Religious Tourism Product Bundling an Innovative Approach to Destination Marketing and Visitor Experience Management: The case of Early Christian Sites in the East of Ireland

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Introduction & Background
Destination Marketing

DMO (Destination Marketing Organisations)

Promoting Places
- Towns or Cities

Branding Destinations

Communicating with Potential visitors
- Influencing their preferences, intention to travel & Final destination

Increase in Visitor Numbers
- & Economic Benefit

Promoting Developments & Marketing of Destinations
How Innovative Is the Approach?

Niche Innovation

Combining Existing Products in New ways to Cater to the Needs and Expectations of Visitors

Religious Tourism Products & Other Cultural & Heritage Products in Destination Marketing
Destinations that Successfully Market themselves as Religious Tourism Destinations

- Saudi Arabia
- Israel
- Italy (some what)
Yet !!!

There are Enormous Benefits that could be Accrued from Utilising Sacred Resources as Destination Marketing Tools the World Over & in Ireland in particular
Because!!!!

An increasing Number of People from all age Groups, Nationality, Gender, visiting sacred sites

It is apparent that sacred sites now play a different role for today’s generation than they did in previous generations (Bond, 2013)

Grabbing the Benefits of Religious Tourism will be easier by adopting a marketing perspective (Kartal, Tepeci, & Atli, 2015)
Importance of Utilising Religious Tourism as a Marketing Tool

Religious Tourism Seems to be the Trend projected increase in Visitor Numbers To Sacred Sites (UNWTO, 2014, Tourism & More, 2014)

Travel Irrespective of the Economic Climate (UNWTO, 2014, Tourism & More, 2014)
However in Ireland!!!

Very Little Effort has gone into Promoting Ireland as a Religious Tourism Destination

Do you think Religious Sites are taken seriously?

Lack of Interest in Showcasing/ Promoting Irelands Ecclesiastical / Religious Wealth
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sacred Site</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Annual Visitor No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knock Shrine Pilgrimage Centre</td>
<td>Co. Mayo</td>
<td>Ireland West</td>
<td>1.600.00</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croagh Patrick</td>
<td>Co. Mayo</td>
<td>Ireland West</td>
<td>220.000</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballintubber</td>
<td>Co. Mayo</td>
<td>Ireland West</td>
<td>35.000</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lough Derg</td>
<td>Co. Donegal</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>20.000</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Failte Ireland Visitor Attraction Survey, 2012
Geographical Representation of Sacred Sites

Failte Statistics, 2012

Study’s Findings

There are 2,470 Ecclesiastical Sites
Griffin, Gorman, Stacey, & O’Halloran (2008)
Evidence of **Growing Awareness** of the **Importance** of **Religious Heritages** as **Strategic Tools** in **Branding** Ireland as a Destination
Objective of the Study

To highlight the importance of utilising religious tourism resources as strategic tools in destination marketing

To highlight the potential economic benefits of utilising religious tourism resources as part of a strategic marketing tool

To advocate the use of these religious heritages as tools in strategic destination marketing (*future strategies*)

To provide evidence of the potential use of religious heritages as strategic marketing tools in marketing Ireland as a destination
Mixed-Methods

Desk Research
Government Reports, Media- Coverage, Websites

Expert conversation
Management of site
Findings
Themes for Brand “Ancient East”

4 Distinct Thematic Pillars

- Ancient Irish History
- Early Christian Ireland
- Anglo, Ireland
- Medieval Ireland

Showcasing the variety and diversity in the area
Ireland Ancient East Tourism Project

- Umbrella **Brand Offering** Visitors a compelling Motivation to visit the East of Ireland
- Discovery of **5000 years** of Europe's History
- **Making use of Religious Heritages** as part of the destination marketing strategy (Monasteries, Castles, Fortresses, Stone Age Art)
- Touring Region as opposed to a Route
Clonmacnoise

St Canice's Cathedral

Holy Cross Abbey

Mellifont Abbey

Jerpoint Abbey

Glendalough Monastery
Findings

To date, religious and pilgrimage heritage sites have been considered as fundamental gateways to success and economic recovery.

They form an integral part of innovative destination marketing and visitor experience management strategies.

Sacred sites are an invaluable tool in marketing Ireland as a destination internationally, and are a potential resource in enhancing the visitor experience, through the provision of personal experiences.

It is also thought that such sites should be useful in attracting new market segments through online marketing and extensive use of media platforms.
Religious & Pilgrimage as a Potential Destination Marketing Tool for Ireland

- Its plethora of sacred sites (2.470) stories to experience for religiously motivated tourists  
  (Griffin et al., 2008)

- Huge religious tourism market segment (e.g. American mkt segment)

- Religious events (Reek Sunday Croagh Patrick & Knock Shrine, Monasteries, Cathedrals, Festivals)
Marketing Ireland as a Religious Tourism Destination

- Use of media platforms local news papers, internet, YouTube videos, mobile apps enables cost-effective marketing communication etc, used by ancient east

- Religious tourism marketing has many benefits (increase tourism revenue by attracting new & high income tourists & Diversifying the sources of tourism revenue

- Increases both individual spending on tourism & Duration of stay during religious trips

- Alleviates seasonality problems in Tourism by attracting faith tourist all year round.

- Brings in new points of attraction to a country's tourism

- Helps local economies develop and contribute to sustainable development

- Religious tourism has enormous potential for marketing Ireland internationally if properly utilised
Implications for the study

The study has implications for all religious tourism destinations where there is a need to understand the role these resources play in marketing and enhancing the visitor experience.
Acknowledgement
Any Questions?