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**“WHISTLE PAST THE CHURCH NO MORE”; -ADDING VALUE TO BRAND
EXPERIENCE TOURISM IN DUBLIN’S LIBERTIES**

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“WHISTLE PAST THE CHURCH NO MORE”; -ADDING VALUE TO BRAND EXPERIENCE TOURISM IN DUBLIN’S LIBERTIES

ABSTRACT

Situated in the Liberties area of Dublin, and within a short walk of Trinity College, the Guinness Storehouse serves as an iconic key attractor for up to one million visitors annually. The success of this visitor attraction can be directly attributed to a “brand immersion” strategy, which emotionally links the visitor with the brand through cultural identification alignment. Yet many tourists, in accessing Ireland’s premier tourist attraction, often pass within the shadows of a cluster of lesser known, but nonetheless significant church heritage sites.

While acknowledging that at the extreme ends of an experience continuum “brand visitation” and “church visitation” experiences can be quite different, with outcomes ranging from brand alignment, to the church’s offering of peace, nostalgia, knowledge acquisition, “atmosphere”, or indeed, the gaining of spiritual merit, the fundamental motivation to visit these disparate attractions can be similar, with each being perceived as offering a form of intangible, post-modern, curiosity-driven cultural experience.

However, delivering this multifaceted tourist experience can often be compromised by a requirement to optimise the allocation of existing resources, within a framework of competing supply and demand factors. This is further complicated by the time pressured decision process facing the short break tourist, who will often look for added value before committing valuable time to visit a single attraction in a less attractive part of the city.

This apparent need for added value would suggest an opportunity for the development of a localised product bundling strategy for the short break visitor. Consequently, this exploratory paper will examine the possibility of blending the church visitation experience in the Liberties area of Dublin with that of the highly promoted “must see” visit to the Guinness Storehouse, from a supply side perspective, which hopefully will provide the basis for a demand side perspective to be assessed at a later date.

The methodology employed is mainly qualitative, involving unstructured interviews with key informants.

The study’s findings may be used to explore the possibility of developing a heritage trail, using the concept of “synergy through good citizenship”, as applied across these “once adversarial” stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, the demand for cultural/heritage tourist experiences continues to grow. It is estimated that this form of tourism currently achieves average growth rates of 15% - three times the overall growth rate of other forms of tourism, while delivering high yield returns to tourism suppliers (Fáilte Ireland, 2007). This statistic is re-enforced by recent research, which indicate that internationally, cultural or heritage tourism represents about one third of all tourism business, and more significantly, when collaborating, are key drivers of brand and destination attractiveness, destination choice and city break competitiveness (OECD, 2009; Dolnicar and Grabler, 2004)).

This exponential growth in short, city break tourism, would appear to have created opportunities to develop tourism revenue streams from heritage products that actually exist on our doorstep. Hannabuss (1999) suggests that within the context of increasing attention being paid to heritage from various interested stakeholders, UK tourism has been quick to recognise the commercial significance of “history” as both a source of revenue, and a way of defining identity. This consumer attraction to heritage and history, and the experiential benefits associated with “past-related” consumption practices (Chronis, 2005), would appear to add weight to any such commercial proposition. And although well established that cities have always possessed cultural functionality, the evolution of a global, service-oriented economy has placed culture at the very centre of urban development, and has in turn, shifted traditional notions of culture from the elitist ownership of art and heritage, to viewing these as economic assets with market value (Garcia, 2004).

Additionally, growth in cultural education and awareness (through media and technology conduits), in an ageing, mobile and cash-rich tourist population, has triggered an interest in exploring history and heritage. However, Goulding (2001) argues that this contemporary quest for history among tourists has often resulted in history “commodification”. Nevertheless, given this knowledge dynamic, tourist destinations are faced with ever increasing challenges to portray attractive and positive imagery with a view to targeting increasingly narrow tourist segments and maintaining competitive advantage (McCartney 2008; Bonn, Joseph and Dai 2005).

Dublin, and in particular the Liberties area of Dublin, with its mix of heritage and history attractions, would appear to be ideally positioned to capitalise on this interest in culture. A compact region of the city, it houses the Guinness Storehouse (an industrial brand, attracting over a million tourists annually), and a significant scattering of ecclesiastical heritage sites, that boast both architectural grandeur and contents of great cultural merit, which should, in theory, add value to the city break visitor experience. Additionally, accessing these cultural/heritage attractions is relatively easy. Recent research states that 72% of visitors view walking as the favoured means of getting around Dublin (Dublin Visitor Survey, 2008).

Yet, the visitor perception of cultural value and attractiveness can itself be transient. Dublin, though imbued with unique and accessible cultural and heritage attractions, appears to have experienced a significant decline in its cultural reputation among visitors. Findings suggest that although still positively viewed, (a 76% positive response), 2008 figures indicate a significant and worrying downward trend in this perception; namely, a 12% decrease from the 2007 figures, and a 21% decrease from the highs of 2006 (Dublin Visitor Survey, 2008). This downward perceptual trend creates a challenge for the cultural tourism product in Dublin. While analysis of these findings indicates a difference between international figures on the growth of cultural tourism, and the perception of visitors to Dublin in 2008, a more interesting internal differential appears to exist between the highly successful visitor figures for the Guinness Storehouse, and the decline in the perception of Dublin as a city of culture.

In the light of the statistical and perceptual dichotomy outlined above, a challenge for tourism in Dublin would be to attempt to reverse this perception by exploring the possibility of developing a localised ecclesiastical heritage trail in its Liberties Quarter, through a process of collaboration, creativity and product bundling among suppliers, that collectively, may add value to the visitor experience in the area.

CHURCHES AS TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

Growth in Religious Tourism

Internationally, churches are one of the few visitor attractions to show sustained growth in visitor numbers over the last decade (Shackley, 2002; Honkanen, 2002). Winter and Gasson (1996) suggests that within this ill-defined market segment, visitor motivation varies wildly from the need for a life changing experience, to just having somewhere to “while away a wet afternoon”.

While religious and brand tourism sometimes appear to share a common pool of visitors, religious tourism in itself, is certainly big business. It is estimated that over 3.5 millions pilgrims visit Santiago de Compostela each year, but this figure pales when compared against the 12 million ordinary tourists who annually visit the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, making it the most popular tourism attraction in Europe (Bywater 1994). This huge footfall obviously presents challenges, not least in balancing the need to conserve church fabric, with the provision of a high quality experience for the visitor. So, how might a church visitation experience add value to a Guinness Storehouse visit?

The Effective Use of Space

One wonders if all is well with suppliers of the church “heritage product”? While it would appear that the nature of the church visitor experience is complex, ranging from art appreciation to nostalgia, to closeness to God and the gaining of spiritual merit (Eliade 1981), some churches and cathedrals are also in the business of providing visitor services and generating revenue. Indeed, the modern challenge to the functionality of the church as a “visitor space” with “creative usage,” has increasingly impacted on its ability to satisfy the value code of its worshippers. Shackley (2002) argues that while forty three Anglican diocesan cathedrals in England attract in excess of 30 million tourists visitors per year, many also function as museums, centres for pilgrimage and foci for the performing arts. This multi-functionality, according to Hannabuss (1999), suggests that lifestyle and media influences contribute to making locals and tourists alike, enthusiastic consumers of heritage and culture. And although it may be argued that excessive visitor numbers may adversely diminish the fabric of a cathedral (by theft, vandalism, graffiti, protest or erosion), they undeniably make a positive economic input into cathedral finances.

God and Mammon Factors; Traditional and Post-Modern Church Visitor Experiences

Broadly speaking, visitors to churches may be divided into two groups, those whose primary motivation is religious, and the far larger group, whose interest lies in post-modern satisfaction of cultural, history or heritage interests (Shackley, 2002). Further segmentation would suggest that for some of the above, churches and cathedrals are architecturally significant, often containing great works of art (Shackley 2002), while for others, the church visitation experience can be an emotional one, almost equating to a return to the womb.

Indeed, the distinction between those who visit the cathedral as a tourist, and those who come to worship, is far from clear-cut. While experience-negating issues such as cultural commodification may, for some traditional visitors, conspire to devalue the uniqueness of the visitation experience, (Hannabuss 1999), a “post-modern bricolage” sets up an altogether different experience for the post-modern visitor, who may be unfazed by the juxtaposition of images from disparate cultural spheres. Furthermore, when considering the behavioural traits of the post-modern visitor, the apparent lack of reverence may not be consciously “unreverential”. Shackley (2002) argues that while the cathedral allows its visitors to rediscover the joys of ancient space, through divorcing them from the external “real world”, it is tempting to suggest that within the emerging pressurised short break holiday market, some post-modern visitors are seeking a ‘quick fix’ spiritual experience by entering a place of worship, for a transient, but nonetheless significant encounter with sanctity.

The post-modern visitor, though not always visiting for spiritual renewal, may also be attracted to a cathedral, by the nature of its connection to the world of entertainment. Recent examples of this are Gloucester Cathedral, which featured in “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone”, and for the BBC’s adaptation of Johanna Trollope’s novel, “The Choir”, in 1995 (Shackley 2002). Similarly, Christchurch Cathedral in Dublin has recently become a more attractive location due to its setting for “The Tudors”, a BBC television series. This would suggest that church tourism often strays into the realm of brand tourism, wherein experiential advertising is a very powerful signifier (Hannabuss 1999), and where within visitor motivation, critical distinctions between cultural experience and mere gratification break down.

The Local Focus

Today's tourists have different experiential needs, and within these needs, knowledge acquisition, through creative and animated tourism has a strong attraction, particularly for the post-modern tourist. For example, in Dublin, the Guinness Storehouse offers a creative experience in the pulling of a pint of Guinness. Christchurch Cathedral, in offering the locational setting for episodes of "The Tudors," attempts to synthesise the authentic and the artificial, and thus satisfy the curiosity of the de-differentiated tourist. "Dublinia" emphasises the experience of how we used to live, through re-enacting Viking life in Dublin.

On the other hand, little appears to have changed in some local churches over the last 200 years. Stained glass windows created by Harry Clarke, Healy and Methyens (John's Lane and St. Nicholas of Myra), burial crypts and seventeenth century fire-brigades (St Werburgh's), the Lucky Stone (St Audeon's), baptismal and burial records, multiple examples of breathtaking architecture, and mosaic-laden shrines, offer an authentic, if un-mediated, static experience, that might well be of interest to both populist and quirky tourist tastes.

HERITAGE SUPPLY-SIDE FACTORS

Barriers to Usage of Church Heritage Sites

Due to a worldwide explosion of interest in culture tourism, the preservation of history and heritage has become a critical concern for visitor attraction providers and conservationists alike. According to Font and Ahjem, (1999), the tourist's use of a destination, changes the nature of the destination through abuse, and/or, wear and tear caused by uncontrolled footfall on the attraction. Co-incidentally, this often un-intentioned damage is created by the same factors that ignite an interest in the attraction (tourist mobility, increase in acquired knowledge, and financial acumen). This in turn may impact on the perceived authenticity of the attraction, when cultural tourism is viewed as a quick and easy solution to combating economic deficiencies (Font and Ahjem, 1999). Additionally, local residents may react negatively to sharing resources with tourists. Many contemporary church visitors are unaware of previously accepted behavioural norms, such as keeping one's voices down inside a cathedral. This perception of the importance of sanctity is central to the idea that sacred space exists only for those who know and respect its characteristics (Shackley 2002).

The issue of revenue generation also constitutes a barrier to church tourist usage, and the generation of revenue, whether through donation, or admission fee is an anathema to some churches. This would appear to suggest that some churches might not be so strongly focussed on generating income from tourists, and would see this practice as skirting the interface between the sacred and the profane (McCannell 1992), in that it clashes with their core objective; - the provision of a facility to those who wish to pray and meditate. Urry (1990) also suggests that the tourist often sees cathedral space as something to be preserved and gazed upon, but not changed. Thus when attempts are made to radicalise the use of that space, whether by physical modification of the site, or by the introduction of charging, a dissonance arises.

However, Mansfield (2008) argues, that for others, it is not surprising, that bearing in mind the high maintenance costs and declining attendance, churches and cathedrals might look to their visitors for additional revenue, despite the fact that instituting a charging system in a church or cathedral is not that straightforward, due to endeavouring to establish what discounts or free access should be given to local people, how access for worshippers is maintained, and how to provide visitors, who have now become customers, with real value for money, all of which may ultimately conspire to create a potential deterrent to opening the church as a visitor attraction (Mansfield, 2008; Shackley, 2002).

Inter-Supplier/Developer Conflict

The brief of stakeholder categories differs according to their mission, with private businesses requiring the maximisation of profit margins, educational institutions seek to raise the awareness of the product, owner/occupiers seek to generate revenue streams or invite visitors to experience spiritual well-being, while public sector organisations appear to place a greater emphasis on optimising available resources and the delivery of net social benefits (Font and Ahjem 1999). However, the authors also posit that almost inevitably, there is conflict due to the individual objectives of each of these groups varying to an extent that these differences will affect the way in which supply as a whole can be managed.

The idea of “net social benefit” is very relevant to the area under consideration. Heritage product suppliers and developers in the Liberties area of Dublin, broadly speaking, fall into four categories, namely, government (public sector bodies), private businesses, educational institutions and owner-occupiers. The Liberties area of Dublin is a semi-derelict location, which houses the largest visitor attraction in Ireland (The Guinness Storehouse), a honey-pot visitor attraction, while simultaneously boasting some of the finest, if under-utilised cultural attractions in the city. The location of visitor attractions can have an impact on both supply and demand factors for the product. Issues such as visitor safety, and a perception that the area is “run down” may impact on visitor intention to walk through the area. Indeed, one wonders if, were it not for the presence of the Guinness Storehouse, what percentage of their one million visitors would travel to this area of Dublin? This over-dependence on one visitor attraction, however excellent, seems shortsighted, and lacking in strategic area development planning. Garcia (2004), using a case study from Glasgow, states that transforming industrial cities into service-oriented economies has successfully been accompanied by a growing interest in using culture as a tool for urban regeneration. However, in the current recessionary climate, stiff competition for scarce financial resources may well put the idea of re-development on the back burner.

PRODUCT BUNDLING, COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY

Product Bundling Opportunities

In order to overcome a dependence on government funding, it may become imperative for cultural/heritage suppliers to collaborate in a creative manner, in order to overcome potential problems with respect to the supply of cultural funding in the conflicting environment of economic instability and increasing cultural supply (OECD 2009). Hankinson (2004) suggests that history, heritage and culture, are highly salient in the formation of visitor destination decisions, and as such he argues strongly for the bundling of these products for tourists to ease the decision process. The establishment therefore of a critical mass of provision is advisable, for attractions to work in close collaboration with one another. Hodges (2000) cites the example of Vinopolis, a wine museum in the South Bank area of London, that in utilising a collaborative domain-destination strategy, co-operates with heritage and arts attractions such as Shakespeare’s

Globe Theatre, The South Bank Centre and The Tate Modern Gallery, through the development of destination visitor-management strategies, with the corresponding avoidance of location cannibalisation strategies.

Collaboration and Creative Opportunities

Given the increasingly difficult competitive environment in which many visitor services and attractions find themselves, effective collaboration may mean the difference between success and failure (Fyall 2003). With the already stated perception that Dublin has becoming less of a cultural attraction (Dublin Visitor Survey 2008), when mapped against similar findings in studies from the UK (Stevens 2000), cultural/heritage tourism appears to be set to experience challenging times, and will need to adapt a more strategic approach to managing attractions than heretofore.

Collaboration between visitor attractions offers the opportunity to collectively package the visitor product within one geographic area, for the time pressurised short break visitor (Fyall, Leask and Garrod, 2001), with aggregate benefits being derived from initiatives such as pooling resources, to sharing market information. Fyall (2003) suggests that this form of collaboration acts to create a vehicle for the natural congruence of tourism objectives between independent partners operating within a particular tourism destination, and wherein decisions made are more likely to benefit the wider destination rather than individual attractions in isolation.

It is important to note that there may also be disadvantages to collaboration such as mutual distrust over contrasting and contracting visitor numbers, unhealthy competition from non participating “honeypot” attractions, and conflict between attractions with different ownership backgrounds and opposing objectives (Fyall 2003). The disadvantages of collaboration are further complicated by psychological factors such as unease over an apparent loss of control over decision making with greater loss weighting being applied at differential rates.

So, does a newer, creative approach need to be taken to communicate with the traditional or indeed, the post-modern tourist? Do culture/heritage product suppliers need to adopt alternatives to conventional tourism marketing, which tended to focus on confirming the intentions of tourists, rather than persuading them to consume differently? Williams (2006) makes a very

strong case for the use of experiential marketing as a creative approach to increase awareness and demand for tourism and hospitality products. This relatively new orientation helps suppliers to avoid the commodification trap discussed earlier, and sees the post-modern tourists using consumption to create identities, a sense of belonging, to gain knowledge, or learn new skills. Pine and Gillmore (1998) put it well by suggesting that when a person buys a service, they purchase a set of intangible activities, carried out on their behalf. But when they buy an experience, they pay to spend time enjoying a series of events that are staged to engage them in a personal way. In other words, the tourism experience moves from “the passive” to “the active”.

The Guinness storehouse has become a first mover in this field. They argue that experiential marketing is driving sales of Guinness around the world through creating “over 2.5 million brand ambassadors, who are talking about Guinness” (Williams, 2006). Other strategic benefits of experiential marketing include mediation of heritage sites, providing narratives for cultural and historical products, utilising WEB2 technology to provide guide instructions or architectural re-enactments on MP3 players, and the use of virtual tours for product animation.

So is it too great a leap of faith to believe, that this form of creative promotion could be applied in collaboration with traditional and innovative approaches to visitors on a localised ecclesiastical tour of heritage sites in the Liberties area of Dublin? Can the creative challenges for heritage product facilitators and suppliers in a semi-derelict part of Dublin, wishing to add value to brand experience tourist experience be met and overcome? What are the views from the supply side stakeholders (government agencies, tourism promotion bodies, academic institutions and church heritage sites)? And finally, would they be willing to creatively co-operate with one another to provide synergistic benefit to all concerned?

This paper enquires if the supply and mediation of a localised ecclesiastical heritage trail might be possible, through collaboration and creativity among individual stakeholders?

METHODOLOGY

This paper presents emerging findings from what is an on-going exploratory study. The research question attempts to explore if suppliers and facilitators of church heritage visitor experience can creatively collaborate in providing a localised church heritage trail, which might in turn add value to the Guinness Storehouse experience in a semi-derelict part of Dublin City. Methodologically, the author stands firmly within the interpretivist perspective (Burrell and Morgan, 2000), wherein knowledge is seen as an emergent social process, and where understanding and explanation of the phenomenon of interest, comes through the language of the respondent.

The research therefore is qualitative, with different stakeholder perspectives being taken on church heritage tourism support and supply factors and. Phenomenological, semi-structured interviews were utilised, each typically lasting for one hour, with additional interviews being accommodated by some participants to generate further relevant data if required. The use of phenomenological techniques (Crotty, 2004; Polkingstone 1999; Cresswell 1998) enabled both conscious and unconscious elements of the discourse to be explored. Snowballing techniques were used to encourage stakeholders to seek identification with other stakeholders, and promote additional contacts for research purposes.

A number of face to face interviews (fourteen to date) were carried out with key supply stakeholders with different and sometimes overlapping briefs, ranging from individual product suppliers with tourism and/or spiritual briefs (The Guinness Storehouse, St Werburgh's Church, St Audeon's Church, Christ Church Cathedral, St Patrick's Cathedral, John's Lane Church, and St Catherine's Church), through private and public tourism promotional bodies (Dublin Tourism and Fáilte Ireland), Government Bodies with an interest in conservation, heritage site development and heritage presentation (Dublin City Council and The Office of Public Works), and other interested stakeholders with conservation, educational and illustration briefs (Dublin Civic Trust, The National College of Art and Design, and tour guides). These interviews covered six broad themes, namely, attitude to tourism and tourists, marketing strategies, collaborative strategies, supply constraints, and attitudes to the development of a localised heritage trail.

In addition, a number of brief demand-lead discussions were also carried out with tourists outside of the Guinness Storehouse and John's Lane Church on two separate days, to explore the

perceptions of tourists on church and other heritage attractions in the area. This produced an anecdotal perspective, which, though not sufficiently rigorous, was contextually useful to the overall research findings.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

While acknowledging that some of the findings were site specific, the broad outcomes of this study will address a number of general themes including, stakeholder attitudes to tourism, tourists and the development of a heritage trail, supply side constraints, supply side opportunities (for creativity and collaboration) among stakeholders. Firstly, it should be noted that as this is a work in progress paper, where the findings are incomplete. Secondly, although this is a study primarily taken from a supply perspective, a small number (twenty in all), of brief, face to face on site interviews (John's Lane Church and The Guinness Storehouse) were carried out to gain a demand side perspective. These interviews were included to afford balance to the supply side findings. However, while it is acknowledged that these findings are anecdotal and not rigorously sound, their inclusion is an attempt to provide additional balance and direction for further research.

Theme Outcome One; (attitudes to tourism tourists and development of a tourist trail)

When asked of their awareness of the tourism profile within the area, almost all of the interviewees were conscious of the volume of tourists visiting the Guinness Storehouse. Bearing in mind that over a million tourists will visit the Guinness Storehouse in 2009, church interviewees did not see tourists as a threat. Indeed, quite the contrary, all of the church site representatives had an open door approach to visitors. However, a caveat arose in some cases, namely the need to "*control excessive footfall within sites*". The Office of Public Works, for example, curators of St Audeon's, though stating a wish for a greater numbers of visitors, would only wish to "*handle a maximum of forty visitors per hour*" due to church capacity. They also stated that they had a contract with the church owners, and did not want to "*damage that relationship*" by allowing an excessive number of visitors into the church. St Werburgh's equally had a preference for small group sizes "*no more than five*", for security reasons, whereas, St Catherine's, John's Lane, St Patrick's and Christchurch, because of their size, did not appear

to place a limit on the number of visitors. This finding would have implications for promoting open access for all visitors in a generalised access plan.

Some visitor attractions (Christchurch and St Patrick's) were more focussed than others on the generation of revenue streams, and consequently were relatively comfortable with charging an entrance fee. Other church sites (St Werburgh's, St Catherine's, and John's Lane) were less inclined to want to engage in this practice, but did acknowledge that tourists would be a potential source of added income through their offering donations when visiting.

Dublin Tourism suggested that inclusion in the "Travel Pass Scheme" would enable all sites to seamlessly receive an income stream from visitors. However, smaller sites (St Werburgh's) were not attracted to the technology requirement, while others (St Audeon's and John's Lane) were committed to free entry to their sites and also appeared to reject the idea.

Some interviewees, with a strong interest in promotion and/or conservation, (Dublin Tourism, Dublin Civic Trust, The Office of Public Works, and Dublin City Council) sensed that tourists, in becoming part of a proposed heritage trail, would, apart from being a significant heritage stream, raise the profile of the visitor attraction, and ultimately contribute to its conservation.

The National College of Art and Design also viewed the passing tourists as possibly offering opportunities to improve their profile and create an opportunity for mediation of the heritage experience. Again, they would welcome small interest groups that would be keen to visit their National Visual Arts Library, and exhibition centre. One sensed some frustration here when one interviewee described hearing tour bus guides shouting; "*over there is the College of Art and Design*".

In terms of the provision of a trail, there was broad interest from church interviewees in the development of, and participation in a "*daisy-chain heritage trail*". However, certain caveats also emerged here. Conservation driven groups were less enthusiastic about the provision of a heritage trail. Two interviewees from Dublin City Council "*could not see any role for their organisation in the development or facilitation of a heritage trail*". Another member of this

organisation stated that *“if we were seen to give money to tourism development in the area, we would be shot by those working with homelessness”*, and again *“I could not see Dublin City Council telling any church how to handle visitors”*. Dublin Civic Trust felt that the proposal would need to be *“properly scoped out”* and in the present state of development of the area, they would not like to participate in heritage trail tourism, as the *“product would not be “authentic enough”* and *“access would need to be greatly improved”*.

Theme Outcome Two; (supply side constraints)

Throughout the research, funding was viewed a problem, particularly for public sector bodies. When asked why they opened for only six months of the year, the St Audeon’s representative replied that they *“wished to open for the full twelve months, and even for extended hours, but recessionary cutbacks had scuppered this plan”*. The additional cost of funding guides for the six month period (October to May) *“roughly amounted to €18,000”*. The respondent also indicated that *“there might not be a demand for access in the winter months, and this would need to be considered”*. Some of the church interviewees felt that funding to pay staff for full time opening of the site was *“outside of their reach”*. They also felt that they *“could not”* or in other cases, *“should not have to pay the €500 being asked by Dublin Tourism for promotion”*. In fairness to Dublin Tourism, they stated that they were a *“commercial organisation”*, but would not be *“averse to negotiating this figure if called upon to do so”*.

Fear of theft, vandalism and harassment were also cited as obstacles to opening church sites and fully participating in a publicised heritage trail. Interviewees cited *“theft of irreplaceable items from their premises when unoccupied”*, *“vagrants sleeping on pews”* and the *“proximity of a methadone clinic, where young clients openly fought on the street and pedalled drugs”*, as being worrying factors impacting on their decision to enable open access to their premises.

There was a strong sense of the need for re-development of the local area, to overcome dereliction, and not just develop a heritage trail to *“pull in tourists to make money”*. There was a hope among some of the respondents that some of this will come to fruition under the proposed Local Area Development Plan. However, within the perspective of some of the interviewees, there was a strong scepticism that there was any real sense of urgency with regard to

implementing the plan. One public body representative stated that *“the city is broke; and very few of the businesses are paying rates”*. They went on to say that *“everyone knows what will happen when the plan is implemented, the problem is that nobody knows how to implement it”*. Other ideas emerging involved the *“theming of streets in the area”*. For example, *“positioning Frances Street as an ‘Antique Street’ and Meath Street as an ‘International Food Street’ would add value to the tourist experience”*. Paving *“a la Verona”* would also *“add to the sense of value in the area”*. Offering *“€5,000 per shop in Thomas Street, to be matched by the shop for upgrading the frontage”* would also help in the development of a viable heritage trail. However, when this was suggested to a public body interviewee, they responded that *“this might have happened in the boom times, but not when there are priorities”*.

Theme Outcome Three; (opportunities for creativity and collaboration)

Generally, there was a strong wish on the part of all of the church interviewees, to engage with other suppliers and facilitators in a collaborative manner. When asked if they would see benefit in this, there was a universal *“yes”*. The problem for some was they did not know how to do so.

The knowledge base of some of the stakeholders (Dublin Civic Trust and The National College of Art and Design) appeared to offer the potential to deliver brand experience tourism through bundling to visitors. An *“ecclesiastical audit”* has been carried out by Dublin Civic Trust, and NCAD offers a mediation skill. These stakeholders would be willing to work in tandem to provide ecclesiastical tours of the area. However, another public body suggested that they were *“reticent, due to staff shortages to become involved in this form of delivery”*.

The NCAD also floated the idea of utilising WEB 2 communication to enhance their wish to mediate the heritage product in the area. This would afford them the opportunity to partner with John’s Lane and Francis Street churches to offer their expertise (on both the Harry Clarke Windows and Pugin architecture), on which they could impart expert commentary and illustration. The college also viewed tourists as providing possible sources of income for their

students who could earn guide fees from tour groups. They also saw great opportunity in linking with the community.

St Catherine's also probed the link between the Guinness family and their church, ("*one of the Guinness family preached here*") thus creating an opportunity for a narrative link in a potential heritage trail. This they felt would be particularly of interest from a product bundling point of view as St. Catherine's "*is the last heritage stop before accessing the Guinness Storehouse*". The St Catherine's interviewee also stated that the church has a direct connection with original pilgrims visit Santiago de Compostela in Spain. *The pilgrims used this as a starting point and bedded the characteristic shells in mortar in headstones at the back of the church.*" *Some of the shells are still visible and although we do not have enough money rid the garden of dereliction, we just want to show the shells to visitors,*"

Visitor Attitude Comments

As stated in the methodology, a number of very brief, ad hoc discussions took place with visitors to the Guinness Storehouse and John's Lane on two separate days. The comments were interesting and overall, illustrated a desire on the part of the respondents, in finding out more about the heritage attractions in the area. One visitor from Dallas, (a student of architecture) and familiar with Pugin stated that "*back home, you would pay money to see this, - there would be queues*". And when advised about the magnificent stained glass windows in the church stated "*why is there nobody here to tell us about this.*" Another visitor commented outside of the Guinness Storehouse "*Is this it*", and when asked if he would be interested in visiting the churches that he passed on the way up, stated "*some of them are closed and look kinda wrecked anyway*"

In conclusion, the findings offer a fleeting flavour of themes emerging from discussion with stakeholder interviewees regarding supply side enablers and constraints in the development of a church heritage trail in the Liberties Area of Dublin. Overall, it would appear that there was a broad welcome (particularly from those with a vested interest), for the proposal to develop a church heritage trail. However, this welcome was not universal. There appeared, as stated in the

findings, to be some dissonance. The lack of funding, conservation concerns and ethical issues regarding the implementing of admission fees, appear to be limiting factors. However, despite this, the overarching view was that there appeared to be a strong interest in collaboration and creative approaches to creating and mediating the heritage experience. Challenges abide.

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