‘The Motivations of Religious Heritage Visitors’

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Outline

• Introduce A.I.T.
• Introduce Atlas and the Religious Tourism Special Interest Group.
• Research Activity.
• Motivations of Religious Heritage Visitors
• Clonmacnoise
• Conclusion
AIT is an award-winning higher education institution located in the heart of Ireland. More than 6,000 students are undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate...
Established in 1970, it has expanded in size, scope and influence over the period. €100 million has been invested in our campus since 2000, ensuring that students experience a world-class education with cutting-edge facilities.
The Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) was established in 1991 to develop transnational educational initiatives in tourism and leisure.

ATLAS provides a forum to promote staff and student exchange, transnational research and to facilitate curriculum and professional development.

ATLAS currently has members in more than 70 countries.
ATLAS Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Special Interest Group

Religious Tourism Conference
Nazare
Portugal.
November 2009
Activities

• S.I.G meet every year and hold a conference every two years.
• Members from various countries across the globe.
• Publications.
• Co-ordinate research activities with the tourism industry.
What is the aim of Research?

To formalise the anecdotal evidence of a particular type of tourism distinguished by its concentration on mental/spiritual renewal and focusing on sites/activities and events which evoke a sense of renewal, of rootedness, of rediscovery of one’s authentic self amid the chaos of ordinary life.
How to achieve this aim?

- **Academic World**
- Various research case studies across the world and across all religions.
- Conferences.
- Up to date publications on the topic.
- **But** there is a need to be more aware of the industry and to collaborate on research projects.
Aim of this Presentation.

• To examine the motivations for religious Heritage visitors in general.

• To address how these motivations apply to Clonmacnoise in particular.
Motivations

• Opportunity for worship
• Acquisition of special merits
• Desire for authentic religious experiences
• Desire for immersion in the cultural traditions of the site
• Interest in the historical, archaeological/architectural features of the site
Pilgrim-Tourist Motive Path

pilgrimage                  religious tourism                  tourism
A____________________B____________________C____________________D____________________E

sacred                      faith/profane                      secular

A. Pious Pilgrim              D Pilgrim< tourist
B. Pilgrim>tourist           E Secular tourist
C. Pilgrim=tourist

(Smith, 1992)
What Motivates the visitor?
Sacred sites as destinations for Pilgrims, Worshippers and Tourists.
Cultural tourism resources

Religious tourism resources
Spiritual tourism resources

Use Religious Resources
Clonmacnoise

- 6th Century Monastic Site (St. Cíarán)
- Outstanding example of an insular Monastic City
- Ecological significance: unique and diverse range of flora and fauna
- World Heritage Site Status Application
- 160,000 (approx.) visitors annually
River Shannon
Temple Finghin
Round Tower

• ‘It was a place from where Europe was re-evangelised in the Dark Ages. That’s where the real importance was. We have the round tower here. I think that is particularly significant because one of its functions was like a lighthouse and you know Clonmacnoise was like a light house to the rest of Europe in the Dark Ages.’
Site Functions

Functions of Clonmacnoise

- Cultural Tourist Attraction
- Roman Catholic Site of Worship/ Burial
- Church of Ireland Site of Worship/ Burial
- Youth 2000 Festival Site
Who is visiting?

Clonmacnoise Visitor Profile

ORIGIN:
Predominantly from Mainland Europe but a majority of Irish visitors attending religious events

AGE:
Wide range of age-groups but predominant age group is 35-65

RELIGION:
Wide range of religions and levels of religiosity

GENDER:
Equal representation from both genders

EDUCATION:
Predominantly well-educated with 49% having a degree or higher degree

OCCUPATION:
Wide range of occupations but predominantly professional

EMPLOYMENT STATUS:
48% employed or self-employed
Why do they visit?

A wide array of motivations involved

1. Cultural
2. Religious/Religious Interest
3. Spiritual
4. Health and Wellness
What Motivates the Visitor?

- Religious: 39 visitors
- Spiritual: 33 visitors
- Health and Wellness: 2 visitors
- Cultural: 79 visitors
Predominant Motivations

- Desire to interact with Irish heritage
- Desire to interact with religious heritage
- Desire to hear the account of the site’s greatness and influence
- Underlying quest for meaning
- Scenic and atmospheric qualities of the site
- Source of inspiration
Effect of visit on the visitor

- The differing experiences of the visitor whether pilgrim or tourist should be researched after they return home and the visit effect on themselves.

- The **transformation** or level of change should be noted:

- Attitude, perception, external characteristics.
Effect of visit on the visitor

- All visitors have different expectations from their trips. (Rbron, 1999 Frey 1998)

- **The question is how different?**

- One end there is the spiritual visitors (not necessarily pilgrims) searching for new meaning in life and site visits can change lives.

- Other end secular visitors may move along the continuum during the journey and return as spiritual visitors. (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005)
Findings on Transformation

• Increased emotional and mental wellness
• Sense of spiritual fulfilment
• Sense of connection in life
• Sense of ancestral connection

BUT

• Not necessarily lasting transformation
Interviewee Comments

• ‘I became more positive and I suppose more in touch with my spirituality again. It’s a constant thing trying to get it back.’

• ‘I definitely had more of a connection with my Higher Power, coming away, and just felt better, lighter... But just because I did something spiritual last week doesn’t mean I will feel spiritual this week. For me, it is just a daily reprieve’.
Communitas

- The phenomenon of temporary fellowship and comradeship which develops among pilgrims (Turner, 1972)
Evidence of Communitas

- ‘The chance to get together with other people all on the same path, and people of different backgrounds all getting together to celebrate their faith: There’s a lot of power in that.’

- ‘You make great connections with people there I find. People are very friendly and you can relate to people easily because you’re all there for the same thing.’
Conclusions

• Potential to address the sense of ‘disconnection’ experienced by many

• Potential to provide a crucial point of connection with the past, with a sense of mission, with Higher Power and with Others

• Potential to transform