ISSN 1753-2396 (Print)
ISSN 2753-328X (Online)

Journal of
Irish and Scottish Studies

Articles

The Economics of Identity: Heritage as a Cultural Resource in Ireland, 1922 – 89

Author: Pat Cooke

Volume 2, Issue 2
Pp: 67-86
2009
Published on: 1st Jan 2009

1 4 9 5

ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Economics of Identity: Heritage as a Cultural Resource in Ireland, 1922–89

Pat Cooke

Introduction

This paper examines the exploitation of heritage as an economic resource in the context of the nation state. The specific field of analysis is the interaction of cultural and economic factors in Ireland's exploitation of heritage in the period since it gained independence in 1922. The main prism through which this question will be examined is tourism, based on the premise that it offers a socio-economic form through which we can observe the implications of treating culture as an explicitly economic resource. The survey concludes by offering some observations on whether cultural identity in its national and local forms can survive the 'industrialisation of heritage'[1] and the encounter with globalised forms of cultural consumption.

Can we offer culture for consumption without being consumed in the process? From the moment the brutalising effects of the industrial revolution on society became manifest in the nineteenth century, critics such as Carlyle, Ruskin and Arnold began to express anxieties about the impact of industrialisation on cultural life.[2] By the mid-twentieth century, the focus of anxiety had shifted to the baneful industrialisation of art and culture through the mass media of film and radio. All human needs, wrote Adorno and Horkheimer, have been anticipated by the entertainment industry; the individual has been turned into the 'eternal consumer', the mere object of the 'culture industry'.[3] Among more contemporary commentators, late capitalism's enfolding of art and culture within the field of consumption has been declared an all-but inescapable fate. Baudrillard insists that all aspects of our experience now take the commodity form.[4] Frederic Jameson sees the present moment as 'marked by a dedifferentiation of fields', such that culture

[1] Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry* (London, 1985).
[2] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London, 1958), 30–130.
[3] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London, 1997), 142.
[4] Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London, 1998), 29.

has become 'profoundly economic or commodity oriented'.[5]

Culture, in other words, has become indistinguishable from economics – something which cultural commentators, on the whole, do not look upon as a positive development. But is this too pessimistic, or too determinist? Is it possible for culture to survive the encounter with commerce, and even to emerge enriched from it? Are we capable, in a pungent phrase Nick Stanley adapted as the title for a study of the impact of tourism on the Polynesian people, of 'being ourselves for you' while retaining an autonomous sense of self?[6] Can we be economical about heritage without being entirely economical about the kind of truth that the search for cultural identity embodies? In this paper these questions will be explored by looking at how Ireland has fared since achieving independence in 1922 in exploiting its heritage as an economic resource.

Heritage and the heart of Ireland

Since the turn of the nineteenth century the Irish have been among the world's great practitioners of identity politics, to the extent that the modernisation of Ireland has come to be seen primarily in cultural terms. UNESCO's Culturelink entry on Ireland notes that 'one of the main cultural characteristics of the Irish population is a preoccupation with cultural identity and national character at the intellectual and artistic level'.[7] In *Inventing Ireland* Declan Kiberd argues that Ireland's writers and political activists in the period between the 1890s and the achievement of statehood in 1921 'achieved nothing less than a renovation of Irish consciousness and a new understanding of politics, economics, philosophy, sport, language and culture in its widest sense'; that they forged, in other words, a credible, synthetic vision of culture as 'a whole way of life'.[8] Yet that era is hardly memorable for economic ideas that could be deemed in any sense commensurate with its distinctive literary utterances. In any case, Kiberd's painful conclusion is that the synthetic vision of this cohort of modernisers was betrayed in the achievement of independence. Ireland came to be ruled by 'conservative rebels,' very few of whom turned

[5] Michael Hardt and Cathy Weeks (eds), *The Jameson Reader* (London, 2000), 10.
[6] Nick Stanley, *Being Ourselves for You: The Global Display of Cultures* (Middlesex, 1998).
[7] Culturelink network: http://www.culturelink.hr/culpol/compare/index.html Accessed: 26 May, 2009.
[8] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: the Literature of the Modern Nation* (London, 1995), 3.

out to be 'revolutionaries imbued with a vision of an alternative society'. He invokes Fanon's dark diagnosis of the post-colonial malaise as descriptive of the Irish case from the twenties onwards: 'The leader pacifies the people' and asks them to 'fall back into the past – and to become drunk on remembrance'.[9] Heritage, one might be inclined to assume, must have served as a ready vessel in which to serve up this soporific libation to a people woozy on political freedom.

Surprisingly perhaps, the early leaders of post-independence Ireland made very little fuss about heritage in the way we do today. Insofar as they thought about it, their primary, if not obsessive, focus was on the Irish language and its intangible heritage of writing and oral tradition of story and song. But their attitude towards the tangible heritage of monuments, remnants and landscapes that we nowadays recognise as constituting national heritage was desultory at best, negligent at worst. Though a National Monuments Act for the protection of archaeological heritage was enacted in 1930, it was not implemented with any particular zeal. During a Dáil debate on the Tourist Traffic Bill of 1951, Declan Costello remarked that 'probably because of lack of interest more than anything else the National Monuments Act has not proved sufficient to preserve effectively and mark out the historic monuments and sites throughout the country'.[10] In 1934, the teaching of nature study was made optional on the primary school curriculum to make more room for teaching compulsory Irish.[11] This led to a dramatic decline in the number of pupils taking nature study, with obvious implications for the understanding and appreciation of natural heritage in the following generation.

Why then wasn't heritage, apart from the language, at the heart of the nationalist project in the first decades of independence? A good deal of the explanation lies in Ireland's unique configuration of religion, education and conservative politics during those years. With independence, the Irish inherited a cultural life dominated by the mores of the Catholic church. Right up to the 1980s, the church's dominance of the educational system sustained a deeply conservative vision of cultural values. The capacity for independent critical thought was not cultivated through the educational system, as a result of which an autonomous cultural sphere, from which a critique of those very cultural and political forces that dominated Irish society might have been expected

[9] Ibid., 391.

[10] *Dáil Debates*: Dáil Éireann – Volume 129 (06 March, 1952), Tourist Traffic Bill, 1951 – Second Stage (Resumed).

[11] Tom Garvin, *Preventing The Future: Why was Ireland so poor for so long?* (Dublin, 2005), 195.

to emerge, did not evolve; a torpid consensus on social and economic issues prevailed.

The first Dáil of 1919 had no ministry of education, this being seen as superfluous in the face of a system perceived as benignly controlled by the church. A Department of Education was eventually established in 1924, but its role remained constrained by the minimalist educational ambitions of successive Irish leaders, including Eamonn de Valera, the towering figure of mid-twentieth-century Irish politics. Tom Garvin caustically describes de Valera's vision of education as an 'essentially static system for a static society'.[12] Educational historian John Coolahan's summary comment on Irish educational policy post-independence is that 'successive ministers for education adopted the view that the state had a subsidiary role, aiding agencies such as the churches in the provision of educational facilities'.[13] Up to the 1960s, Irish politicians were content for the majority of the Irish people to be provided with only primary education. The attitude was epitomised in a memo written by the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Patrick McGilligan, in the mid 1920s:

> … if a nation is to depend on its agriculture it must produce mainly a population of farmers: men of patience, endurance, thrift and modest intellectual aspirations. If it produces other types it must export them at an early age if it is not to risk the continual inner ferment of disappointed and distorted minds denied by circumstance their adequate exercise.[14]

By the late 1950s, three out of every four Irish children did not proceed beyond primary education. In contrast, Northern Ireland, with half the South's population, spent four times as much per head of population on education. It was only in the 1960s that Irish politicians at last began to speak of a new subject: the economics of education. Finally, in the 1980s, following the introduction of free mass education in the sixties, the majority of Irish students gained exposure to second and third level education. The numbers in third-level education, for example, went from 18,000 in 1964–5 to 93,000 in 1993–4.[15] It is surely no accident that when the first wave of heritage zeal hit Ireland in the 1980s it coincided with the arrival in adulthood of the first wave of those who had benefited from mass education.

[12] Garvin, *Preventing the Future*, 171

[13] John Coolahan, *Irish Education: History and Structure* (Dublin, 1981), 46.

[14] Quoted in Garvin, *Preventing the Future*, 169.

[15] Ibid., 202.

A crucial factor in explaining the torpor that typified Irish attitudes to heritage in the decades following independence is that all of the national institutions, including the Museum, Gallery and Library, came under the aegis of the Department of Education. That arrangement only ended in 1985 when they were transferred to the Department of an Taoiseach. In a country where for so long after independence the link between education and economic development went unrecognised, it is hardly surprising that it took so long to recognise the educational, not to mention economic, potential of heritage.

It was the Free State's Minister of Education, Professor J. M. O'Sullivan, who set up the first review of the National Museum in 1927, with a view to aligning its functions with the aspirations of a newly-independent nation. Remarkably, the subsequent report was bereft of any proposals on the Museum's educational role. Although the report recommended the creation of several new curatorial and administrative posts, the need for an education officer, let alone an educational service, was not even raised.

The only significant structural change the report advocated was the setting up of a Folklife Division dedicated to collecting the material culture of a rural-dwelling, Irish-speaking people. The committee was explicit about the kind of material that should be collected. It should be exclusively pre-industrial, consisting of the furniture and implements of everyday life in the period 'before these objects became denationalised by the machine-made mass production of foreign countries'.[16] The committee's Swedish advisor and only non-Irish member, Professor Nils Lithberg, is unequivocal on the continuity between archaeological and folk artefacts within a national framework. Archaeology, he asserts, provides 'satisfactory evidence' in the case of utensils and furniture that 'once an appropriate form has been evolved no very considerable alterations are necessary for their continuance'.[17] In other words, the tangible heritage of Irish nationality was embedded in the life of the people as lived on the land, and constituted the material dimension of an organic and unified Irish

[16] Dermod O'Brien, J. M. Adams, C. McNeil and Thomas Bodkin, *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Working of the National Museum*, Unpublished Report, Ministry of Education (1927) Dublin. Par. IV. The full membership of the committee was: Dermod O'Brien, P.R.H.A., President of the Board of Visitors of the National Museum; Thomas Bodkin, B.A., B.L; Charles MacNeill, Royal Society of Antiquaries in Ireland; P. A. Murphy, Department of Lands and Agriculture; and Professor Nils Lithberg, advisor to the Northern Museum, Stockholm.

[17] Nils Lithberg, untitled report on the National Museum of Ireland, unpublished, Ministry of Education (Dublin 1927), 8. Lithberg appears to have insisted on furnishing his own report separately from the committee.

culture that embraced custom, tradition, language and working life from time immemorial. In this context, government did not perceive an urgent need to construct heritage through a process of museumisation, let alone to use museums as instruments of education in nationality; the people, after all, were living docents in the open-air museum that was Ireland.

Eamon de Valera once famously declared that if he wished to find out what the Irish people wanted all he had to do was to look into his own heart. This apparently vainglorious assertion had a subtly corporate inflection: for as long as the premodernity of Irish life remained credibly inviolate, the Irish people themselves would hit upon the deepest wishes of their leader's heart by sympathetic introspection; insight into the corporate condition of Irishness was something shared by leader and led. Heritage was not so much the historical dimension of culture as the existential substance of Irish life. Against this background, government policy had two straightforward objectives: to promote language revival and protect Irish cultural integrity through vigorous censorship laws.

Inevitably, therefore, it was into the language that successive governments poured most of their energies. Thus, the task of collecting an intangible heritage of story and song through the work of the Irish Folklife Commission, which was founded in 1935, was given priority over material heritage. Building and exhibiting a collection of folk material could wait. Though some desultory collecting of folklife objects did go on from the thirties to the sixties, it was not until 1974 that the National Museum of Ireland eventually set up a Folklife Division. A similar lassitude pervaded almost all aspects of the Museum's functions and capacities. A review of the museum carried out in 1973 revealed that since the 1930s annual visitor numbers had inexorably declined, opening hours had contracted, and the physical accommodation and exhibition space had dwindled by a third – some of that space going to meet the needs of its immediate neighbour, the Irish parliament in Leinster House.[18]

Heritage and international visibility

But if the role of the National Museum was not, then, to educate the Irish people in Irishness, what was its purpose in an independent Ireland? The 1927

[18] Institute of Professional Civil Servants, *Museum Service for Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), 32–5.

report contains a mission statement for the National Museum that provides a clue:

> The main purpose of the National Museum of Ireland should be to accumulate, preserve, study and display such objects as may serve to increase and diffuse the knowledge of Irish civilisation, or the Natural History of Ireland and of the relations of Ireland in these respects with other countries.[19]

The key word here is 'diffuse'. The focus is on Ireland's comparative standing in the community of nations, on raising the visibility of Ireland in international contexts. The construction of national identity through national institutions is seen to be primarily about gaining visibility and credibility for Ireland in the cultural competition between nations.[20] Given the insularity and overwhelming homogeneity of Irish society between the 1930s and the 1970s (a period in which Fianna Fáil governments remained in power for all-but six years) there was little perceived need to instrumentalise heritage as a tool of *domestic* consensus. This left successive governments free to deploy heritage as an instrument in an international status game of recognition.

An insight into this order of priorities can be gained from the government's attitude to the prospect of winning the Chester Beatty collection of manuscripts for Ireland. Fleeing the impositions of a socialist government that had come to power in Britian in 1945, Alfred Chester Beatty migrated to Ireland in 1950. 'The people have so much charm,' he declared, 'life goes on as it did elsewhere until 1939'.[21] Taking refuge in a country that was far from socialist in its politics, and one that had appreciably lower wealth taxes as well, he brought with him one of the finest collections of oriental and Islamic manuscripts in the world. The secretary of the Department of External Affairs wrote enthusiastically to the Taoiseach's Department in July 1950: 'It appears that the housing of the [Beatty] collection in a Museum in Dublin would undoubtedly be of great national benefit … we should accede to Mr Beatty's personal request to express our official interest in the building of this

[19] O'Brien *et al.*, Par. IX. Subsequently endorsed by the Minister for Education as the official policy of the museum. See *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 25, 11 July, 1928.

[20] G.B. Dahl and R. Stade, 'Anthropology, Museums, and Contemporary Cultural Processes: An Introduction', in *Ethnos*, 65:2 (2000), 170.

[21] Brian Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1988), 50.

Museum'.[22] With unprecedented alacrity, the government moved to secure the Chester Beatty collection for Ireland: the Library opened in 1953.

This contrasted with the lack of support shown by successive governments for other more indigenous heritage projects. Though Dublin Civic Museum opened in the same year as the Chester Beatty Library, it was one of only two publicly-funded local authority museums in the country at that stage, the other being Cork Public Museum (1945). By 1989 only a further eight local authority funded museums had opened, which meant that less than a third of local authorities had museum services of any kind. Those that did exist tended to mimic the collection categories of the National Museum. Local authority museums functioned as 'mini-nationals', whose collections categories and exhibitions endorsed an homogenous, nationalist perception of material culture. The permanent exhibitions at the Cork Public Museum, for example, until its revamp in 2005, echoed the collection categories of the National Museum, comprising a mixture of archaeological, art and industrial and folklife material, as well as a display that provided the local angle on the fight for Irish freedom.[23]

Tourism and heritage

Successive governments' persistent attitude of negligence towards physical heritage was to a considerable extent reflected in attitudes to tourism, whether foreign or domestic. For the first thirty years of independence, the overwhelming emphasis in tourism discourse was on heritage in its intangible rather than tangible form. This translated into an idea of the tourist experience as essentially an encounter with a pastoral people untouched by modernity, speaking an ancient tongue, and dwelling with a modesty amounting to invisibility in a landscape of unsurpassed natural beauty that bore hardly any of the marks of their own toil. The pace of Irish life is slow, its vistas timeless. It is an aesthetic crystallised in artist Paul Henry's western landscapes, images which were among the leitmotifs of Irish tourism advertising from the thirties to the fifties. Notably, Henry's gaze relies hardly at all on the heritage content of landscape; no more than people, historic or prehistoric remains hardly intrude upon the minimalist content of his vistas.

[22] Ibid., 69.

[23] The author acted as an independent advisor to Cork Public Museum for its 2005 revamp.

The trope of Ireland as empty space proved remarkably resilient. As late as the 1980s, artist Robert Ballagh exasperatedly observed, 'you have Bord Fáilte eulogising roads where you won't see a car from one end of the day to the other', so that, 'it's almost as if they're advertising a country nobody lives in'.[24] Barbara O'Connor has pointed to how the reification of landscape promises not only 'empty space' but 'empty time', a land where the difference between today and yesterday, the contemporary and the historic, is seamless.[25] The ruin or the dilapidated building are likewise enfolded within vistas of the picturesque, where they serve as suggestive signifiers of timelessness.

However, the enduring attraction of this conceit is misleading, as it partially occludes the emergence in Ireland from the 1950s onwards of an increasingly structured approach to the presentation and conservation of heritage—not as an amorphous element of timelessness experience, but as discrete elements of a differentiated tourism product. Heritage, as we now understand it (a cultural construct with economic dimensions), emerges in Ireland through the expanding scope of tourism and its search for the range and variety of experience that would drive tourism earnings from foreign visitors.

Heritage and leisure

The minister for Industry and Commerce in the Fianna Fáil government, Sean Lemass, set up the Irish Tourist Board in 1939. The powers of the new Board were set out in the Tourist Traffic Act of the same year. The Act contains only the most muted and indirect reference to heritage, though the power to 'improve and maintain amenities and conditions likely to affect tourist traffic' intimated some potential in this regard. Insofar as tourism policy during these early years was concerned with domestic tourism, the main focus was on exploiting the fact that paid holidays for workers in the Free State had been introduced in 1938. In 1943, Lemass produced a memorandum entitled 'Towards and Irish Recreation Policy'. The plan called for the provision of playing-fields, parish halls, swimming pools and hand-ball alleys in 247 rural parishes as a means of occupying the idle minds and bodies of the Irish on holidays. Very little attention, it appears, was given to offering cultural forms

[24] Quoted in Barbara O'Connor and Michael Cronin (eds), *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis* (Cork, 1993), 74.

[25] Barbara O'Connor, 'Myth and Mirrors: Tourist Images and National Identity', in O'Connor and Cronin, *Tourism in Ireland*, 76.

of stimulation for the mind—an attitude that accords all-too-well with the attitude to education noted earlier.[26]

In 1951 Lemass introduced new legislation which led to the setting up of Bord Fáilte the following year. In addition to the powers already conferred under the 1939 Act, the new body was given two new powers: to protect and maintain historic properties and to provide signposting. This marked the moment when tourism policy for the first time explicitly recognised heritage as a discrete element of the tourism product.[27] The exact words used were:

> to protect and maintain and to aid in protecting and maintaining historic buildings, sites and shrines and places of scenic, historic, scientific or other interest to the public and to facilitate visitors thereto by the provision of notices and the provision and improvement of means of access.[28]

In 1953 the Board set up an Advisory Archaeological Council to advise on activities in relation to national and historic monuments. By 1956 information plaques had been erected at 170 historic sites, shrines and national monuments, and photographic surveys had been carried out at some of the larger national monuments.[29] In 1962 an archaeologist was recruited. The setting up of Regional Tourism Organisations in 1964 led to regional bodies taking direct responsibility for historic buildings and other heritage attractions, such as the Joyce Tower at Sandymount in Dublin, Yeats's Thoor Ballylee at Gort, and Bunratty Castle and Folk Park. Tourism was now a direct player in the provision of heritage services as part of the tourism package.

What was driving this more focused interest in heritage matters? From the mid-1950s Bord Failte was coming to realise that there was a need in an increasingly competitive international tourist market for more diverse holiday packages that integrated a variety of activity options, embracing not only exercise and entertainment but cultural options as well.[30] It is clear, therefore, that the initial impetus to develop a more active approach to the interpretation of Irish heritage came not from a desire to promote a better knowledge of it among the native Irish, but from the need to meet the

[26] Irene Furlong, *Irish Tourism 1880–1980* (Dublin, 2009), 77.
[27] Ibid., 168.
[28] Ibid., 177.
[29] Ibid., 178
[30] Ibid., 184.

expectations of better-educated American and English tourists, a market that was becoming central to Irish tourism policy as the government sought to maximise income from foreign earnings. However, the Bord was conscious of the beneficial cultural effects these efforts were having on Irish life. As the fifties progressed, the Bord's annual reports began to reflect a wider sense not only of the economic but the social and cultural impact of tourism on Irish cultural life. The 1956 Report, for example, stated:

> While based upon the Transport, Hotel and Catering and Entertainment industries, Tourism enters all branches of Social, Cultural and Sporting activities; and operating, as it does, over a wide and varied range of interests it plays a major part in the country's development and progress.[31]

From a wider perspective, the tourism-heritage nexus was driven by the fact that Ireland was being drawn out of insularity by global growth in the post-war tourism and leisure industry, which began to take off in earnest in the 1950s. Over 95 per cent of the world's museum have come into being since 1945.[32] The majority of these, along with countless other forms of heritage attraction, date from the 1970s. From that decade onwards, the construction of heritage as tourism product became a global phenomenon, as successive countries embraced an enthusiasm for heritage in line with their relative levels of economic development and exposure to tourism. Lowenthal traces the use of the word 'heritage' in the modern sense of a 'catch-all creed' to 1980.[33] And indeed something of a heritage boom emerged in the UK in the 1980s. Government's role in its protection and management was prescribed in the Heritage Acts of 1980 and 1983. The spectacle of what appeared to Robert Hewison as an unbridled 'cult of heritage' provoked him to write a trenchant critique of the phenomenon in *The Heritage Industry* (1985).

Ireland's heritage boom

1985 was also the year the Irish government produced a major policy paper on tourism, giving it a priority role in revitalising an economy that was then

[31] Bord Failte: 'Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March, 1956', 5.
[32] David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, 1998), 3.
[33] Ibid., 5.

in the doldrums.[34] The study noted that a recent ranking of twelve European countries according to attributes as perceived by international holiday-makers had placed Ireland last on three of them: accessibility, sports and activities and cultural experience.[35] The determination to address these deficiencies is reflected in the policy paper, where the third (in cultural experience) is addressed under two objectives: (a) the enhancement and preservation of the nation's cultural heritage and (b) the conservation of the physical resources of the country.[36] These objectives were carried forward into the National Development Plan of 1989 which formed the basis for the injection of a massive £152 of European funding for the development of Irish tourism infrastructure – a significant element of which was directed towards the development of heritage amenities.

By any measure, 1989 was a watershed year for Irish heritage. In that year, the first of two five-year Operational Programmes for Tourism commenced. Designed as capital funding mechanisms for tourism infrastructure, the Programmes identified heritage, and specifically heritage attractions, as a major area for development. Over the period of the two Programmes 55 per cent of all existing heritage attractions with visitor services and 44 per cent of all existing museums in Ireland were commissioned – predicated on the assumption that they contributed directly and positively to Ireland's tourism infrastructure.[37] Over the next decade, both the hardware of Irish heritage (conservation of monuments and provision of new museums, visitor and heritage centres) and the software (the mediation of heritage through state-of-the-art, multi-media interpretation) were transformed.

Yet despite the evidence of a growing awareness of heritage among Irish tourism interests from the early 1950s onwards, the sheer scale and suddenness of the commitment to developing heritage as a core feature of Irish tourism in the nineties is striking. At first sight, it appears to be a sudden break with the lassitude and indifference that had hitherto characterised government policy towards heritage. The Programmes are not, however, evidence of a sudden realisation of the worth of heritage on intrinsically cultural grounds. The single most important factor prompting this development was the

[34] *White Paper on Tourism*, Stationery Office (Dublin, 1985).

[35] James Deegan and Donal Dineen, 'Irish Tourism Policy: Targets, Outcomes and Environmental Considerations', in O'Connor and Cronin (eds), *Tourism in Ireland*, 116.

[36] Ibid., 117.

[37] Pat Cooke, *The Containment of Heritage: Setting Limits to the Growth of Heritage in Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), 15.

criteria attaching to European Regional Development Funding–and in particular the connection made there between tourism, cultural infrastructure and regional development. It was this that allowed the Irish government to unlock such significant levels of funding for heritage. In economic terms, the very generous terms of funding available (on some projects up to two thirds from EU sources, matched by one third from the Irish government) gave rise to what Pignataro and Rizzo have called 'fiscal illusion'. When, they argue, conservation projects are realised through relatively remote sources of funding, and without imposing any significant burden on local finances, it is likely to produce an economically unrealistic assessment of heritage costs.[38] In Ireland, the perception of European funding as essentially 'free' capital spurred on a 'me too' enthusiasm among agencies and local bodies around the country to win funding for its local heritage centre or amenity. By 2000, fifty-one per cent of all existing heritage attractions had come into being over the previous decade–something that would have been inconceivable in the absence of European funding.[39]

Sustainable tourism, conservable heritage?

This spectacular growth in heritage as tourism product reflects the primacy of expansionary objectives in Irish tourism policy. Over the past twenty years, successively upward targets for tourism numbers in Bord Failte's five year plans have been consistently met and exceeded. In its *Tourism Development Plan, 1994–99*, the Bord set an overall growth target of 4.4 million visitors. The outcome in 1999 was 5.5 million, a third more than planned.[40] Overseas visitor numbers increased a further 13.9 per cent from 1999–2005, with total visitor numbers reaching 6.8 million in 2005.[41] In 2007 there were 7.7 million visitors, up 4 per cent on 2006.[42]

While this inexorable growth in visitor numbers has been a boon in terms of tourism-generated revenue, it must also be judged against Irish tourism's embrace of sustainability as a policy objective from the mid-1990s onwards.

[38] G. Pignatarro. and Ildo Rizzo, 'The Political Economy of Rehabilitation: The Case of the Benedettini Monastery', in Michael Hutter and Ilde Rizzo (eds), *Economic Perspectives on Cultural Heritage* (London, 1997), 96.

[39] Pat Cooke, *The Containment of Heritage*, 17.

[40] Ibid., 30.

[41] Failte Ireland, *Development Strategy, 2007–13* (Dublin, 2007), 3.

[42] Ibid., 6.

The subtitle of the 1994–99 plan was 'Sustainable Tourism', and subsequent plans have emphasised sustainability objectives. But as early as 1996 the tension between the growth and sustainability objectives was becoming apparent.[43] It came down to this: how could inexorably upward growth targets for tourism numbers continue to be set without damaging what had been declared a key characteristic of the Irish tourist experience: the absence of mass tourism? And now that tourism policy had so enthusiastically embraced heritage in its wider natural, landscape and environmental senses, how could the strong conservation values required for its protection be reconciled with inexorable growth in numbers? Could not, Deegan and Dineen asked, a target have been set to attract more higher spenders in smaller numbers, 'with fewer associated costs, both economic and environmental?'[44] While acknowledging the positive impact of tourism investment through the enhancement and conservation of heritage resources, they nevertheless note that while the tourism lobby had been vocal in highlighting the foreign exchange benefits of tourism, it had downplayed the economic costs of externalities such as pollution and overcrowding at tourism hotspots.[45] As most of these tourism hotspots coincide with some of Ireland's most iconic built and natural heritage (Killarney being the prime example) the conflict between tourism's growth and conservation objectives carried direct, negative implications for heritage conservation.

However, this contradiction cannot be attributed to Irish tourism policy in isolation. EU policy on sustainable practice, which the Irish were obliged to implement along with the terms and conditions attaching to regional development funding, were partly at fault. For many years, EU policy promoted the ambiguous principle of 'sustainable growth' which, it has been argued, facilitated the uncoupling of conservation goals from growth-driven economic objectives across a wide range of policy fields.[46]

On a more positive note, Failte Ireland's most recent strategy for tourism, covering the years 2007–13, displays a more consistent commitment to

[43] Sean Brown and Terry Stevens, 'The role of heritage attractions in sustainable tourism strategies: The experience in Ireland', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, vol.1, no. 4 (1996), 241.

[44] James Deegan and Donal Dineen, 'Irish Tourism Policy: Targets, Outcomes and Environmental Considerations', in Barbara O'Connor and Michael Cronin (eds), *Tourism in Ireland*, 131.

[45] Ibid., 132.

[46] Susan Baker, 'Between Commitment and Implementation: tensions in sustainable development policy of the European Union' in Michael Redclift and Graham Woodgate (eds), *International Handbook of Environmental Sociology* (Edward Elgar, 1997), 383.

sustainability. Crude numerical targets have been abandoned and the crucial issue of carrying capacity has been identified and research into its implications for tourism commissioned.[47]

Culture and economy

From an Irish policy perspective, the difficulty tourism has faced in reconciling sustainability goals with economic ones may reflect an unresolved tension between cultural and economic values that has been inherent in Irish policy-making since the foundation of the state. Michael Peillon sees the dislocation between culture and economics over the first decades of independence as leading to a tectonic build up of tensions: 'the socio-economic dynamic and the cultural dynamic were pushing Irish society in different directions,' he writes, and 'they did not coexist harmoniously, but in a state of tension and even contradiction'.[48] The dominance of the Catholic church had played a large part in forging this divide because of its domination of cultural life and its relative indifference to economic issues. Culture, Peillon concludes, 'had to a great extent been uncoupled from the economy'.[49]

The gap between cultural values (which emphasised heritage and tradition) and economic planning (which focused on growth and development) became manifest from the 1960s onwards as Ireland pursued a policy of rapid industrialisation through inward investment. Luke Gibbons has drawn attention to the Industrial Development Authority's promotional campaigns of the 1980s, which highlighted the advantages for foreign companies of setting up in a country whose main cultural attraction was its pre-industrial quaintness.[50] At the same time, Bord Failte was reinforcing this image as Ireland's unique selling point, as Ballagh (cited above) had noticed.

We might now see the Operational Programmes as a mechanism that worked inadvertently to bring these contradictions to a crisis. The assumption that heritage resources could be quickly developed—on a veritable industrial scale—into a nationwide panoply of leisure products within the short, project-driven timescales of the Programmes soon encountered a form of resistance

[47] Failte Ireland, *Development Strategy, 2007–13*, 79.

[48] Michael Peillon, 'Culture and State in Ireland's New Economy', in Peader Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin (eds), *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* (London, 2002), 43.

[49] Ibid., 45.

[50] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork, 1996), 88–91.

that was more cultural than economic in nature, and which in time delivered some harsh lessons to government and policy-makers.

The development of the Irish heritage/tourism product in the nineties can be interpreted at one level as an effort to exploit global trends in the leisure industry. Individual heritage sites and attractions translated into tourism products, which were differentiated through regional and local variation, and then marketed in the aggregate as an agreeably coherent experience of 'Irishness' as a brand. However, the view of Irish culture as seen through the portal of heritage was becoming increasingly divorced from the lived experience of contemporary Ireland. Irish heritage was discovered at just the moment when the past was indeed becoming 'a foreign country'. A more secularised Ireland was now open to global cultural and economic influences. The authority of the church was waning. Having rejected divorce in a referendum in 1986, the Irish eventually voted for it in 1995. Rural Ireland was being populated by migrants from Irish cities and a host of immigrants from European countries. Ethel Crowley, in a recent study of her native west Cork, registered the growing complexity. The social actors in west Cork now represented 'interests, or networks of interests, that stretch far beyond the physical boundaries', so that local communities comprise 'the product of any combination of varied cultural, economic, social and political perspectives'.[51]

The European Economic Community, which Ireland entered in 1973, was not only a source of supra-national regulation that member states were obliged to implement, but also constituted a court of appeal in which the Irish government could be held to account by its own citizens – particularly on environmental matters. Inevitably, the Irish state's authority was gradually diluted, and its monopoly of cultural life – that is, its ability to look into its own heart and find there that answering beat that de Valera had once felt so sure of – was being pressurised in the interplay between global, supra-national and local levels of political authority. As Anderson has pointed out, national consensus, because of its essentially imagined nature, is a volatile thing:

> The nation is a special or privileged way of imagining community, but it is, in fact, no more a privileged way of imagining them than any other. The power of imagining is what causes local communities to rise up against the nation in its imagined distinction from the nation which it no longer feels fully represents it.[52]

[51] Ethel Crowley, *Land Matters: Power Struggles in Rural Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), 176.

[52] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983), 6.

The first Programme was not long under way before it encountered unprecedented resistance from locally-based groups, who rapidly built networks of support with wider national and international environmental activists, to insist that the state and its expert agencies had no special dispensation to impose heritage developments on local communities. The state's expeditious attempts to construct national park visitor centres at Mullaghmore in County Clare and Luggala in County Wicklow were the flashpoints. The short, five-year timescales of the Programmes compressed the planning process and curtailed the opportunity for consultation and conciliation, which weakened the state's case and strengthened the resolve of opponents. As early as February 1991 in an article headed 'Is our heritage being threatened by its guardians?' Frank McDonald, Environment Correspondent of the *Irish Times*, was raising questions about visitor centres being planned by the Office of Public Works for such sensitive locations. He pointed out that the state agency employed no planners, was not bound by the planning laws, had carried out only the most cursory environmental impact assessments, and local authorities and the public had barely been consulted. Intended to serve as a sign of Ireland's variegated homogeneity, heritage was suddenly revealed to be the very ground of dissidence and conflict.

Taking stock of the first Operational Programme in 1996, Sean Browne and Trevor Stephen registered the chastening effects of these developments. They advocated a new approach based on what they called the 'democracy of community involvement' and urged Bord Failte to prioritise its commitment to 'the localisation of decision-making and activity in the current [1995–99] five-year plan'. But the fires of heritage conflict, once started, proved difficult to quench. The visitor centre controversies raged right through the nineties, and would not ultimately be resolved until the first years of the new millennium, when they were succeeded by a new wave of heritage disputes centred on road developments.[53]

In the course of the Burren and Luggala disputes, the state suffered dramatic defeat. The Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Burren Action Group in 1993. Henceforth the state would be obliged to apply for planning permission for all developments (it had up till then been exempt).[54] Years later, following a stubborn rearguard action, the High Court directed the OPW to pull down the partially constructed buildings at both sites and restitute the land

[53] Browne and Stevens, 'The Role of Heritage Attractions in Sustainable Tourism Strategies', 249–50.

[54] *Irish Times*, 'Supreme Court rejects OPW appeal on centres', 27 May, 1993.

at a cost of several millions.[55] It is difficult to think of a comparable case where the state was so comprehensively humiliated through the legal process.

With hindsight, we can see that the Operational Programmes reflected those flaws in tourism policy which failed properly to integrate sustainability values with economic objectives. Though sustainability had been declared as central to tourism strategy from the mid-nineties, it was persistently trumped not alone by overrun growth targets, but also by the developmental energies unleashed with the Celtic Tiger. The ever-upward targets for tourist numbers precipitated a massive expansion in the accommodation and amenity base. A rash of new hotels, holiday homes, golf courses and heritage amenities sprang up, many in the most scenic locations, their passage smoothed by lax planning laws, political corruption, and loose lending policies by the banks. Judgment of a kind was passed on this in an article of Timothy Egan's in the *New York Times*, when he wrote of a visit to Dingle:

> You walk along Dingle Harbor past a forlorn rock tower, Hussey's Folly they call it. It was a 19th century stimulus project, a jobs generator for starving people at the time of the Great Famine. And then, in the green folds of a peninsula holding the greatest concentration of archaeological sites in Ireland, you see the latest and largest of artifacts – the empty houses built at the peak of the Celtic tiger period.[56]

The effect is an imploding Russian doll: a planning failure, inside a cultural failure, inside an all-enveloping economic one.

The economics of identity

Michael Cronin and Barbara O'Connor have pointed up the tendency for tourism studies in Ireland to settle into 'a depressing binarity'. It is seen either positively as something that creates jobs and facilitates regional development, or else as destructive in the way it commodifies peoples and cultures.[57] Kneafsey takes issue with the wholly negative characterisation of

[55] *Irish Times*, 'Mullaghmore Centre car park to be demolished', 2 April, 2001; 'Permission refused for Luggala Centre', 14 February, 1995.

[56] Timoty Egan, 'The Orphans of Ireland', *New York Times*, 1 April, 2009.

[57] Michael Cronin and Barbara O' Connor (eds), *Irish Tourism: Image, Culture and Identity* (Clevedon, 2003), 3.

commodification, insisting that such forms as traditional music are 'inalienable possessions', which can be shared but never completely given away.[58] Quinn, in her analysis of two arts festivals in Ireland, is critical of the lack of agency in tourism studies, which tend to portray natives as the passive victims of tourism culture.[59]

This emphasis on the agency of local people echoes the findings of anthropological work carried out elsewhere. In particular, Nick Stanley's study of the impact of tourism on the Polynesian Islands argues that it is possible to 'be ourselves for you' and remain, in some sense, true to ourselves. Local peoples are agents in their own destiny, he argues, and can harness tourism for their own purposes, and can even strengthen their identity in the process.[60] Tate le Fevre endorses this view, arguing that tourism scholarship has underestimated the degree to which local people can manipulate tourism to serve their own purposes, 'one of which might be to broadcast their traditional identity to a global audience'.[61]

However the problem with this analysis is that it somewhat simplifies the relation between native and 'other'. The visitor centre controversies can be read as symptoms of the growing fissures in homogeneous 'Irishness'. Complex coalitions between locally-based activists and nationally and internationally based environmentalists were involved in both campaigns. According to Leonard, environmental movements need to be open to such alliances to be effective.[62] In this context the idea of 'being *ourselves* for you' takes on a more complex meaning. The agent (who is also the object) of tourism can, in T. S. Eliot's phrase, 'prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet'. This recuperated agency, however ironic, is nonetheless an antidote to the pessimism and passivity under which the subject is consumed in consumerism in the vision of critics such as Adorno, Baudrillard and Jameson.

Ironically, the very forces of globalisation that compel people to take control of their cultural destiny at local level are the same as those which

[58] Moya Kneafsey, 'If it Wasn't for the Tourists We Wouldn't Have an Audience: The Case of Tourism and Traditional Music in North Mayo', in Cronin and O'Connor (eds), *Irish Tourism: Image, Culture and Identity*, 21–42.

[59] Ruth Casey, 'Defining the Local: The Development of an "Environment Culture" in a North Clare Village', in Cronin and O'Connor (eds), *Irish Tourism: Image, Culture and Identity*, 42–60.

[60] Nick Stanley, *Being Ourselves for you: the Global Display of Cultures* (London, 1998), 12.

[61] Tate le Fevre, 'Tourism and Indigenous Curation of Culture in Lifou, New Caledonia', in Nick Stanley (ed), *The Future of Indigenous Museums: Perspectives from the Southwest Pacific* (New York, 2007), 88.

[62] Liam Leonard, *The Environmental Movement in Ireland* (New York, 2008), 31.

compel national tourism agencies to accentuate those distinctive factors which differentiate one national product from another. 'The more Irish culture has become global,' writes Tom Inglis, 'the more the Irish need to continually create and maintain national difference'.[63] In the battle against sameness, against global homogenisation, 'cultural entrepreneurs search for authentic local difference that can then be marketed globally'.[64] Terry Eagleton recognises 'a kind of universalised particularism' as one of the signatures of post-modernity.[65] He is sceptical of the cultural credentials of contemporary capitalism: 'the predatory actions of capitalism breed, by way of defensive reaction, a multitude of closed cultures, which the pluralist ideology of capitalism can then celebrate as a rich diversity of life-forms'.[66] As we have seen, the national brand is mediated through heritage tourism into 57 varieties of locality and place.

The German idealists, by rooting their idea of culture in folk tradition, initiated the idea of culture as 'a whole way of life'—but crucially circumscribed that wholeness with national boundaries.[67] Ironically, for a nationalist leader like de Valera, the object of politics, and therefore of culture, was to protect a whole way of life from being eroded by foreign influences. In the initial phase of the Irish tourist industry in the thirties and forties, only a form of voyeuristic tourism that took memories (of a people living slowly in a timeless, empty land) and left lots of foreign exchange, was compatible with this vision. However, as Ireland through the 1950s became drawn into the international competition for tourism earnings, it brought with it inevitable changes to the cultural composition of the product, changes that were in themselves symptomatic of cultural changes in Irish life.

Heritage, in Ireland as elsewhere, is part of the process of modernisation, or perhaps more accurately of post-modernisation. It has grown along with the shift from the consumption of goods to the consumption of services, and can be understood 'as both a cultural phenomenon and also as a form of economic practice'.[68] Heritage and tourism, we might conclude, are intrinsically related, in the way that economics and identity, despite the protests of the disenchanted culturalists, have always been.

University College Dublin

[63] Tom Inglis, *Global Ireland: Same Difference* (London, 2008), 71.
[64] Ibid., 163.
[65] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (London: 2000), 82.
[66] Ibid., 129–30.
[67] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, 12
[68] Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-modern World* (London: 1991), 49.