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

Vreny Enongene  
*Technological University Dublin*, vreny.enongene1@mydit.ie

Kevin Griffin  
*Technological University Dublin*, kevin.griffin@tudublin.ie

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

Vreny Enongene, Ph.D. Candidate & Dr Kevin Griffin

Dublin Institute of Technology,
School of Hospitality Management and Tourism,
Cathal Brugha Street. Dublin 1

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Introduction & Background

World religious travel **fastest growing segments** in travel

Significant & **rapidly growing** segment. An estimated (300-330mn) visitors to sacred sites annually & **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.
Friel (2008) on how orthodox spiritual routes and monasteries, could be used as regional development strategy tools equally acknowledged the possibility.

Conference on Tourism Religion and Culture that was held in Salento Italy in (2009).

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.
Glendalough Monastic Site

- Is about **52km** from Dublin City Centre
- Glendalough is both a **sacred site** and a **cultural** tourist attraction
- One of Ireland's 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

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

- **Participant Observation**

- **Expert conversation with**
  - Management of site
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

Employment Opportunities

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.


• 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!!!