Religious Heritages as Tools for Sustainable Economic Development: the case of Ireland’s Ecclesiastical Settlement Glendalough

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Religious Heritages as Tools for Sustainable Economic Development: the case of Irelands Glendalough Monastic Settlement

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World religious travel is the fastest growing segments in travel. A significant and rapidly growing segment. An estimated (300-330mn) visitors to sacred sites annually and 60% Tourists.

40% from Europe, Nos. expected to DOUBLE in 2020 (UNWTO, 2014, Tourism & More, 2014)

Appeal to people of all ages and all nationalities

Estimated at ($USD, 18bn) (Tourism & More, 2014)
Problem Statement

• Role played has **not** received **considerable** attention in academia

• **Especially** the sustainable economic development **role** it **plays** for regions in which they **serve** as the **main source** of **tourism**

• The role it **might** play has been **acknowledged** by a few scholars
Religious and pilgrimage sites are often classified under Cultural Tourism Attractions

But !!!

Religious tourism is a unique tourism product & data and statistics pertaining to the sector must not be disguised under the cultural tourism attractions umbrella
Empirical analysis by Cardenas (2012) of the possibility of regional development through religious tourism

Rizzello & Trono (2013) on pilgrimage to the San Nicola Shrine in Bari and its impact, whose findings revealed that from an economic standpoint, there has been no noticeable economic impact on the local community.
Yet !!!

- There is **dearth** in research that explores this phenomenon **globally** & especially in regions where they **serve** as the **main source** of tourism……

In the Island of Ireland in Particular *
Research into the role religious heritages play in the sustainable economic development of regions in which they are located remains noticeably scarce in the religious tourism scholarship. Till date, no study has been done in Ireland.
Study’s Objectives

To **Explore** the role religious and pilgrimage heritage sites play in the sustainable economic development of regions, especially the Glendalough and Laragh regions of Ireland.

An **Investigation** into stakeholders perception on the sustainable economic development of both the Glendalough and Laragh regions as a result of tourism to the Glendalough Monastic site.

To **Evaluate** the **typology** of sustainable economic developments evident in both the Glendalough and Laragh regions, as a result of governmental strategies and policies aimed at enhancing the on-site and off-site experience of visitors to Glendalough Monastic site.

To **Examine** the **extent** to which governmental policies and strategies geared towards economic developments have been guided by the principle of sustainable tourism development.
A Holistic View of Glendalough Monastic Site
Glendalough Monastic Site

- Is about **52km** from Dublin City Centre

- Glendalough is both a **sacred site** and a **cultural** tourist attraction

- One of Irelands **most beautiful** and **visited destination**, that dates as far back as the 6th century, when the hermit Monk St Kevin founded the monastic site

- It attracts **1.5 million** visitors annually (Tourists & Pilgrims)

- **Till date** some pilgrims still walk St Kevin's way (18 mile, 30km) and visit its **prayer centre, Retreat**

- Often called an **enduring place for pilgrimage**

  [Link](http://www.dochara.com/places-to-visit/glendalough/)
Mixed-Methods

- Desk research
  - Government Reports, Media Coverage
  - Websites, journal articles

- Survey Questionnaire with Locals, Local Business Owners

- Expert conversation with Management of site

- Participant Observation
Research Findings

- Findings revealed that the religious heritage has played a fundamental role in regional economic development.

- The theme of ‘spiritual heritage’ is making a growing economic and social contribution for the local community (increase in visitor Nos.)

- This has led to the development of products and services aimed at enhancing the visitor experience leading to;......

- **Investment:** ‘people, and ‘product’ intensive industries (subsidies from the Gov’t)

- **Entrepreneurial:** Expansion of existing retail outlets (restricted to primary development zone)

- **Employment opportunities:** (in the tourism, hospitality & Leisure sectors)

- Triggered other Infrastructural Developments (e.g. roads) & Nature-based Product Development (walking trails, hiking & Hill walking)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Glendalough</th>
<th>Laragh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location and Distance from Dublin city</td>
<td>52km from Dublin City Centre</td>
<td>51km from Dublin City Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Visitor Numbers</td>
<td>1.5 million visitors Annually</td>
<td>1.5 million visitors Annually ??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typology of Visitors</td>
<td>Pilgrims &amp; Tourists</td>
<td>Pilgrims &amp; Tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructural Development</td>
<td>Roads, housing units, parking space</td>
<td>Housing Units,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial, and Investment opportunities</td>
<td>Hotels, B&amp;B’s, Restaurants, Pubs, Craft shops, Guest Houses, Chipper Van, Ice-cream stand, Glendalough woollen mill</td>
<td>Hotels, B&amp;B’s, Restaurants, Pubs, Guest Houses, woollen mills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Accommodation Units in both regions &amp; their environs</td>
<td>106 accommodation units for both the Glendalough- Laragh regions and its environs</td>
<td>To include, Hotels, Hostels, Self-catering Units, Caravans &amp; Camping units, Inns &amp; Pub accommodation, &amp; other Unique venues (i.e. the Hermitage centre for pilgrims) &amp; Group accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Businesses in both regions &amp; their environs</td>
<td>174 Businesses in total for both regions</td>
<td>To include, Restaurants, Cafes &amp; pubs &amp; Bars, &amp; take away foods &amp; drinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Development Initiatives</td>
<td>Glendalough Monastic Trail, St Kevin’s and St O’Tooles Festivals, St Kevin’s way Routes) Glendalough green, Spinc.</td>
<td>Glendalough Monastic Trails, Wicklow way, Ballbraid &amp; Ballyboy Trail.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These developments and opportunities have been guided by governmental policies and strategies that are keen to improve the economic, environmental and social welfare of the local communities. (eg. Zoning)

Sustainable economic developments have been evident thanks to the collaborative efforts between governments, public and private organisations and the local community.
Economic Benefits of Activities to Host Communities

- **Sustainable economic approach**

**Entrepreneurial opportunities**
- Bike rental

**Investments Opportunities**
- Mobile adventure company providing guided tours
- Accommodation & Food Sector

**Multiplier effect / sustainable economic benefits to local community**
Sustainable Economic/ Environmental Development Approach (Developments of Trails)

Source: https://thewicklowwalkers.wordpress.com/tag/ireland/
Conclusion & Implications of the Study

Religious and pilgrimage sites can be successfully used as tools in the sustainable economic development of regions and destinations.

Especially for regions that are geographically isolated, but are host to a religious or pilgrimage site, which serve as their main tourism product in the case of Glendalough.

The study has implications for all religious tourism destinations where there is a need to understand the role these sacred heritages play in the sustainable Development of regions in which they are located.
References


• Pistocchi, F., Zabbini, E, (2009). International Conference on Tourism, Religion and Culture in Salento Italy.


• http://wicklowcountywalks.com/stkevinsway.html
Many Thanks For Your Attention!!!

Any Questions