
11 Tourism and Political Change in Ireland, North and South: Identity, modernity, contrast and moving toward convergence

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Introduction

Politics and political change are often at the heart of how tourism has been planned, developed and managed (Hall, 1994). This has been found to be evident in many destinations and the cases of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland discussed in this chapter are no exceptions. In fact, these cases stand out as exemplars as to how politics, power arrangements and the absence of political stability (in the case of Northern Ireland in particular) have explained both the nature of tourism development over time and the importance that tourism came to have, both from a societal and an economic perspective. The author has deliberately chosen to present both in terms of their narrative; the narrative of one of the cases, namely Northern Ireland, has been presented elsewhere (Boyd, 2013a) and so only a precis of this will be offered here. Both countries are less than a century old, so their histories are relatively short compared to some other case studies presented in this book. What makes them unique and interesting to study is their contrasting stories. The chapter will argue that for the Republic of Ireland, this young nation's association with tourism is one of conflicting value, where tourism has had a role to play in shaping its identity, both within its citizenry and for those visiting from overseas, and also in terms of how the industry could represent modernity and become a major sector of the economy (Zuelow, 2009). As for the case of Northern Ireland, the chapter illustrates how a sustained period of political instability, (including overt violence in the form of terrorism), interrupted the development of tourism in the region and that only with assemblages of a more peaceful environment over the past two decades, where a more politically stable environment has been put in place, has tourism become established as an integral component of the region's economy, and where tourism is present in what Boyd (2013a) termed as a 'normalcy tourism environment'. This chapter commences with a short narrative of the presence of tourism in Ireland prior to the Civil War, the formation of the Irish Free State (now the Republic of Ireland) and Northern Ireland, before looking at the stories of both regions separately, and examining the interconnections between them as their narratives became more intertwined over the past two decades.

Tourism in Ireland pre-partition (before 1922)

Ireland's past pre-industrial revolution era can be best summed up around notions of rurality, poverty, emigration, and the importance of the church in people's lives. Tourism was not seen as an essential need; it was not important to people who were struggling over decades of blight, famine and hardship. The appeal of visiting places in Ireland remained the preserve of the elite. Ireland was the playground of the English elite and to many gentry and upper society members, Ireland was their 'Grand Tour'. Beaches shifted from being viewed as transitory zones to becoming healthy spaces as 'cold-water' bathing across Northern Europe became popular. Remote and mountainous regions were transformed through the writings of authors and paintings of artists as romanticised and beautiful places to visit; and the ruins or parts of the past urban fabric of early society were no longer viewed as eyesores but rather as scenic, and places worthy of visiting. Two destinations (attractions) emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as integral to what Ireland offered in terms of its Grand Tour. Killarney and the Giant's Causeway enjoyed visitors from as early as 1775 to the 1830s, as depicted in many lithographs and paintings. They were a part of what was termed 'romantic tourism'. In the case of Killarney, it was a two-day visit to explore the lakes, and the major market was the upper class from London, journeying by railroad to Wales, then crossing the Irish Sea and continuing by railroad to the Killarney region.

The infrastructure to facilitate this early tourism flow was put in place by English entrepreneurs for a predominantly English audience; English railroad companies built the railway in Ireland and English entrepreneurs built and owned much of the accommodation in Killarney. As for the Giant's Causeway, it quickly gained a reputation as one of the wonders of the world, with its unique columns protruding upward, and a must visit. Sadly, many also came to Ireland in the early years of tourism to see Irish poverty for themselves; what Zuelow (2009) argues was the legacy of English absentee landlords, combined with famines, poor soil and little in the way of agricultural improvement during the early years of industrial revolution. Early mass tourism was not present in Ireland due to a poor transportation network. In 1856 over 10,000 miles of railway track had been laid down across England compared to only 400 miles in Ireland; it would improve substantially with 2000 miles in place by 1870. Early visitors had to rely on the coach networks that developed across many of the Irish counties in the absence of laid track.

A key development in early tourism was the presence of Thomas Cook tours to Ireland in 1852, which quickly prompted English railway companies to develop tours themselves. Not deterred by this, Thomas Cook eventually set up a Dublin office in the 1880s; only for the chief appointee to resign (1891) to set up a magazine entitled *Irish Tourist* (1894) and then the following year to join forces with hotel and railway companies to found the first Irish Tourist Association (ITA). This organization is important to understanding the early years of the Irish tourism industry, as albeit with a strong English influence, it would be influential in improving the tourism infrastructure across Ireland, thus giving public access to sites such as the Giant's Causeway. As an organisation it lobbied government to pass the Health

Resorts and Watering Places (Ireland) Act 1909 that gave local authorities money for tourist development.

The 1914-22 years saw the outbreak of the First World War, the movement toward independence in the south (Easter Rising, 1916; the Irish War of Independence, 1919-21), the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 1921 and the subsequent formation of Northern Ireland in 1922; followed by the Irish Civil War (1922-23). The political changes as a result of these events had limited impact on tourism, other than restricting the extent of tourism development. What, however, emerges from this period is a larger question of national identity for the Irish people; tourism would play a central role here as both a national interest and a challenge over what Ireland should show to visitors (Zuelow, 2009), and so tourism and political change would quickly align.

The role of tourism in shaping two new countries: identity versus modernity (1922-1969)

Eire

Post-civil war, tourism was not a priority for the new government in Ireland (Eire), but it quickly emerged as something worthy of government investment as a result of lobbying by the Irish Tourist Association (ITA). That body quickly established itself as the leading tourism voice in Ireland and made the case that tourism was not only a source of wealth but that tourism infrastructure development would help reduce unemployment, poverty and serve as a national solution to local problems, and would be something that local communities saw as worthwhile investing in. Thompson (2003: 263) comments that:

“...the British army had burned much of downtown Dublin to the ground in 1916; they had set Cork’s city centre on fire; they had terrorised the countryside for three years; yet the British bourgeoisie possesses finance capital. Therefore, invite them to gaze at the scenery, to play golf, to hunt, to fish and to be entertained by native wit”

The ITA was founded in 1925, consolidating three existing tourism organisations that had existed since the late 19th century (Zuelow, 2009). The ITA was highly political; many ex-Irish Republican Army (IRA) members who had fought in the Irish Civil War worked in this newly formed organisation, a fact hidden from its board. The ITA gained support from the Irish state press as evidenced in the editorial by *The Irish Times* in 23 March 1925: “We are reminded to-day of another national asset. Ireland can offer the world not only beef, but beauty.” Thompson (2003) points out that the phrase the ‘world’ referred exclusively to Britain as the Irish economy relied on this market for 90% of its exports and in return 90% of tourists to Ireland were British. Support from the Irish state press helped to quickly legitimise tourism as an industry, though in those days it was not an industry per se; it was too dependent on the vagaries of the British economy and willingness of their people to holiday in Ireland. Thompson (2003: 264) argued that in 1925:

“tourism was not an industry but a desire that expressed the stunted sentiments of the new elite...it should be understood more as a mass-cultural expression of this desire rather than as an important component of the economy”