 2010; Braun, 2005, Beritelli, 2011; Polo & Frias, 2010). In New Zealand and internationally, this focus on network and regional policy to get STE to work together prevails but, in reality, examples of good practice are few and far between. This study has shown that initiatives from local government to intensify collaboration between rural STE would benefit from recognising that rural STE are not solely motivated by profit nor is tourism their only business activity. In a lesser-known rural location where a RTO has a low level of participation, there are other ways that STE find value in working with others to enhance destination performance.

In the case of Western Southland, personal characteristics, values and beliefs are primary factors that motivate rural STE to engage in expanded business–community relationships. Most of the STE informants could be described as self-sufficient and closely connected to the pioneer ideals and characteristics of their parents or grandparents. While STE collaboration is a goal for many RTO, councils, and economic development units throughout New Zealand, it could be said that it is not always in the Kiwi psyche to work together (Dupuis, 2009). For STE owners/operators, an opportunity to enhance

outcomes for the not-for-profit organisations they belong to did attract their interest. The web-raising programme provided a point of collaboration, and subsequently a point of entry for STE owners/operators and community members alike to engage with tourism processes. The opportunity for those in this rural tourism network to leverage from these ties and social threads offers significant potential to develop a richer visitor experience. In order to do so, there is a need to build STE capabilities, intensify existing relationships, and develop new ones with other tourism stakeholders.

Strong network ties exist between STE owners/operators and community were most evident in what can be described as a 'local social movement' to create the Southern Scenic Route. This local attraction was developed by a group of people with common goals and beliefs, mostly related to the values of previous generations and the pioneer society of their ancestors, who depended on each other in their struggle to work the land and survive in challenging times (Smith, 2009). At that time, informants indicated that there was a need to collude and assume a level of solidarity 'against the authorities'.

While several authors (Bhat, 2008; Jamal & Getz, 1995) suggest that collaboration often begins at a very low level of engagement, this study suggests an earlier step: *collusion* between network actors. STE owners/operators worked with neighbours, friends and acquaintances in Western Southland to thwart the attempts of local authorities to, for example, prevent signage for the Southern Scenic Route being put up. They worked together to get funding for various projects when applications for resources were turned down by local government. They combined forces to secure funding for the web-raising programme at a time when public agencies associated with tourism did not choose to allocate resources to tourism development in the area. Network formation in the case of Western Southland was founded on a basis of collusion rather than collaboration. While the network may have had a somewhat negative beginning, stories from these local activities make interesting podcasts of New Zealand's pioneering history (e.g. a podcast on the history of the Southern Scenic Route) and enhance the experience for a visitor to

this local iconic attraction. These links constitute some of the valuable social threads that STE weave into the community social fabric. STE owners/operators find value in these links and were eager to discuss ways in which they could leverage from them. While there was recognition that they could be used to improve their business performance, there was also an element of reciprocity (giving back to the community) in their interest.

Community lore (e.g. folklore, stories and heritage information) and tacit understandings of commonly held values within the community are valuable in terms of tourism (George, 2010). Butcher's (2003) description of the new moral tourist is closely aligned to those travellers who are attracted to the experience of 'rurality' (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). In other words, those travellers who are looking for experiences in a natural environment that offer rich, holistic, spiritual interactions with locals to understand different ways of living and different value systems and core beliefs.

The key features of their moralised conception of leisure travel are a search for enlightenment in other places, and a desire to preserve these places in the name of cultural diversity and environmental conservation.

Butcher (1993, p. 8)

Where there is a lack of fellowship amongst rural STE owners/operators, there is little likelihood that they will engage in formal or even informal collaborative activities. Research participants were generally selective about their relationships, seeking 'like-minded souls' with similar personal values with whom to build relationships and access and share resources (material, cognitive and influential). Informants managed complex lives in terms of work, family, business, and community, often leaving little time or energy to devote to maintaining and sustaining one specific 'tourism network'.

'Collaboration', 'collaborative efforts', 'networks' and 'clusters' are part of the language of tourism researchers, planners and RTO – but not of the business owners. The researcher has often heard representatives from a variety of public agencies talk of 'raising the awareness' and 'educating STE' of the benefits of working together. This top-

down approach does not always result in individuals finding the value of such activities for themselves. The web-raising programme created an opportunity for STE and community to work together to advance local interests and achieve common goals associated with local economic and social well-being. Should RTO become more enmeshed with STE owners/operators, and the rural communities that they are part of, then they will be better able to support STE owners/operators to find value in collaborative activities through the reality of actually working together - as opposed to 'educating' STE or 'making them aware' of the benefits of collaboration. Public agencies that model collaborative behaviour in their processes, connections and activities, show stakeholders how to create value together and are possibly the best role models to foster co-operation in the communities (business, residents, industry) they serve. Further research would be useful to understand just how collaborative New Zealand's RTO are.

This begs the question: What then should be the role of the state and public agencies that promote collaboration in tourism development at a regional level? The short answer is: To provide an enabling environment in which collaborative activities among STE and community can thrive. This highlights the importance of the work by Murphy and Murphy (2004) who contend that fundamental aspects of such an environment include the provision of ample political, social, legal, infrastructural, economic and environmental resources. This study advances the work of these authors by recommending that priorities for resource allocation and agendas for development be set in close liaison with the very people most affected by them. It also suggests that a long-term commitment to a programme of work (such as the nature of the web-raising initiative) is required rather than a one-off project. Western Southland is an area where locals are trying to take charge of their economic future through a citizen-driven process of renewal. The role of the RTO then shifts from a top-down approach to developing and promoting a rural destination, to one where they actively 'seed' initiatives to empower

and enable local businesses with tourism knowledge and skills and implement a supportive local framework for doing so.

In New Zealand and elsewhere the role of local government is changing from one based on 'consultation' to seek more engagement with local businesses and residents. In terms of STE network formation, NZTRI's web-raising programme complements that of local public agencies including the RTO but should not be seen as a substitute. It is unlikely that a regional tourism organisation or other public agency would be sufficiently resourced in order to work so closely with STE and community members to provide a sub-regional web presence at the level of granularity of, for example, www.westernsouthland.co.nz. The web-raising programme was described in a written communication by a representative of one public agency as 'groundbreaking' – providing a local level of information that they could not, and perhaps should not, provide. While there are significant national and regional (top-down) endeavours to promote Southland as a destination, there is also a need to stem the reliance on the public purse and to support local private enterprise and community initiatives (bottom-up) to link to the visitor industry at a sub-regional level. The researcher was told on more than one occasion that NZTRI provided much needed 'energy', skills and expertise and could support both grass-roots and the RTO in their endeavours. This support is evidenced in the invitation to partner with WSPAI, supported initially by the Southland Community Trust, the Southland District Council, and the tourism businesses and communities of Western Southland.

The web-raising programme has developed a sound network of relationships between residents of Western Southland, both long-term residents and newcomers. The network includes those who were the very early pioneers of the Southern Scenic Route as well as other key individuals in the area who, as 'local leaders', have linked in other people from their communities. Through the web-raising and podcasting projects, links to schools and tertiary education providers provided excellent back-up support in terms of technical

advice and facilities (e.g. broadband for those who don't have it). NZTRI researchers also provided a sense of security for busy locals who knew that there was access to a full-time Web-development team as well as the ICT and technical infrastructure at AUT University. The involvement of the University offered WSPA the ability to draw on the expertise of a diverse range of community and tourism practitioners (e.g. tourism marketing, community tourism planning, etc). This highlights a role for universities to work with tourism stakeholders (RTO and public agencies, private enterprise, community) to support the processes of network formation. A university brings a level of impartiality that can add value to the way social capital is formed and be a useful element of an enabling environment for network development.

Web-raising evolved into a programme of different initiatives designed to foster tourism network development. It offered a point of collaboration and a mechanism to identify the systems of stakeholder social connections in order to advance STD within this rural destination. The web-raising programme provided an opportunity to up-skill community members in valuable ICT skills and a chance to identify training needs for further capability building for STE owners/operators. The short-term activities and tasks associated with the programme gave STE owners/operators a purposeful endeavour to engage with, as well as a form of social entry – a way to meet others and discuss issues of local importance and shared concern (e.g., local environmental concerns and initiatives).

Costa and Martinotti (2008) argue that negative environmental impacts of tourism can be mitigated if local business and community are involved in the management of environmental resources. By enabling a bottom-up approach to environmental management associated with tourism, the authors suggest that locals are more likely to accept restraints and to participate in conservation initiatives. Facilitating interaction with and between STE owners/operators and community is a vital step towards raising the awareness of tourism impacts among community, as well as addressing the often conflicting needs and priorities of stakeholder groups.

Immersion in the web-raising programme allowed the researcher to gain valuable insights into the social threads that made up the community fabric of the various towns and settlements within the region. The web-raising programme helped identify key individuals, influencers, advocates, 'Go To' people and local experts who could influence the outcomes of the project (positively and negatively), or derive benefits from it. Through the various project activities, relationships were renewed or formed between and among STE owners/operators, with residents and local community groups.

Western Southland is made up of a network of relations, connections, links, ties or contacts between multiple and diverse actors who, together, create the tourism experience in a rural setting (see Comas & Guia, 2005; Novelli et al., 2006; Aylward, 2009). This approach is grounded in social network theory in which a social network is defined as "a specific type of relation linking a set of persons, objects or events" (Knoke & Kuklinski, 1982, p. 12) and relies on the capacity of people and institutions to organise themselves. Definitions of social capital that are most appropriate in this context therefore are those very early descriptions related to "intangible substances that count for most in the daily lives of people – namely, goodwill, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse" (Hanifan (1916, quoted in Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Similarly, ties built on the values of love, respect for age, reciprocity and spirituality (Robinson & Williams, 2001; Laban, 2011) as those associated with Maori and Pacific people, are important in rural locales.

This raises the complexity of tourism and the nature of the relationships between tourism stakeholders. Destinations are often marketed as a co-ordinated set of experiences but this is frequently not the case. STE owners/operators are busy in rural areas (Aylward & Kelliher, 2009; Bensemann & Hall, 2010) where tourism is not the only 'hat' they wear in a day, often leaving little energy for development of the destination as a whole. As individuals, STE owners/operators are competitive by nature (Brás et al., 2010; Dredge, 2006b) and there may be legacy feuds amongst neighbours and families,

or even between towns, that prevent such co-operation. However, STE owners/operators in Western Southland were quick to embrace initiatives where they could see real potential to affect business and community success (Clark, 2007; Milne et al., 2008).

Interest groups such as promotions organisations, tourism groups, heritage organisations and other advocacy groups play an important role in tourism development (Albrecht, 2010; Hall, 1999; Murphy & Murphy, 2004). The relevance and importance of these groups is an increasingly significant component of stakeholder collaboration given growing pressure from governments globally to cut back on expenditure and consolidate activities. This is particularly true in rural areas where public agencies are often not fully resourced to effectively manage and develop destinations. This highlights the need for innovative approaches to rural STE network development. This examination of a rural STE network has focused on very small, often family-run tourism enterprises, exploring the linkages and connections of those STE to better understand their relational capabilities and how these capabilities manifest themselves. These connections have not been limited to interactions among and between STE, or between STE and public agencies; they have also included community. What has emerged from this study is the notion that the greatest potential for successfully creating an *enabling environment* (Murphy & Murphy, 2004) where collaborative efforts and activities can occur, comes through the relationships with community, and the nature of the 'place' of STE owners/operators in their community.

Denicolai et al. (2010, p. 263) argue that "different network approaches lead to the development of different tourism core-competencies." In a rural setting these core-competencies are not only about provision of sufficient accommodation, food and beverage services, and sights and attractions, they are also to do with the community 'art of welcoming visitors' (see Murphy, 1985). The CI web-raising programme offered local residents an opportunity to engage with tourism business and, thus, local economic

development. It also offered the potential to enhance the ability of busy rural people to engage with tourism through easily accessible, manageable, bite-size achievable tasks and activities.

This raises the following question: If rural STE network development is to move forward to something that brings tangible results, do we look at social capacity, community capacity in terms of businesses serving social ends, or social programmes associated with community development and run in the manner of businesses? This study builds a case for the latter approach.

Reimer et al. (2008, p. 5), describe social capacity as people's ability to work together to access resources and organise public relationships, rather than giving responsibility for those relationships wholly to state actors. Social capacity building for rural tourism destination development, in the case of Western Southland, began with a desire to promote the region to the people of the region and strengthen a sense of local pride and community attachment. Several authors discuss the relational capabilities of SME as critical elements of network formation as a means to exchange knowledge, create opportunities and joint process improvements (O'Toole & McGrath, 2008), as well as to innovate and gain access to the resources of other organisations (Ngugi et al., 2010; Gulati et al., 2000). This finding highlights the fundamental difference between the general SME network literature (predominantly concerned with manufacturing and supply chain management) and the tourism SME literature relating to network development: the important dimension of community. The former is more concerned with business improvement, leaner production, the optimal use of labour, and processes as driving forces for network formation. The latter is more concerned with the values, beliefs and aspirations of individuals and their ability to connect to those who can offer access to valuable resources for rural tourism. To strengthen the resilience of small rural communities to respond to economic and environmental forces that affect them, approaches are needed that encourage participation at the grassroots level and

encompass all elements of the community fabric – governmental, private business, associational – rather than top-down approaches driven by central and local government (Reimer et al., 2008; Ateljevic, 2009; Aylward & Kelliher, 2009).

The tourism network in Western Southland was formed by STE *and* community pulling together as a local social movement to advance the development of tourism. At some level, it could also be argued that the network exhibited elements of an epistemic community (Haas, 1992). Social cohesion formed by a common purpose (to promote Western Southland as a great place to live, work and visit), and with deep-rooted feelings of place identity and solidarity (evidenced by a history of collective action against local authorities), enabled key individuals and community leaders in Western Southland to disseminate an awareness of problems and issues throughout their communities. By working with those most affected, these key individuals were able to formulate a solution to these problems, and they were also able to anticipate likely implications of, or impediments to, achieving those solutions.

Characteristically, epistemic communities consist of professionals from a variety of disciplines who have a shared set of principled beliefs, common causal beliefs, shared notions of validity, and a common policy enterprise (Cinquegrani, 2002; Haas, 1992; Dobusch & Quack, 2008). STE are tourism and community experts with knowledge of local lore; they also have community aspirations and goals to engage locals with tourism, and the ability to use social relations to exact an outcome in terms of economic and social development. All these attributes mean that STE have the ability to influence policies that affect them. However, a lack of a clear link to the political power of central or local government lessens the ability of these leaders and key individuals (in what may be called an epistemic community for tourism) to participate in government-level policy and projects that affect them. This limits their influence with public authorities in the tourism development process, and thus precludes them from being an epistemic

community in the more commonly accepted definition of the term (see Cinquegrani, 2002; Haas, 1992).

Given the knowledge and capacity of STE to closely align themselves with host communities and their pivotal role in the tourism value chain, there is merit in considering the social networks of small tourism firms as emergent epistemic communities. This privileges the role of small business and community above that of tourism planners and elevates the standing of host communities in tourism planning (Murphy & Murphy, 2004; Ali & Frew, 2010).

The overarching message from this study is that STE owners/operators are part of community. For STE and community, the development of *weak* network ties with tourism planners would assist in securing the much-needed resources of government. These are vital if the network is to access the financial and knowledge resources necessary for promotion of the destination and local infrastructure development for tourism. This requires STE owners/operators to engage more readily in market and bureaucratic social relations (Reimer, 2002) than they do currently. While STE in Western Southland exhibit strong associative and communal social relations, it is important that they strategically develop *weak* (external) ties to public agencies. The web-raising programme demonstrates that one way this could be done is to develop community-generated digital content for use in marketing and promotion. This meets both the community objective of archiving heritage information as well as providing a digital resource for promotion of the destination that can be used by the destination marketing organisation.

Public agencies can learn a lot from how town planners consider two criteria for design: they have to raise the standard of the built environment from the present level while also having a design that successfully meets the complex levels of human needs. In other words, it is not just the physical environment but also the fabric of the community that determines the approach taken. This focus on human needs requires evaluation of the

ideals and characteristics of key individuals and industry leaders in the community – their combined vision – as well as their community's interests. While community fabric in the tourism context is yet to be defined in the literature, in the case of rural tourism it is about understanding and disseminating community values through tourism. The web-raising programme offers an example of how social threads can be used to weave a 'digital fabric' of community stories, tips for travellers, local heritage information, community information, and support residents and STE owners/operators to share what they value about their 'place'. This in turn will support the community's economic and social aspirations. Such an online presence disseminates information on 'what goes on around here and what's important to us' in a rural community.

6.3 Integrating ICT in STE network formation.

The community informatics approach adopted in the web-raising programme used ICT to enable communities to realise their economic, community and social aspirations. It began by transcending the domain of private enterprise and embraced the 'community interest', i.e. interest in the development process, interest in decision-making, and interest in the social well-being of local citizens (Gurstein, 2003; Williamson, 2008). In this study, the drivers of STE and community engagement with the web-raising programme were to capture heritage information for future generations and to use local knowledge (stories and tips for travellers, for example) to attract both visitors and newcomers to the region. Newcomers that could provide health care, new businesses, teachers and educators were particularly sought, and informants considered the web-raising programme to be a way to attract them to the area.

The project brought people together with a common purpose and went some way to strengthen social connectedness, providing avenues of support for people who needed help with technology and linking younger community members with elders to record a story. Passing on local heritage information and local stories contributes to a sense of belonging and cultural identity. As such, social well-being goals and community

aspirations for local development play an important role in engaging STE and community in collaborative activities that enhance destination performance.

Technology used in this way can help tourism planners understand more about the social structures within a particular community or destination. STE can also contribute local stories and 'lore', and, through the process of the workshops and gatherings to develop such a site, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the community social fabric within which to embed visitor experiences.

A widespread belief in initiatives to encourage businesses to cluster and network is that:

... [working *collectively*] should inspire individuals to maximise their potential and work especially hard. This belief is quite surprising, however, as in these two cultures most people's prime motivation is to assert their individuality and uniqueness and stress their separateness from the social world.

Markus & Kitayama (1991, p. 226)

New Zealand's rural communities are indeed made up of individuals with an individualistic culture but fellowship, solidarity, community lore and local values were often discussed by research participants in Western Southland. The case study research participants were residents of the rural communities of Western Southland and reveal aspects of a collectivist approach to tourism development, as evidenced by their community spirit and their eagerness to work for the community good.

The Western Southland tourism network is not primarily a geographically based unit of association. Instead the word 'network' is applied as a way of interpreting and organising the stakeholder relationships and linkages of the destination. Respondents were not part of a dyad or group who were working together to create 'packages' or to optimise access to resources; rather, they switched between multiple informal networks, both personal (kin, friends, neighbours, workmates and interest groups) and professional (business,

industry and workplace or organisation). As such, ICT played an important part in enabling these community processes.

6.3.1 Community informatics and tourism

One of the underlying philosophies of the CI approach relates to community development and the process of bringing communities to a state where they are able to self-manage and self-organise in relation to community goals (Gurstein, 2007, p. 13). The web-raising programme shows that ICT can be used in a tourism setting to assist communities to more clearly define their goals and be involved from the start in setting and achieving them. It then becomes possible to build a range of tools and communication processes that can engage various audiences. Digital engagement is therefore vital, but it still lives within a wider context of cultural and social cohesion. The importance of place (history, culture, natural and built environment) becomes increasingly central to this discussion.

The challenge is to find a way of ‘creating an imagination’ (Gurstein, 2010) about the opportunities that ICT provide for tourism, small business and community, social well-being, local economic development, and community empowerment. For individuals and communities, ongoing maintenance and sustenance of much of the good work that is being done is about the ability to find real value in terms of enhancing life circumstance. Otherwise, if participation in CI initiatives such as the web-raising programme does not have a relevant and useful outcome for the individual, it is unlikely that their involvement will continue as the network evolves (Gurstein, 2010; Williamson, 2008).

A common goal of individuals, groups and public agencies that work with communities to enhance individual circumstances is to use ICT to effect change (Williamson, 2008; Gurstein, 2003). Understandings of the transformative effects of digital technologies are critical as ICT has now become an integral part of what we do, how we socialise, and how we transact. These individuals and organisations are the enablers, facilitators and

implementers of a good deal of government policy initiatives, and it is how they work that will determine how effective the transformations will be.

Understanding STE systems of connections and relationships within a community – the values, and long-held core beliefs of those who are part of that community – is vital in order to tap into the ‘community interest’ and strengthen ties between STE and other tourism stakeholders. This also requires awareness of local suspicions (e.g. of public agencies or institutions), and opportunities where the transformative effect of ICT enables private enterprise to work ‘beyond what we do now’. The challenge will be for tourism planners and practitioners to take what is relevant from these lessons in order to enhance the lives of individuals and their communities.

Gurstein (2010) suggests that “real success [in enhancing life circumstances through the use of technologies] will come when there is a real and equal partnership between ICT and community enablement.” This does not elevate ICT to a status it doesn’t deserve. Rather, it begins to see technology as an environment and not just as a tool. Community cohesion is an essential element of that environment, just as changes in human values, connectedness and associations, place, advances in hardware and software, and so forth are also part of that environment. It cannot be assumed that CI can really take place without community development. Nor can it be assumed that CI won’t affect community development. Both are integral to the environment (Gurstein, 2010). The processes involved with creating community-generated digital content (e.g. podcasts with local stories, local hosts, videos, photos, text, links, etc.) offer significant opportunities to galvanise rural communities and so enhance community and STE cohesion and connectedness for rural tourism destination development.

In Phase 2 of the web-raising programme (podcast project), STE owners/operators who engaged with the project were not primarily motivated to do so because of the opportunity to promote their own businesses. Rather, they were motivated by the desire

to support community aspirations, i.e. economic *and* social development, at a very local level. The benefits to the firm traditionally purported in the literature (e.g. reduced costs and operational efficiencies, creating new services or experiences, knowledge transfer, marketing and distribution, and better access to resources) are important, but pale in comparison to the benefits that intensified STE relationships and linkages with community can offer the firm and the destination.

This research highlights the need to change the way collaboration is viewed by tourism planners and academic researchers. Collaboration is not something that is always achievable through intervention; instead it works best when it is organic and originates from the grassroots level. This approach supports rural STE owners/operators who are sometimes characterised (see Wilson, 2002; Clark, 2007) as being fiercely stubborn, self-sufficient (pioneer self-sufficiency), and suspicious of newcomers and public agencies. Busy individuals seek out like-minded souls (people we like) in informal social networks. Social networks that also cross organisational boundaries are not built by those who seek imposed or structured (top-down) units of organisation and network structures (sometimes with people we wouldn't like or otherwise choose to 'connect' with). In simple terms, STE networks in rural destinations are best thought of in terms of connectedness and systems of connection. Several authors suggest that is desirable to find ways and means to ensure that all sectors of community participate in tourism development (Murphy & Murphy, 2004; Ateljevic, 2009; Hall, 2005; Butler & Hall, 1998). This study shows that ICT can be used to foster collaboration among rural 'lifestyle STE' and community. STE are the conduit for the visitor to understand more about local lore and the community social fabric, thus enhancing the tourism experience for the 'new moral tourist'. Tourism developers can facilitate and optimise that 'connection' as a valuable resource. To do this, it is necessary to tap into what attracts the 'lifestyle STE' to be in business in the first place. Many authors suggest that this is about well-being: personal, community, social and, to a lesser extent, financial well-being (Bensemann,

2009; Goulding, Baum, & Morrison, 2005; Hall, 2005; Ateljevic, 2009; Morrison & Teixeira, 2004). As such, STE owners/operators who run their business for 'lifestyle' reasons seek connection with others (Murphy & Murphy, 2004) and often find opportunities through encounters with visitors and others to develop social relations. In the case of Western Southland it is also about the community aspirations to retain and regenerate population, and to craft a legacy for future generations (jobs for youth, etc.) through knowing more about local food production and local stories and archiving this valuable heritage and cultural information.

STE owners/operators are collaborating all the time with others at the destination. They participate in various systems of connection including personal social networks, formal and informal business and community networks, diaspora communities, and affiliations. Unless STE develop commissionable packages for RTO to market through inbound tour operators and the VIN network, RTO sometimes have difficulty recognising the value of STE collaborative efforts. These distribution channels are of course vitally important, but they will evolve given the rise and rise of ICT-facilitated distribution channels and social media.

6.3.2 Web-raising and new media

Many community-based promotions and tourism groups work with digital content, albeit at an elementary level, to promote their areas as a great place to work, live, play or visit. WSPAI is such a group. Formed by community members passionate about 'our place', the community itself is the best resource to develop digital content to portray 'place' to the outside world. The Podzone Country project significantly extended the web-raised site through the use of podcasts where more enthusiastic Western Southlanders than expected learned to podcast and created a rich community resource.

If STE and communities are to develop and distribute their own content, they need to have the opportunity to do so. The podcast project has shown the need for a platform

capable of supporting more complex content, such as mixed collections of video, audio, image, geographical and textual data in various formats. At the same time, the platform must be more than a mere repository because it has the potential to play a central role in community promotion.

Tourism organisations internationally are slowly moving from a 'command and control' approach to the creation and quality control of digital content to one of empowering and enabling operators to become distribution channels themselves. Examples include Tourism New Zealand's new open-contribution model Operator Database (see <http://www.register.newzealand.com/en/home>) and the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse. Rather than creating a destination website where content is owned and controlled by a single unit, tourism organisations (at the national, regional and local level) are responding to this rapid change in tourism consumer behaviour and are evolving to become enablers of partnerships and collaborative efforts to broaden the tourism experience and guide access to relevant, personalised information delivered online to the consumer. Information includes the usual elements of tourism content (accommodation, activities, food & beverage, transport, etc.) but moves from centralised repositories of stored information to more open-content contribution and distribution models that give the consumer access to a broader range of travel-related information (e.g. community information, special interest information).

As new channels and new influences shape the consumer's access to travel and tourism information, peer-to-peer exchanges and user-generated content increasingly influence buying patterns and the technology consumers use to make those purchases (Pollock, 2001). Today more customised and configured tourism-related experiences are expected from the tourism supply chain than ever before. Travel consumers are changing the way they research, communicate and purchase the travel product (Minghetti & Buhalis, 2010; Buhalis & O'Connor, 2006). On a practical level, the consumer (visitor/traveller/tourist) is being sold an *experience* made up of a great many contributing components, rather than

a single *product* (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). While the consumer may indeed visit a destination website as a trustworthy and credible source of information, this is no longer the sum total of their efforts to determine, pre-travel, what that experience may actually be like.

Initiatives to enable decentralised structures for online content aggregation and localised decision making (e.g. how a community portrays itself to the world) facilitate a better accumulation of information specifically for the individual and allow better retrieval of more niche information according to the consumer's needs (e.g. consider the open-content contribution model of www.newzealand.com). A move to a decentralised architecture would enable better sharing of content among and between stakeholders; for example, by supporting operator-to-operator content sharing. This is a vital step forward to support tourism businesses to work together to create packages, trails, and complementary offerings to the consumer. Government tourism organisations play a critical role in working with tourism businesses to provide training to better prepare operators to create digital content and engage online and by facilitating these links. RTO destination websites provide a fair and unbiased information source to the traveller, but a visit to such a website is just one element of the consumer's online activities. Websites belonging to individual operators, other businesses, community groups and special interest groups also form part of that search (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Ali & Frew, 2010).

Concomitantly, consumers also look to other sources of travel information that are openly and freely contributed by peers through social media. These includes personal blogs, travel networking and peer review sites such as Trip Advisor and Lonely Planet, and social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Online searches for information on a destination are not focused only on one channel (e.g. a destination website) or only on social media; nowadays the consumer has many different ways to gather information (Ali & Frew, 2010). While still important, technology forecasters predict the slow demise of the website and the rise in use of social media and Internet-

enabled mobile and location-based services. Innovation needs to have an impact on user behaviour so whatever the technology trends (and hype) are, it remains important to stay focused on the human and consumer behaviour (Collins & Wellman, 2010). It should be remembered that consumers in New Zealand's key target markets – North, South and South-East Asia and the Gulf Countries in the eastern hemisphere, and the United Kingdom, Europe, the Americas and Australia in the western hemisphere – use a diverse range of social networking sites and search engines. It is vital that operators can distribute content by ICT innovations that directly open up the way they can be found through a variety of search and social media channels.

Today, tourists do much of their information gathering about a destination online (Buhalis & Law, 2008). They have their own channels of choice: their favourite search engine, and their favourite blogs, social networking applications and travel aggregators. This offers the potential to change the structure of communication from hierarchical top-down exchanges to organic, 'flattened' relationships that link together multiple players and accommodate and facilitate peer-to-peer relationships amongst travellers. The web-raising programme integrated ICT in STE network formation and the outcomes of this approach (e.g. user-generated digital content, community involvement) also support the visitor (especially the new moral tourist) to grow a relationship with the destination.

While encouraging more STE to accelerate the online distribution of their tourism content to increase their global visibility, it is important to bring to the fore a 'consumer' focus, and support those travellers actively considering a visit to better understand the tourism *experience*. In other words, to move STE away from developing online content that is predominantly brochure-ware and text-based to developing content that has pictures and rich media conveying a destination's unique attributes to the world and giving an insight to the host community. In this way, STE owners/operators and host community are able to work together to not only create the visitor experience but to also communicate that experience to potential visitors. Social media also facilitates a greater

exchange between visitor and tourism producer, allowing consumer and community to get to know more about each other. Knowledgeable STE owners/operators are integrating social networking into their marketing mix and using social media to enable them to do so (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2011). In order to better prepare STE to meet consumer demand through the provision of online content, a suitable 'hook' must be found to peak their interest. A CI project of this nature (web-raising) provides such a hook. It can advance STE social networking and strengthen relationships within the host community and then extend the reach of those relationships locally, nationally and internationally. The added advantage is that community-generated digital media is an important step forward if STE are to tap into opportunities to integrate social media within their marketing mix.

In order to support increased personalisation of information to consumers, there is a need for tourism planners to redefine the way that content is exposed to the consumer. By allowing a central index of content for the tourism industry, technology initiatives can open up tremendous scope for tourism organisations to work with operators to not only build capability but also to use the process of digital multimedia content creation as a focus for networking and collaboration between STE and community.

In Western Southland, the community-built destination website is a resource for community *and* tourism. The web-raising programme brought people together to talk community *and* tourism. This study describes the activities and processes that underlie the development of the site and these are rich in content for further work. To summarise, these processes allow tourism planners to:

- identify key nodes in the network (e.g. key individuals, tourism and community leaders, and the roles they play)
- understand STE connections (e.g. affiliates)
- understand local hierarchies and structures (e.g. who do you 'go to' for ...?)

- tease out local issues, challenges and legacy feuds
- present activities that allow locals to develop an enhanced sense of place, identity and community attachment
- work with community to identify the community interest and aspirations (e.g. socio-economic development)
- offer a fun social activity
- encourage STE and long-term residents to engage with visitors and newcomers and share stories, heritage information, tips for travellers, etc. (i.e. community lore)
- link generations through recording local stories, and link to schools
- create a community resource to attract newcomers, new residents, visitors, and education and health professionals to the area
- enthuse locals about their local 'iconic' tourism attractions.

Using the community-built tourism website www.westernsouthland.co.nz as a unit for analysis, it becomes clear that there is merit in going beyond the 'enterprise-centric' approaches to understanding tourism SME networks in a rural setting and a need to examine the network from the perspective of the host community within which STE are heavily embedded.

The web-raising programme gave network actors a purposeful endeavour to engage with that aligned to their sense of community spirit. The tasks and activities attached to each phase of the web-raising programme were short-lived, transitory and achievable. The project activities (e.g. preparing newsletters, organising venues, recruiting workshop participants, attending workshops) provided an opportunity to enjoy social time with others. People enjoyed the nature and purpose of the project, but more importantly, it provided an opportunity to intensify and multiply connections and social ties, thus expanding the network. The small towns of Western Southland each have a diverse community social fabric with a variety of social threads which STE and residents use to participate in various programmes and activities. Resident support for community

projects is strong, especially when there is a 'cause' related to healthcare services, education, conservation and environmental issues, cultural and heritage projects to preserve the past, housing, and social and leisure activities. Local economic development is also viewed as important, although there are fewer activities and programmes that residents can participate in. The web-raising programme offered a series of useful activities to underpin the processes of network formation, and provide a point of entry for STE owners/operators and community. This encourages the kind of tourism that is more responsible and mindful of the needs of the host community, a type of tourism that should be an integral part of any local system (Costa & Martinotti, 2008).

ICT have been a principal innovating force in the structure and organisation of the tourism industry generally and an enabler of a key concept for the productive organisation of the tourism industry, notably the *flexibility* principle (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Harvey, 1989). However, the case study in Western Southland showed that an interest in business productivity and profit was not the primary driver behind STE owners/operators adopting ICT. Therefore, if the goal is to encourage ICT uptake and network formation by STE, it is important to tap into what they are interested in.

Using ICT to tap into the 'community interest' and retain important cultural and heritage information through podcasting, offered a social activity that brought individuals together in workshops and community meetings to learn about tourism and the Internet, thus creating valuable human and social capital. ICT offers new ways to encourage local involvement and participation in rural tourism development (Milne et al., 2008; Nodder et al., 2005; Gretzel et al., 2009) but it is not the ability of ICT to support business processes or operational activities that entice rural STE to use ICT. The 'hook' was to get them working together, in a fun social setting, to do something that appealed to their values and aspirations.

However, as Milne et al. (2005b) suggest, involvement and participation in tourism processes on their own do not optimise local conditions and resources or bring about social and economic transformation. Nor do they necessarily lead to real 'engagement' with tourism (Nordin, 2003; Hall, 2005). Milne et al. (2008, p. 661) contend that "ICT focused rural tourism collaborative initiatives need to be developed based around trusted social networks that can foster attitudes amenable to learning and development." In other words, it is not only important to get rural stakeholders associating in a way that contributes to the development, management and marketing of the destination, it is also vital that this is done in an *effective* manner that sustains motivation and interest and builds cognitive capacity (Milne & Ewing, 2004), thus leading to effective development outcomes. A CI project of the nature described in this study is such an activity because it captured the community interest.

The web-raising programme has proved a valuable tool to engage STE owners/operators and community in some of the processes that must occur before collaboration can exist. These include the identification of key individuals, local and external expertise, tourism assets, and the development of social relations. In Western Southland these are the pillars on which future collaboration can be built.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and future research agenda

The two questions that guided this research were: *How are STE networks formed and maintained in rural areas?* and *What is the role of ICT in forming and strengthening these networks?* This chapter presents conclusions drawn from the analysis of the case study in rural New Zealand, and discusses their implications in terms of small tourism enterprise network formation, the processes that underlie it, and how information and communication technologies facilitate and strengthen the networking process. The chapter begins by providing a summary and synthesis of the research and an answer to the major research questions. It then presents a grounded proposition to integrating ICT in rural STE network formation.

The chapter also presents a summary of the research's theoretical contributions in the fields of social network theory and the regulation approach, which are used to provide new insights to inform the further development of theory associated with STE network formation in rural destinations, and the ways that ICT can be integrated in the process. The chapter concludes with a set of recommendations for future research.

7.1 Research summary

The regulation approach has been used by a variety of authors to describe the changing nature of tourism production and consumption who contend that elements of pre-Fordist, Fordist, post-Fordist and neo-Fordist regimes of accumulation co-exist in the industry today. In an industry, both in New Zealand and elsewhere, that is characterised by a predominance of primarily family-run small tourism enterprises, the economic sustainability of tourism is dependent on the ability of these STE owners/operators to adapt to both global forces and the changing demands of 'new tourists' who are increasingly informed and sophisticated in their choice of tourism products. New tourists are environmentally and socio-culturally aware, and wish to participate in tourism

activities that enable them to become more involved with the local society that they visit. These travellers often have a holistic approach to travel, where quality experiences that enhance a sense of 'wellness' in terms of mind, body and spirit, and an opportunity to become more self-aware and find one's individual identity and self-knowledge are increasingly sought (Butcher, 2003; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). Accessibility, affordability and quality are key decision-making factors for new tourists, who are attracted to rural destinations not only for the natural environment, but also for the spiritual and emotional dimensions of the tourism experience.

Tourism offerings in rural areas are often diverse, fragmented and unco-ordinated in terms of management due to the wide variety of stakeholders. This is compounded for rural STE owners/operators in regions where geographical isolation, distance from markets, and often limited transport and infrastructure impact on their ability to be competitive at a national and global level.

In order to respond to an increased demand for tailored tourism experiences, tourism planners encourage STE owners/operators to collaborate to provide a comprehensive range of products and services that satisfy tourists' specific requirements for a rich and authentic 'total visitor experience' in the destination. Small tourism firms are embedded within broader community structures and networks, yet policy-makers often view tourism in isolation from other factors that constitute the social, environmental and economic fabric of communities. Here it is argued that it is the very nature of the social relations that lie within these structures that offer the greatest potential for STE owners/operators to increase tourism productivity and enhance the visitor experience.

The opportunity to improve competitiveness, profitability and economic efficiencies are cited as key motivating factors for individual engagement in the majority of the literature concerning tourism SME alliances, business partnerships and networks. The researcher found that STE owners/operators in Western Southland were also motivated to some

extent to engage in network formation in order to access resources (material, cognitive and influential), enhance business performance by using the Internet for marketing purposes, and to provide a quality visitor experience by developing digital resources for tourism. However, this study finds that STE owner/operators were not primarily motivated by a need to provide profit for tourism producers and partners; rather, they were more concerned with the benefits that could be brought to their community by using tourism as a tool to stimulate local economic and social activity.

7.1.1 How are rural STE networks formed?

A historical review of the evolution of tourism in Western Southland was integral to explore factors that affect rural STE network formation today. Social network theory was used to explain the characteristics of key individuals, STE owners/operators and community stakeholders, and their motivations to connect with the tourism network. Research participants (in formal interviews, informal discussions and through observations at various meetings and workshops) exhibit similar values, beliefs and attitudes. These have created strong local ties and underpin a set of communal and associative relations built on trust and reciprocity with family, friends, neighbours and acquaintances in the community. These ties are built on experiences of working together (colluding) to counter the effects of an economic downturn in the area that saw local industry wind down, and business and public services close. This research also reveals a suspicion of public agencies and subregional differences that affect the ability of STE owners/operators to form bureaucratic relations, i.e. the weak (external) ties necessary to access resources for improved infrastructure, marketing and destination development. This case illustrates the importance of identifying the global, historical and postcolonial context in which the tourism network in Western Southland is currently situated.

Drawing on the four forms of social relations (communal, associative, market and bureaucratic) described by Reimer (2002), it was possible to identify how STE owner/operator research participants organised their relationships, distributed

resources, and structured their organisations to reach a particular goal. To understand the basis for social capital and how social cohesion is embedded in each of these relations, it was necessary to explore the way STE owners/operators connected and linked to people and groups in different ways across different institutions. The researcher found that the 'groups' and 'institutions' that STE owners/operators linked to were not always other tourism or associated businesses; rather, they were predominantly community groups, special interest groups and local residents.

In the case of Western Southland, network formation began by community members, including STE owners/operators, colluding and working together in clandestine operations to develop the Southern Scenic Route. They were also active participants in the development of other tourism attractions in the area where they collaborated to advance the aspirations and interest of the small communities in the region. The commonality with this and the development of the community-built website www.westernsouthland.co.nz is that these initiatives provided an accessible point of collaboration to engage with – grassroot initiatives that were not generated (top-down) by public agencies. In a community that values its sometimes scarce natural resources; local heritage information was seen as a rich asset that could be used to secure the community economically, socially and culturally for future generations. Not only could local stories, folklore, information about the towns and settlements of the area, and historical events be captured and archived on the site for future generations, they could also be used to provide information to visitors and enhance the visitor experience in order to stimulate the local economy and generate employment through tourism, and to attract new residents to counter the effects of depopulation.

Rural STE owners/operators reside and are embedded in host communities but this does not necessarily mean that they have developed strong ties and social relations with all of the other tourism stakeholders within their community. The web-raising programme brought individuals from private enterprise and community together to discuss local

issues and opportunities for tourism. This point of collaboration facilitated entry into the network for STE and other stakeholders.

7.1.2 The role of ICT in forming and strengthening STE networks

The web-raising programme occurred in two phases. Phase 1 was the initial development of the community-built website that today houses 163 separate listings created and uploaded by STE owners/operators, other business owners/operators, community organisations and individuals. The second phase was the *Western Southland: Podzone Country* project which equipped the community with the skills and equipment to create podcasts.

The initial phase of the web-raising programme was instrumental in identifying the diverse range of tourism producers, community organisations, individuals and attractions that are components of the visitor experience in the region. It also assisted to identify 'hot spots' where there was likely to be the greatest engagement with tourism. Specifically, this was in those towns most exposed to tourism on the Southern Scenic Route (Tuatapere and Riverton). It also showed those elements of the region that community were most attached to or proud of and wanted to share with others. The 'affiliate' function of the user-generated web pages is a useful tool that could be used by tourism developers to build various packages, experiences and trails. The self-selected 'affiliate' function of the site shows exactly who STE owners/operators are happy to be associated with and who they are likely to consider collaborating with in order to create marketable packages for distribution through a variety of channels.

Short-term achievable project tasks associated with the second phase of the programme (the podcast project) afforded tourism stakeholders an opportunity to interact and to get to know each other. In this way, the personal and professional social networks of STE owners/operators and community were stimulated in order to get people together to talk tourism. The web-raising initiative also provided a point of connection to the schools

and education providers in the region, which was useful for accessing resources and connecting to the younger generation. While the web-raising programme provided STE owners/operators with an opportunity to promote their own business as well as link to others in their town or settlement, it was primarily viewed by research participants as a way to build a community resource. This served the dual purpose of 'selling' the destination to the residents of the destination to enhance local identity and an improved sense of community attachment, as well as linking STE owners/operators and community in order to develop a resource for tourism.

7.2 Towards a theory of integrating ICT in rural STE network formation

The overarching contention of this thesis is that the role of ICT in rural STE network formation is to provide a 'commonsplace' (environment) for STE owners/operators and community as a point of collaboration where these tourism stakeholders can interact in order to strengthen network ties and unravel and delay the destination for the visitor.

There are three assertions that summarise this thesis. These relate to the need to provide an enabling environment in which collaboration can occur, to use indicators of social well-being to guide network development, and to facilitate entry to the network by creating points of collaboration that stimulate STE owner/operator networks and strengthen community attachment and local identity.

7.2.1 An enabling environment for STE network formation

STE play an integral role in destination competitiveness and are important for the destination's economic development potential. If tourism is to bring benefits to rural communities and local economies, it is vital to ensure STE owners/operators have the capacity to run a profitable enterprise and provide a quality visitor experience. Networking allows businesses to share experiences, transfer knowledge, and find ways to work together to create new products. In order to increase collaborative activities

between small rural tourism firms, it is important to first create an environment where collaboration can occur. The web-raising programme proved to be a valuable tool to engage STE owners/operators and community in processes that must occur before collaboration can exist. These include the identification of key individuals and local influencers and their motivations to engage with the network, local and external expertise and people resources ('Go To' people in the community), tourism assets (tangible and intangible), and the nature of existing social relations (communal, associative, market and bureaucratic). In Western Southland these are the pillars on which future collaboration will be built.

An evolutionary approach to understanding the development of tourism in a small rural area is useful to reveal issues that may present a barrier to STE owners/operators engaging with each other, with public agencies, and with other members of the community. The tourism network in Western Southland is born of a history of solidarity where STE owners/operators and community worked together as a local social movement for tourism. Taking an evolutionary approach to understand the development of tourism in the region gave insights into ways that various stakeholders engage with tourism, and what they perceive are the benefits that may arise from the visitor industry. This approach also enables those who work with STE owners/operators to explore the nature of the social relations that exist in terms of communal, associative, market and bureaucratic relations with other tourism stakeholders. In order to leverage from these social relations, it is important to understand the motivations of STE owners/operators to connect to others in order to satisfy an immediate need. This 'need' may relate to using tourism to secure an individual's financial future, or to aggregate social action and support a common vision and goals to strengthen a community legacy for future generations.

7.2.2 Social well-being indicators to guide rural STE network formation

This study highlights that it is a mistake to assume that tourism is all that rural STE owners/operators do in a day. Rather, they are embedded in local communities and enmeshed in a variety of personal and professional activities and networks.

The STE owners/operators in this case study did not to any great extent engage in collaborative relationships with other small firms to create a set of commissionable packages. The value they found in working with community and others encompassed a broad range of factors associated with economic *and* social well-being. In a rural setting, outcomes from tourism cannot be measured and described solely in terms of economic development for the simple reason that they are not the sole motivation for individuals who own or operate small firms *and* who are part of local communities to engage with the industry. While capital accumulation through tourism is critical for local and national economies, it is not always as important to those individuals who are the public face of the industry. The path to achieving economic growth and stability through tourism STE networks therefore needs to consider the social well-being of the individual, for it is the social relationships between individuals that strengthen social capacity and guide network development within rural host communities. A recommendation is made to use indicators of social well-being to guide the direction of economic growth and socio-economic development.

7.2.3 Facilitating entry to the network

One of the problems associated with STE network formation outlined in this thesis is that despite the rhetoric of policymakers and public agencies that collaboration between tourism stakeholders is valuable in order to enhance the visitor experience, the gap in the literature lies in explaining how this actually works.

This study highlights the need to provide points of collaboration in order to create a focus for ‘working together’, and to facilitate entry to the network for community,

private enterprise and public agencies. Western Southland is a region that does not exist in terms of distinct political boundaries and is limited in its available resources for tourism development. Local promotions and community groups have limited time, energy, tourism-related knowledge and skills to devote to the formation of network structures. Therefore, the processes that underpin network formation need to include short-term, fun, achievable project tasks that stimulate existing personal and professional networks and create new relationships with, and between, a broad range of community stakeholders. By tapping into these systems of connection, individuals involved with various elements of the visitor experience can link to tourism and expand network activities, thus improving not only the tourism experience for the visitor but also the community experience of tourism.

7.3 The contribution of the research

This thesis has examined STE network formation, the processes that underlie it, and how ICT facilitate and strengthen those processes. The thesis has made a distinct contribution to theory, practice and research methodology.

The study contributes to methodologies in tourism research by using a qualitative approach (using grounded theory and a case study) that draws on a community-built destination website as a unit of analysis to explore the relationships that lie within the structure of the web linkages.

A contribution is made to applications of the regulation approach in tourism with a focus on the mode of social regulation; in particular, the processes involved in the social ordering of relationships of STEs, their relational capabilities, and the types of social relations they draw on to form networks.

In a post-Fordist regime of regulation, the flexibility of the firm to respond to global forces can be strengthened by viewing STE networks not as units of interaction confined to other business or public agencies, but also as systems of connection with and within

rural communities. The thesis asserts that STE network formation in rural destinations should be guided by social well-being indicators, local economic development, and community empowerment.

The study adds to the available literature on SME networks in general, but more particularly to the sparse empirical research in the area of small tourism enterprise network formation in rural destinations. This is done by providing an understanding of the impact that geographical isolation has had on network formation and how social relations have been used in the past to strengthen the resilience of community. In addition, the study explores motivating factors for rural STE owners/operators to engage with network development and finds that motivations are strongly linked to the STE owner/operator's 'place' as part of community.

The research also makes a practical contribution to literature associated with the successful implementation of tourism strategies that feature co-operation and collaboration between rural STE and other stakeholders by integrating the important dimension of community.

A contribution is made to the body of knowledge associated with the use of ICT in tourism SME network development via the use of a community informatics approach. This study extends on the web-raising technique (Milne & Mason, 2001). Such an approach strengthens the role of STE owners/operators as a conduit between visitor and community. Similarly, the web-raising approach considers the social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects of sustainable tourism with a focus on the community experience of tourism. The web-raising approach supports STE owners/operators and community to grow their attachment to a region, and unravel and delay the destination for newcomers and visitors alike. STE are a valuable conduit between visitor and community who possess the greatest assets for tourism of all: those

associated with local lore, local knowledge and expertise embedded in the social relations with, and within, their own communities.

7.4 Future research direction

The findings of this research study provide an agenda for future research. This study has not addressed the next phases of STE network formation so vital for stimulating the local industry in Western Southland. Essentially, this relates to the need to strengthen the market and bureaucratic relations of the existing network. While STE in Western Southland exhibit strong associative and communal social relations, it is important that they strategically develop *weak* (external) ties to public agencies in order to access much-needed resources for tourism in the area, namely infrastructure, distribution, marketing and investment. In order to do this, more work is needed to apply Reimer's (2002) four modes of social relations to a tourism context and create a qualitative set of indicators to understand the available levels of social capital that can bring about STE rural network formation, and identify the extent of social cohesion at a destination which is embedded in each of these relations.

A second priority for future research relates to the further development of the concept of web-raising as a tool to stimulate STE and community collaboration, and the need to test the approach in a broader range of case study settings; for example, in small island states or urban areas. One of the key elements that underpin the web-raising approach is about giving those at the destination a 'voice' in the development of tourism in their area. This manifests in the development of user-generated digital content to create a community and tourism resource. Future research should explore the web-raising approach at a hyperlocal (high street, road, neighbourhood or suburb) level in an urban setting.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Presentations made and meetings attended

Appendix 1

Table 8: Presentations made and meetings attended

Event	Date	Details
Venture Southland – project inception meeting	24 October 2007	
Western Southland Promotions Association Inc. Board meeting	25 October 2007	Otautau
Riverton Promotions Association Board meeting	26 October 2007	Riverton
Venture Southland – project update meeting 1	1 February 2008	Invercargill
Western Southland Promotions Association Inc. Board meeting	1 February 2008	Riverton
Venture Southland – project update meeting 2	11 April 2008	
Western Southland Promotions Association Inc. Board meeting	12 April 2008	Tuatapere
Venture Southland – project update meeting 3	11 June 2008	Invercargill
Western Southland Promotions Association AGM	11 June 2008	Otautau
Venture Southland – project evaluation	29 September 2008	Invercargill,
Western Southland Promotions Association project meeting	30 September 2008	Nightcaps
Western Southland Promotions Association Inc. Board meeting	22 March 2009	Tuatapere
Tuatapere Promotions & District Promotions Association	21 March 2009	Community meeting 23 local residents, Reps from Nightcaps, Ohai, & Otautau Promotions groups Tourism business owners, other

Event	Date	Details
		business owners Humpridge Track trust Tuatapere Community College
Tuatapere Community College	12 June 2009	Year 8 podcast planning group
Western Southland Promotions Association Inc. AGM	11-12 June 2009	AGM

Appendix 2: Interview discussion guide

Appendix 2

Interview discussion guide

- Please tell me about your background [and your organisation]
- Are you involved with any community groups/activities? Do you talk business/tourism with people at these encounters?
- How has tourism evolved in Western Southland?
- Do you see value in WS tourism businesses working with each other to promote what they have to offer?
- Have you or your organisation helped to facilitate collaborative relationship with or between STE? If so – how did you go about this?
- Can we discuss any examples of STE networks (formal or informal) that you know of?
- Please tell me about any use of information and communication technologies by those who participate in these networks.
- Do you think tourism businesses in Western Southland support each other or compete with each other - why?
- What kind of relationship do you have with public agencies (do they go for advice?, take advantage of RTO services?)

To see how other organisations assist in network formation

- How would you describe the collaborative relationships of your organisation?
 - a) With small tourism enterprises (STE) in your region?
 - b) With other stakeholders in tourism in your region?
- Have your collaborative relationships helped your organisation to reduce costs and operate more efficiently? Please elaborate on your answer.
- Have your collaborative relationships helped your organisation to create new services or experiences, or customise tourism products for your visitors? Please elaborate on your answer.
- Have your collaborative relationships helped you to make better informed decisions about the way you run your business, for example to use new channels of distribution or enter into new market segments? Please elaborate on your answer.

- Have your collaborative relationships offered better access to resources? Please elaborate on your answer.

The web-raising project:

What motivated you to become involved?

How would you describe the outcomes of the project?

Public Agency Interview Question Guidelines

- Do you think tourism businesses in Western Southland support each other or compete with each other - why?
- What kind of relationship does your organisation have with tourism businesses in Western Southland? (do they come for advice?, take advantage of your services?)
- Does your organisation assist in network formation between businesses?
- Could information technology help businesses work together to support the development of the WS tourism industry?

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet



Date Information Sheet Produced: 30 January 2008

Project Title: Small Tourism Enterprise Network Formation in Rural Destinations: Integrating ICT and Community in Western Southland New Zealand

An Invitation

As a key individual in a regional or national tourism organisation; industry association, economic development unit or other government organisation, Council staff; a respected academic in tourism; or an operator of a small tourism business, you are a very important part of the New Zealand economy. You are invited to participate in this research on small tourism enterprise networks in New Zealand through an interview.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research aims to explore how small tourism enterprises network and collaborate with each other, with other businesses and with other tourism stakeholders (e.g. government, council) and what value there is in doing so. It also investigates the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in developing and sustaining those networks. This research is being conducted as part of my Doctor of Philosophy at AUT University. Results of the interview may appear in my PhD these and/or be used in journal and conference publications.

How was I chosen for this invitation?

You have been identified as a key individual or leader in tourism either at a local, regional or national level. You have either been recommended by my contacts as the Western Southland Promotions Association, Venture Southland or are well known for your contribution to tourism development in New Zealand. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

What will happen in this research?

This research involves interviews with people who are considered to be tourism industry 'experts' or who are involved in tourism in Western Southland.

What are the discomforts and risks?

You are giving your valuable time and information to help with this research and I can assure you that I have considered your well-being and that of your business or organisation. You may feel that you are not an expert in some of the areas discussed, or you may be concerned that I will 'leak' confidential or sensitive information to others. You may also be concerned about the use of your time - a valuable resource.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

All questions are optional, and you may choose not to answer some questions. However, the interview is designed to gain an understanding of the reality of working in the tourism industry, so there are no right or wrong answers. Any information you provide will be interesting. I am strictly bound by my University's ethics procedures and processes and will not pass on any information to others. I will keep the interview time to approximately one hour.

What are the benefits?

This research will result in a better understanding of the issues and challenges which face small tourism businesses. It will offer insights into how ICT can be used to support

collaborative activities between STE and other tourism stakeholders and how this can add value to business performance and assist STE to achieve their business goals.

How will my privacy be protected?

All answers are confidential and your answers can in no way be linked to your personal or organisation's details. The results will be presented in aggregate and no individual business or organisation will be identified in any of the publications relating to this research. I will also send you my notes from our interview so you can check what I've written before I write up anything in my thesis.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

This interview will take approximately one hour.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

I will contact you in the next week to see if you would like to be interviewed, and if so, to make an appointment to visit you at your home/work at a time which suits you. You will have time to consider the invitation before accepting. The interview will be recorded but only with your written permission.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To participate in this research, simply confirm an appointment time when I contact you, via email or telephone. I will also ask you to sign a Consent form (copy attached) that gives me your written consent to participate in the interview.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

The results of this research will be included with my PhD work and will be available on www.nztri.org in early 2009. I will inform you by email when results are published. Results may also be presented in your local media. To thank you for your participation, I offer to send you a brief summary of what I have found (a synopsis of my thesis).

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Simon Milne: email simon.milne@aut.ac.nz, phone 09 921 9245

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details: Carolyn Nodder: email: carolyn.nodder@aut.ac.nz, phone 09 921 9999 ext 8892

Project Supervisor Contact Details: Simon Milne: email simon.milne@aut.ac.nz, phone 09 921 9245

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **25 January 2008**, AUTEK Reference number 08/07 Tourism SME network formation in New Zealand: the role of ICT

Appendix 4: Consent form

Appendix 4



Consent Form

Interviews

Project Title: Small Tourism Enterprise Network Formation in Rural Destinations:
Integrating ICT and Community in Western Southland New Zealand

Project Supervisor: **Simon Milne PhD**

Researcher: **Carolyn Nodder**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 30 January 2008.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I would prefer:
 - ☐ That this interview was audio-taped
 - ☐ That the interviewer took notes only
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

Date:

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13/10/2008
AUTEC Reference number 08/07*** Ethics application approved for a period of three years
until 10 September 2011.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.