Revealing the Economic Value of Adventurous off-road cycling as a Tourism Product: a Case-Study of South West England

The Centre for Sport, Leisure and Tourism Research is collaborating with 1 South West Cycle Adventure (1SW) - a partnership organisation who is working to create an off-road cycling region, through a programme of coordinated and sustainable off-road cycling development in the South West.

Through an ESRC CASE studentship awarded to Neil Ormerod, Professor Tim Coles and Professor Gareth Shaw, work has begun in partnership with Paul Hawkins – Project Manager for 1SW on a project entitled ‘Revealing the Economic Value of Adventurous Off-road Cycling as a Tourism Product: a Case-Study of South West England’.

Adventurous off-road cycling is a key leisure pursuit within the UK, and it is still rapidly growing in popularity. For a region like the South West with a heavy emphasis on its environmental assets, off-road cycling offers an opportunity to broaden the tourism offer in both peak and off-peak periods. The 1SW Project is now in progress to develop off-road cycling in order to attract new markets, retain existing visitors for longer, spread pressure away from the coast, and increase visits outside peak season.

At the forefront of this development, the 1SW project (www.1sw.org.uk) aims to ensure that the development and promotion of off-road cycling in the South West takes place in a co-ordinated way to benefit all. The purpose of the studentship is twofold, namely: to develop a dedicated method for better capturing the economic benefit to regional tourism of adventurous off-road cycling; and to establish the strength of the case for adventurous off-road cycling as a regional tourism ‘attractor’ as part of the wider regional tourism ‘offer’. One of the principal tasks facing the project is to make sense of the wide array of contested methods, techniques, approaches and guidance on the economic impacts of tourism, leisure and recreation.

This study aims to increase our knowledge of the success of promoting off-road cycling to a wider audience and, as part of wider regional tourism package. This will be achieved through an empirical research investigation into the behaviours of off-road cyclists at selected 1SW sites, and also the extent to which off-road cycling impacts local businesses. This investigation will take the form of an extensive questionnaire survey of off-road cyclists and will be accompanied by a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with local businesses. Both of these methods will be used to support the production of estimates to quantify the economic impact of off-road cycling in the South West.

This will be one of the first studies to disaggregate spatially and sectorally how an investment in recreation impacts on the tourism sector, and adds value as part of a wider regional tourism offer.

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