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The Spirituality of The Leader and its Influence on Visitor Experience Management at Sacred Sites in the Island of Ireland: Insights and Implications

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The 9th Annual International Religious Tourism & Pilgrimage Conference
Armeno, Orta Lake, Italy

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Rationale & Problem Statement

Paucity of Scholarly Investigations into Sacred Site Visitor experience Management from **Managerial Perspective** & the **Dearth** in Research in **Pilgrimage Tourism Management** in general (**Griffin & Raj, 2012 & Geography of Leisure and Tourism Research Group 2014**)

The **Role Leaders Play** in Visitor Experience Management at Sacred sites Religious (**The Researchers, 2016**)

**Spirituality
(Beliefs)**

Role Socio-Psychological Characteristics of Leaders Play in Sacred Site Visitor Experience Management

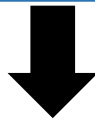
Wiltshier (2014) on the role of Volunteers highlighted the **propensity** of their **spirituality** to influence the delivery of the visitor experience

No Exploration of the Phenomenon Globally Till Date & In the **Irish Context**

Seldom Acknowledged in the Religious & Pilgrimage Tourism Scholarship

Olsen (2008) Cautioned RPT Scholars to take **religious culture** seriously & How **Leaders** view Tourism & its **influence** on Management of these places

The socio-psychological characteristics of leaders and their influence of visitor experience management



Religious Affiliation / Society
Social



Beliefs, Feelings , Actions
Psychology



Determine / Influence decisions
Marketing, management



Determine / Influence visitor
Satisfaction & Return Visits

- ❖ Regarding strategy development and Implementation
- ❖ The sort of products and service offerings/delivery
- ❖ The interpretation of artefacts
- ❖ Guided tour narratives

Our Interest

Research Aim / Question & Objectives

To Explore with a sample of Irish Sacred Site Leaders so as to determine in what ways their Spirituality Influences Visitor Experience Management at these Holy Places



How Does the Spirituality of Sacred Site Leaders Influence Visitor Experience Strategy Development and Implementation?

Objectives

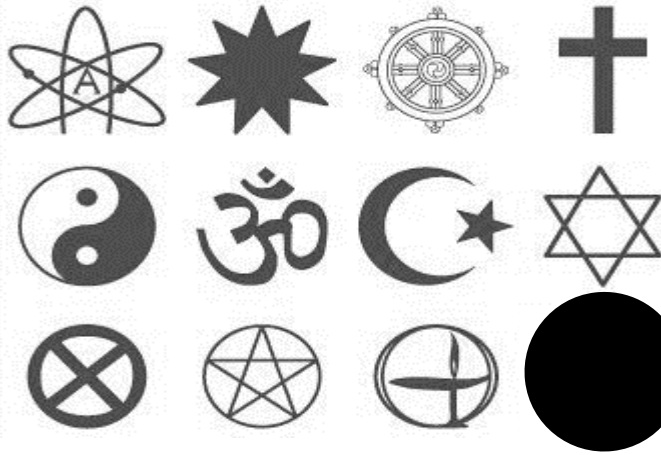
To **Advance** theoretical knowledge on sacred site visitor experience management from the managerial perspective

To **Explore** how the spirituality of leaders at different levels in the organisation influences and determines product and service development and delivery strategies

To **Examine** the extent to which leaders spirituality- based- actions, attitudes and behaviours impacts on the visitor's experience at these sites

To **Evaluate** the **implications** of their **spirituality- based -actions** in effectively catering to a diverse visitor requirement

Towards a Definition of Spirituality & of a Leader



Definitions & Perspectives on Spirituality Differ

Spirituality is more of an **individual practice**, it also relates with the process of **developing beliefs** around the **meaning of life & Connection** with others

Christians Views & Perspectives

The inability to separate the term spirituality from its religiousness

Spirituality is a process by which individuals recognise the importance of Orienting their lives to something non-material that is beyond or greater than themselves so that there is an acknowledgement of and at least some dependence upon a higher power which is invisible or spirit
(Martin & Carlson, 1999)

Spirituality has been defined as our inner consciousness a specific form of work feeling that energises action, sometimes a world view plus a path”
(Cavanagh et al., 2001 & Guillory)

Pattison (2001, p.34) contests that if the word is removed from this association then it
“ is lost in the interest of providing bespoke meta-physical marshmallow that is non-specific, unlocated, thin, uncritical, dull and un-nutritious”

A **Leader** is defined as a person or thing that holds a dominant or superior position within a field, and is able to exercise a high degree of control or influence over others & Cause others to follow some course of action or line of thought
(Business Dictionary)



Spirituality From an Organisational Management Standpoint

Research conducted by McCormick (1994) on American managers and their Spirituality at work revealed that :

Managers bring their **deepest spiritual values** to bear on their work

Many **Believing managers** say that their **relationship** with **God Influences** their **work lives more than any other factor**

Understanding the Role of Spirituality in the Management of the visitor experience at sacred sites

1. **'Lived Spiritualities'** i.e. the way spirituality is acted out in everyday life
2. **'Reflective Spiritualities'** which is an interpretation and the way of communication of this experience

(Sharma & Bharti, 2014)



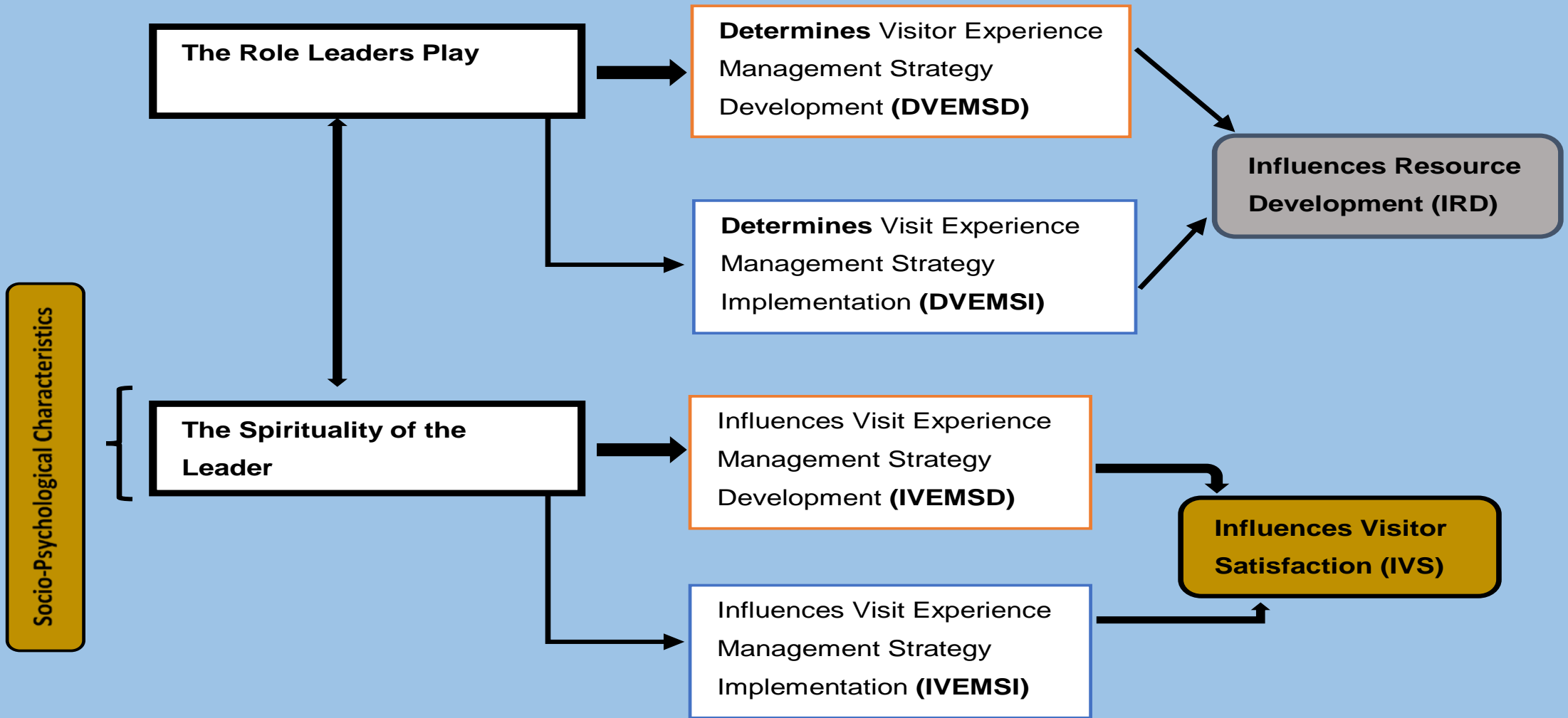
Research Approach & Methods Employed	
Research Tools	Interviews (in-depth) / semi-focus groups
Research Participants	Managers, Tour Guides, Administrators, Rectors, Priests
Sampling Frame	Irish sacred sites / Diverse category/ (Shrine, Island, Monasteries, Cathedrals, Mountain & Churches)
Response Rate	23 Interviews 11 sacred sites
Data Analysis Technique	Data Manually Transcribed



[Research Outcome]

- ❖ Findings revealed that the spirituality of the leader, either based on religion or upon secular influences to a **greater extent** the sort of experience visitors get at these sacred sites.
- ❖ It revealed that the **more spiritual** the leader the more **inclined** they were to visitor experience management **strategies** and their **implementations** that catered to the religiously / spiritually – motivated visitor, and vice versa,
- ❖ Tour Leaders **wielded absolute power** to deliver the tours in ways that best suited them, those who considered themselves **more spiritual** tended to direct their narratives to include more religious aspect of the site
- ❖ While the **less spiritual**, focused their **narrative** towards the historical and archaeological aspect of the site.

Perspectives of Spirituality and its influence in the Management of the Visitor Experience at Sacred Sites



Source: The Authors

Implications

Questions to what **extent** visitors diverse needs and expectations are effectively catered for & visitor satisfaction with their experiences

While highlighting the **complexities** involved in effectively catering to a multiplicity of visitors needs at sacred sites.

Conclusions / Summary

❖ The spirituality of the leader plays a significant role in shaping the sort of experiences visitors get at sacred sites

❖ Thus, the findings of the study reveal that the spirituality of the leader implicitly and explicitly influences visitor experiences management at a diverse category of sacred sites in the Island of Ireland.

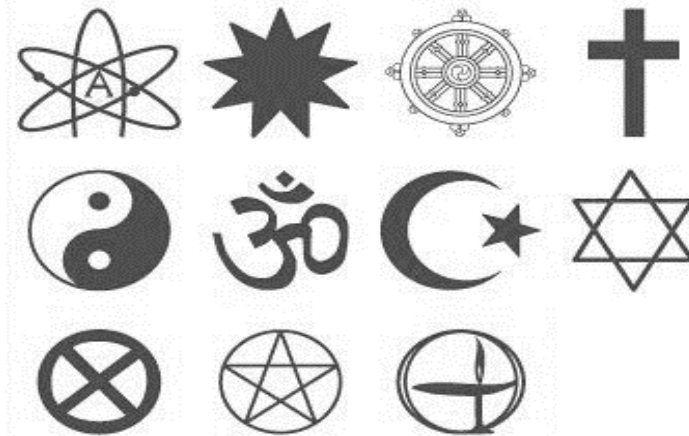
❖ Leaders perception / view on tourism at these ecclesiastical sites, significantly influences the typology of product and service development and delivery strategies and their implementations

Future Research

❖ The Research **opens avenue** for more investigations into those factors that might play a vital role in influencing visitor experience management at sacred sites.

❖ Such as the **demographic characteristics** (age, gender etc.), crucial in that most of the sacred sites are male dominated organisations.

❖ It could also be explored from different religious and spiritual backgrounds, i.e. **Muslims, Buddhist, Hindu, etc**



Thank You for Your Attention!!!

Any Questions

