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The Spirituality of the Leader and its influence on Visitor Experience Management at Sacred Sites in the Island of Ireland: Insights and Implications

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The Spirituality of The Leader and its Influence on Visitor Experience Management at Sacred Sites in the Island of Ireland: Insights and Implications

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Rationale & Problem Statement

**Paucity** of Scholarly Investigations into Sacred Site Visitor experience Management from **Managerial Perspective** & the **Dearth** in Research in **Pilgrimage Tourism Management** in general (Griffin & Raj, 2012 & Geography of Leisure and Tourism Research Group 2014)

The **Role Leaders Play** in Visitor Experience Management at Sacred sites Religious (The Researchers, 2016)

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Spirituality (Beliefs)

Role Socio-Psychological Characteristics of Leaders Play in Sacred Site Visitor Experience Management

Seldom Acknowledged in the Religious & Pilgrimage Tourism Scholarship

Wiltshier (2014) on the role of Volunteers highlighted the **propensity** of their **spirituality** to influence the delivery of the visitor experience

Olsen (2008) Cautioned RPT Scholars to take religious culture seriously & How Leaders view Tourism & its influence on Management of these places

No Exploration of the Phenomenon Globally Till Date & In the **Irish Context**
The socio-psychological characteristics of leaders and their influence on visitor experience management

- Religious Affiliation / Society
  - Social
  - Beliefs, Feelings, Actions
    - Psychology

- Determine / Influence decisions
  - Marketing, management

- Satisfaction & Return Visits

- Our Interest
  - Regarding strategy development and implementation
  - The sort of products and service offerings/delivery
  - The interpretation of artefacts
  - Guided tour narratives
Research Aim / Question & Objectives

To Explore with a sample of Irish Sacred Site Leaders so as to determine in what ways their Spirituality Influences Visitor Experience Management at these Holy Places

How Does the Spirituality of Sacred Site Leaders Influence Visitor Experience Strategy Development and Implementation?

Objectives

To **Advance** theoretical knowledge on sacred site visitor experience management from the managerial perspective

To **Explore** how the spirituality of leaders at different levels in the organisation influences and determines product and service development and delivery strategies

To **Examine** the extent to which leaders spirituality-based actions, attitudes and behaviours impacts on the visitor’s experience at these sites

To **Evaluate** the implications of their spirituality-based actions in effectively catering to a diverse visitor requirement
Towards a Definition of Spirituality & of a Leader

Spirituality is more of an **individual practice**, it also relates with the process of **developing beliefs** around the **meaning of life** & **Connection** with others.

**Definitions & Perspectives on Spirituality Differ**

Spirituality is a process by which individuals recognise the importance of Orienting their lives to something non-material that is beyond or greater than themselves so that there is an acknowledgement of and at least some dependence upon a higher power which is invisible or spirit

( Martin & Carlson, 1999)

Spirituality has been defined as our inner consciousness a specific form of work feeling that energises action, sometimes a world view plus a path” (Cavanagh et al., 2001 & Guillory)

**Christians Views & Perspectives**

Pattison (2001, p.34) contests that if the word is removed from this association then it “is lost in the interest of providing bespoke meta-physical marshmallow that is non-specific, unlocated, thin, uncritical, dull and un-nutritious”

**A Leader** is defined as a person or thing that holds a dominant or superior position within a field, and is able to exercise a high degree of control or influence over others & Cause others to follow some course of action or line of thought

(Business Dictionary)
Research conducted by McCormick (1994) on American managers and their Spirituality at work revealed that:

- **Managers** bring their **deepest spiritual values** to bear on their work.

- Many **Believing managers** say that their **relationship** with **God** **Influences** their **work lives more than any other factor**.

Understanding the Role of Spirituality in the Management of the visitor experience at sacred sites:

1. **‘Lived Spiritualities’** i.e. the way spirituality is acted out in everyday life.

2. **‘Reflective Spiritualities’** which is an interpretation and the way of communication of this experience.

*(Sharma & Bharti, 2014)*
# Research Approach & Methods Employed

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- **11 sacred sites**
Findings revealed that the spirituality of the leader, either based on religion or upon secular influences to a greater extent the sort of experience visitors get at these sacred sites.

It revealed that the more spiritual the leader the more inclined they were to visitor experience management strategies and their implementations that catered to the religiously / spiritually – motivated visitor, and vice versa,

Tour Leaders wielded absolute power to deliver the tours in ways that best suite them, those who considered themselves more spiritual tended to direct their narratives to include more religious aspect of the site.

While the less spiritual, focused their narrative towards the historical and archaeological aspect of the site.
Perspectives of Spirituality and its influence in the Management of the Visitor Experience at Sacred Sites

The Role Leaders Play

Determines Visitor Experience Management Strategy Development (DVEMSD)

Determines Visit Experience Management Strategy Implementation (DVEMSI)

Influences Resource Development (IRD)

Influences Visitor Satisfaction (IVS)

The Spirituality of the Leader

Influences Visit Experience Management Strategy (IVEMSD)

Influences Visit Experience Management Strategy Implementation (IVEMSI)

Source: The Authors
Questions to what extent visitors diverse needs and expectations are effectively catered for & visitor satisfaction with their experiences

While highlighting the complexities involved in effectively catering to a multiplicity of visitors needs at sacred sites.
Thus, the findings of the study reveal that the spirituality of the leader implicitly and explicitly influences visitor experiences management at a diverse category of sacred sites in the Island of Ireland.

Leaders' perception/view on tourism at these ecclesiastical sites, significantly influences the typology of product and service development and delivery strategies and their implementations.
Future Research

- The Research **opens avenue** for more investigations into those factors that might play a vital role in influencing visitor experience management at sacred sites.

- Such as the **demographic characteristics** (age, gender etc.), crucial in that most of the sacred sites are male dominated organisations.

- It could also be explored from different religious and spiritual backgrounds, i.e. **Muslims, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.**
Thank You for Your Attention!!!