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Walking Labyrinths : spirituality, religion and wellness tourism

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Di Williams's book *Labyrinth - landscape of the soul*. (2011) states that labyrinths have been known to the human race for well over 4000 years. They seem to have emerged and re-emerged in several time waves and in slightly differing forms throughout this period. The various forms of labyrinth have a long history, stretching back thousands of years. As a primeval archetype they occur in many parts of the world and in almost all religious traditions. The term is of ancient Greek origin, and the labyrinth in the palace of Knossos in Crete figures in Greek mythology. It is found in Hindu and Hopi images among many others. In Christian usage, a labyrinth was constructed in stone in the floor of Charters cathedral near Paris, around the year 1200. The faithful could make a pilgrimage journey to the cathedral and complete it by walking the labyrinth as the final symbol of a journey to the Holy Land. Having historical, cultural, and religious roots, humans have been walking the path of the labyrinth for centuries be it on the beach or in a cathedral.

Labyrinth are experiencing a revival in modern life, showing up everywhere from universities, retreat centres, rehabilitation centres and hospitals, to prisons and back garden and bog landscapes. The process of walking the labyrinth is in response to the growing felt need for a spirituality to counter the materialism and chaos of our time. This research focus on a comparative study of the visitor's experience of walking a spiritual labyrinth in Ireland with that in Lithuania.

Key Words: labyrinths, spirituality, Ireland, Lithuania

Introduction.

In today's fast moving world, people are seeking out new experiences with authenticity and uniqueness. According to Alex Norman (2012) spiritual tourism could be grouped into five varietal categories which can offer such experiences be it: healing; experiment; quest for personal discovery; quest for knowledge or; as retreat and collective. Nowadays, wellbeing is a top priority in everyday living and wellness activities be they active or passive are sought out by the individual to correct or ameliorate elements of everyday life, which is perceived as problematic. There are emerging spirituality trends seeking out something old and ancient combined with modernity. To meet these needs of people, the 'rebirth' of labyrinth occurred in the twentieth century as a meditation tool.

Labyrinths were designed and used by people thousands of years before Christ. This tradition has been preserved and we still have labyrinths not only in today's architectural designs, but also in peoples back gardens, outside of hospitals, schools, parks, or even

prisons. Labyrinths are used in many spiritual traditions and in all faiths as a walking meditation. It is believed that as you walk the sacred geometry, the different pathways actually helps to calm the mind, open the heart and rejuvenate the self, through meditation in a place of contemplation.

However, this paper attempts to emphasise the connection between religion, spirituality and wellbeing through the investigation of visitor experiences at the spiritual walking labyrinths. Spiritual walking labyrinths were chosen for this research because it is a slowly growing market all around the world and it is a huge niche market for the hotel and leisure industry. Furthermore, walking labyrinths are a vital tool in bringing communities closer together.

The key aim of this paper is to establish different types of labyrinths and to compare the visitor experiences of labyrinth walking between Ireland and Lithuania. The areas to be addressed include definitions of spiritual, religious and wellness tourism and the relationship between them. The author aims to emphasize the

linkage between the tourism forms mentioned above and the walking labyrinths. In addition, research areas will include the history of labyrinths, their rebirth, and the types of labyrinths.

Definitions of Religious, Spiritual and Wellness Tourism

Religious Tourism is defined by the Strategic Initiatives & Government Advisory (SIGA) team (2012), as travel with the core motive of experiencing religious forms, or the products they induce, like art, culture, traditions and architecture.

Authors such as Sharpley (2006) and Richards (2011), describe the phenomenon of religious tourism as a very complex area, the combination of 'religion' and 'travel'. Richards (2011) in his studies of religious tourism, indicates that the concept is far from clear. A number of different concepts may be grouped under the term 'religious tourism' or could be related to it; including pilgrimage, pilgrim-tourism, spiritual tourism, cultural tourism, holistic tourism, wellness tourism and creative tourism.

As stated by Timothy and Olsen (2006:4):

Many people who consider themselves spiritual would not see themselves as religious and vice versa', .

Raj, Griffin and Blackwell (2015:105) using Vukonic's definition, describe religious tourism as

consisting of a range of spiritual sites and associated services, which are visited for both secular and religious reasons (i.e. spiritual sites such as shrines and pilgrimage sites).

In fact, Timothy and Olsen (2006) claim that religion and spirituality are among the most common motivations for travel.

The term spiritual tourism is relatively new and a small number of scholars have commented on it. Spiritual tourism is defined as tourism characterised by a self-conscious project of spiritual betterment. One of the appropriate descriptions of a spiritual tourist is

someone who visits a specific place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual meaning and/or growth, without overt religious compulsion, which could be religious, non-religious, sacred or experiential in nature, but within the Divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling (Haq & Jackson 2009:145).

Timothy & Olsen (2006:4 citing Heelas, 1998:5) outline religion and spirituality as separate suggesting that people 'have what they take to be spiritual experiences without having to hold religious beliefs'. Furthermore, they suggest that spirituality is an individual experience.

Some authors have argued that spirituality is at the core of wellness (e.g. Devereux & Carnegie, 2006; Pernecky & Johnston, 2006; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006 in Smith and Puczko, 2009:47). This leads to a shift away from religion towards a kind of transcendent spirituality. However, secularisation of notions of religion and spirituality has resulted in a wider interpretation of what constitutes sacred tourism places and experiences and hence, increased participation in such forms of travel, according to Timothy and Olsen (2006:238). This leads to the idea of a 'New Age' movement and the essence of it is self-spirituality, that is the notion that 'self' is sacred and that spirituality lies within the individual person (Smith, 2006:50).

The reinvented 'movement' of walking labyrinths might be related to the 'New Age movement' that started in 1990s, around the time that Dr. Lauren Artress, created a canvas replica of the Chartres medieval pattern and facilitated open walks for the public. (Rhodes, 2009:82).

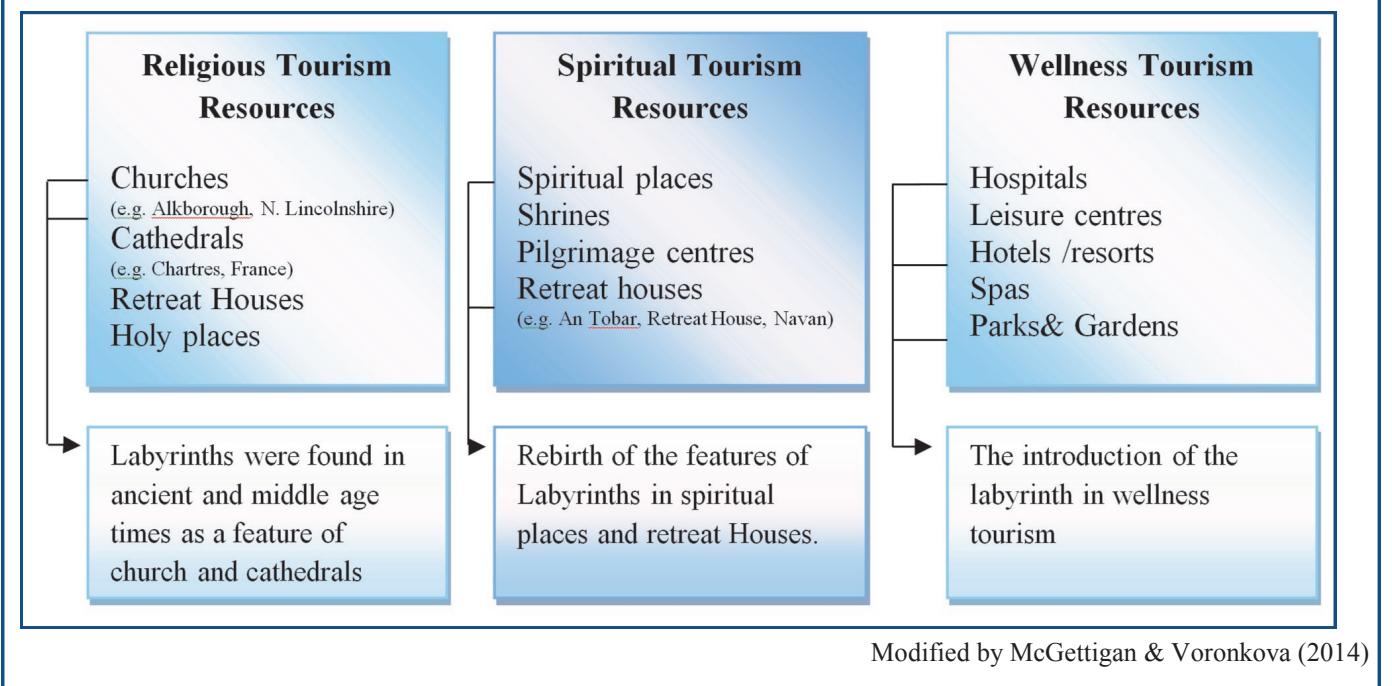
As literature reviewed by Smith and Puczko (2009) shows, spirituality might have links with wellbeing and / or health tourism. According to Zuker & Sharma (2012), labyrinth walking is a form of mindful meditation and is viewed by some as a tool to help improve quality of life. As there are links between mindfulness, spirituality and health, well-being and wellness concepts are examined hereafter.

Concepts of well-being and wellness are quite widely used, for example, in the 'health, well-being and tourism' sector, according to Konu, Tuohino and Komppula (2010). In addition, Smith and Puczko (2009:12) state that wellness is a very complex concept, containing

elements of lifestyle, physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing, and one's relationship to oneself, others, and the environment.

They argue that wellness includes different concepts related to it, such as well-being, happiness, quality of life, holistic practice and spiritual beliefs.

Figure 1 : Religious, Spiritual and Wellness Tourism Resources Model



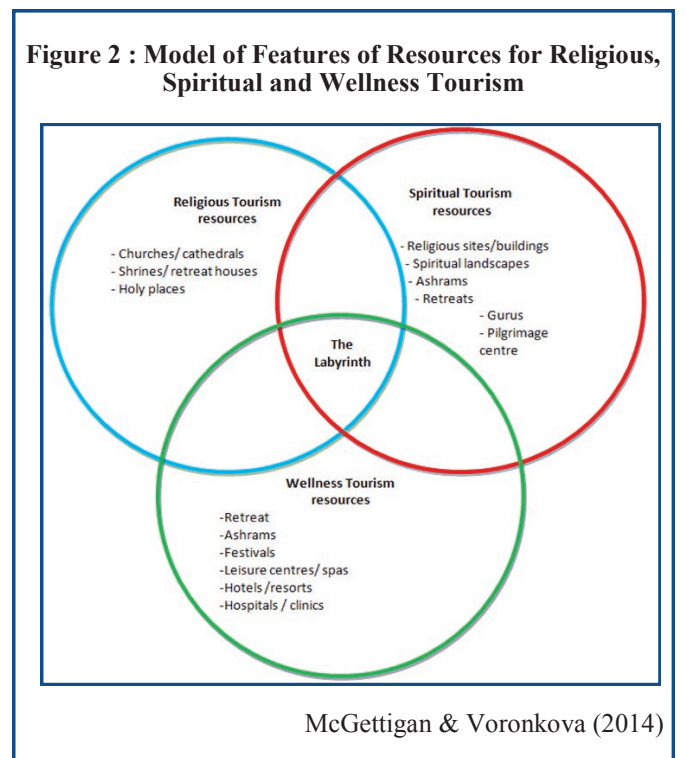
Modified by McGettigan & Voronkova (2014)

Resources for Religious, Spiritual and Wellness Tourism

Many authors (e.g. Heelas, 1998; Smith & Puczko, 2006; Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010; Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Norman, 2012), have argued that most spiritual, religious and wellness tourists travel to the same destination, but their individual quest may differ and vary. For example, as indicated by various authors (e.g. Olsen & Timothy, 2006; Shackley, 2004) religious tourists visit churches, cathedrals, shrines, retreat houses, holy places and festivals. Likewise, Smith (2006) proposes that spiritual tourism can include visiting religious sites or buildings, spiritual landscapes, pilgrimage centres, ashrams, retreats and gurus. In addition, Smith and Puczko (2006) suggest that health and wellness tourism facilities include retreat, ashrams, festivals, leisure centres, spas, hotels and resorts, hospitals and clinics.

This clearly shows that the resources of religious, spiritual and wellness tourism overlap, as displayed in Figure 1. On analysis, they all share a common feature, which is a labyrinth - as outlined in Figure 2. While labyrinths in ancient and medieval times were found inbuilt on cathedrals floors and walls, and were used by pilgrims, more recently however, walking labyrinths appear in retreat houses, parks, gardens, hospital, and schools and even in prisons. The fact that walking labyrinths have physiological effects, is thus relating them to wellness tourism. In this regard, research has been carried out on walking labyrinth effects and their benefits for humans.

Figure 2 : Model of Features of Resources for Religious, Spiritual and Wellness Tourism



McGettigan & Voronkova (2014)

Introduction to Labyrinths

A labyrinth is an ancient, sacred, archetypal pattern that has been found throughout the world in many forms and sizes. Labyrinths have a single path to the centre and back and they are one of the few archetypal patterns that we can physically interact with. Walking labyrinths are enjoying rebirth in popularity as tools for meditation and healing (Labyrinth Ireland.com, 2015). The process of walking a labyrinth helps many people become more centered and balanced (as outlined by Rhodes, 2006). Many authors (e.g. Beaman, 2006) have described walking labyrinth as a ‘walking meditation’ or a ‘spiritual path’.

Many people confuse walking labyrinths with walking a maze - but a labyrinth is not a maze. The labyrinth differs from a maze in that it is unicursal and it has a single path leading to the centre and back. Mazes are puzzles, designed to trick the participant and get them lost (Artress, 2000; Beaman, 2006).

History of the Labyrinth

Many authors (e.g. Shaper & Camp, 2013; Sharma & Zucker, 2012; Bigard, 2009; Artress, 2000) say that labyrinths are ancient meditative tools that have been in existence for thousands of years. In the middle ages, many cathedrals and churches had labyrinths embedded in their floors, the most famous being the eleven-circuit medieval type labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral in France. Labyrinths in the great cathedrals gave the opportunity for pilgrims who could not travel to Jerusalem to follow ‘in the footsteps of Christ’ (Carnes, 2010).

According to the traditional perspective associated with the labyrinth, walking the labyrinth is viewed as a metaphor for one’s journey in life and can be used in secular and / or spiritual context. It offers a holistic experience that acknowledges on this basis the interrelationships between body, mind, and spirit. Bigard (2009) has described its substantial potential as a therapeutic and educational tool.

The labyrinth pattern is universal and has been found on all continents, except Antarctica (Bigard, 2009). There are various patterns of labyrinths both modern and ancient. The Labyrinth Society website (www.labyrinthsociety.org) has a clear description about the design of labyrinths and sacred geometry. They present the thoughts of their members, including Sig Lonegren’s definition of sacred geometry as:

The use of a handful of ratios to create forms that help the seeker to resonate properly to achieve their desired spiritual goal (Labyrinth Society, ND).

However, embracing diversity, they also include Alex Champion’s definition:

sacred geometry is the contemplation and utilization of the archetypal geometric patterns of Nature for the purposes of spiritual communion and healing (Labyrinth Society, ND).

However, the most appropriate definition of sacred geometry, which they present is Robert’s Ferré’s commentary:

Sacred geometry is the act of studying the divine act of creation and then using that knowledge to create in the same way. By studying nature, we find that the basic building blocks of creation are geometric. Since a divine hand is responsible for originating the numbers and proportions of the manifest universe, that geometry is sacred. Studying sacred geometry leads us to truth and self-understanding. All societies use sacred geometry to construct their temples, sacred places, and art. Chartres Cathedral, for example and its labyrinth. Numbers aren't just for counting, nor are they just symbolic. They are the actual essence of everything that exists (Labyrinth Society, ND).

Rebirth of Labyrinth

According to Carnes (2001), the tradition of labyrinth walks was recovered by Lauren Artress in the United States in the early '90s at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco and in recent years, the labyrinth has come to be recognized as an instrument of holistic healing. The aforementioned Artress is one of the founders of ‘Veriditas’ a major force and voice of labyrinth revival and its use as a spiritual tool (as outlined on the Labyrinth Society website). Veriditas is non-profit organisation that is known for offering quality experiences of the labyrinth in workshops and retreats throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa and Australia.

In her message, Artress (2000) suggests that today’s spiritual seekers want something for the New Age that is ancient and substantial, not just ‘New Age’. The labyrinth appeals to seekers of every faith and seekers with no or very little faith background. Recently, labyrinths are appearing in likely and unlikely places, such as gardens, parks, city streets, nursing homes,

hospitals, retreat houses, colleges. Additionally, more recently, the therapeutic effects of labyrinths on human well-being have been the focus of nursing research investigations, (Munro, 2010).

The Labyrinth community is rapidly growing worldwide. The best known in the US is The Labyrinth Society (TLS). Their mission is

to support all those who create, maintain and use labyrinths, and to serve the global community by providing education, networking and opportunities to experience transformation (Labyrinth Society, NDb)

According to the Labyrinth Society, in the twenty first century, people began asking a different set of questions about labyrinths. The usual were historical, contextual, and archaeological questions about the designs, locations and uses of labyrinths. Nowadays, however, people have begun to ask questions about the reported effects of walking labyrinths or interacting with labyrinths in a variety of other ways. These questions led to a new and emerging field of labyrinth research.

With the growing demand for labyrinths, and investigations being undertaken on the benefits and effects which walking labyrinths might have on human wellbeing, there might be a niche market for the tourism and hospitality industries. Hotels that have large gardens and room for improvement can incorporate a walking labyrinth with the potential to attract more customers that have religious, spiritual, wellness and / or other motives. For example Ballynahinch Castle Hotel, in Connemara, Co. Galway, Ireland has a labyrinth in its gardens.

There is on-going research related to labyrinths. The Labyrinth Society Website cites close to fifty articles and studies related to the growing field of labyrinth research. Doctor John W. Rhodes is responsible for on-going research that assess the effects of walking labyrinths. The results of his work (2008) shows that walking a labyrinth or interacting with it in other ways might increase the level of an individual's relaxation, calmness, quietness or /and decrease their agitation, anxiety and stress.

Types of Labyrinth

Various authors (e.g. Beaman, 2006; Lonegren, 2001) have outlined various types of labyrinths. The two primary patterns that are most common not only in

Figure 3 : Classic Labyrinth



Figure 4 : Chartres Labyrinth



Ireland and Lithuania but in the world, are the classic seven circuits, as displayed in Figure 3 and the Chartres eleven circuit medieval pattern as shown in Figure 4. The Classic seven-circuit labyrinth can also be found in eleven, fifteen or three circles.

Beaman (2006) states that the classic seven circuit labyrinth is mostly known as the Cretan or pagan labyrinth. This pattern can be made of stone, turf or paint and for many people this design symbolises the wholeness of the labyrinth as a spiritual tool, removing its associations from any particular faith community or spiritual truth. The second common design is called the Chartres labyrinth. It is so called because its representation was found on the floor of the Chartres Cathedral in France (see Figure 5). This is one of the most famous Christian labyrinths, and has survived intact (Shaper & Camp, 2013). According to Artress (2000) 'as many as twenty-two of the eighty Gothic cathedrals housed labyrinth'. In addition, it is believed that the Chartres type labyrinth design has a sacred geometry and thus, walking the different pathways might help to reduce stress and calm the individuals down (Rickelmann, 2008).

Figure 5 : Walking the Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral (Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Chartres), France



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Labyrinth_at_Chartres_Cathedral.JPG

Figure 6 Labyrinth Locations in Ireland



- Classic type of labyrinth
- Medieval Chartres Type labyrinths in five or eleven circles
- Unknown type of labyrinth

Figure 7 Labyrinth Locations in Lithuania



The World-Wide Labyrinth Locator has been designed by The Labyrinth Society to be an easy-to-use database of labyrinths around the world. At the current time, the Worldwide Labyrinth Locator database contains over 4,300 labyrinths in 75 or more countries. In Ireland, there are 25 registered private and public places that have walking labyrinths and in Lithuania there are four sites listed.

Labyrinths in Ireland

Classic type labyrinth imprints are found in various parts of Ireland. For example the 'Hollywood Stone' which was found in 1908 in County Wicklow, by some local men. Dating from around the sixth century CE, the Hollywood Stone most likely has some connection with ancient pilgrimages to the monastic settlement at nearby Glendalough. Since December 2005, the Hollywood Stone is at the visitors centre at Glendalough, County Wicklow. Additionally, a medieval style labyrinth has been found in Rathmore Church Co. Meath (Saward, 2013).

Figure 6. demonstrates labyrinth locations and types in Ireland. According to the Labyrinth Locator, there are fifteen registered classic type labyrinths in Ireland in

both public and private lands. the medieval Chartres type labyrinth is less popular and the remaining four are listed with no description.

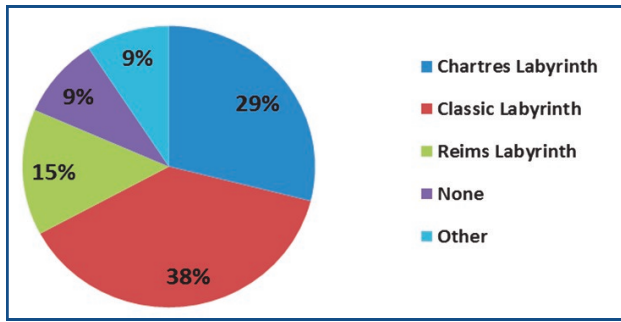
Labyrinths in Lithuania

Figure 7 displays the types of labyrinths in Lithuania that have been registered. Only two places have incorporated the classic type of labyrinth. *The Park of Energetic Labyrinth and Geometric Shapes* consist of various types of labyrinths on the one site - such as classic, Chartres and Reims Labyrinths. Interestingly (note the discussion above), one maze is also registered in Lithuania.

Study Methods

As discussed earlier, the purpose of this study is to investigate visitor experiences at the spiritual walking labyrinths and to compare experiences in Ireland with those in Lithuania. To collect these data, various registered sites were chosen in Ireland, such as An Tobar retreat house, in Navan, Co. Meath. In Lithuania, the *Park of Energetic Labyrinths and Geometric Figures* was investigated.

Figure 8 : Types of Labyrinth



In order to assess the effects of walking labyrinths, a five-step Likert Scale was used. The research by Rhodes (2006) was helpful in designing the questionnaire. The findings from the present study provide important insights into the walking of labyrinths and the connection between tourism, religion, spirituality and wellness. With changing human needs, the uses of walking labyrinths has changed also. There is a very little academic literature on this topic, and thus, this paper aims to bridge the gap in academic literature between material on walking labyrinths and religious, spiritual and wellness tourism, particularly, with reference to measuring the visitor experience at spiritual walking labyrinths..

Findings

The results section focuses on the findings derived from forty questionnaires. As one of the objectives is to compare visitor experiences in Lithuania and Ireland,

twenty questionnaires were distributed to users of Lithuania’s *Park of Energetic Labyrinths and Geometry Shapes*. For respondents in Ireland, online questionnaires were sent to several people who are linked with the use of labyrinths. The findings are presented in both graphical and narrative form.

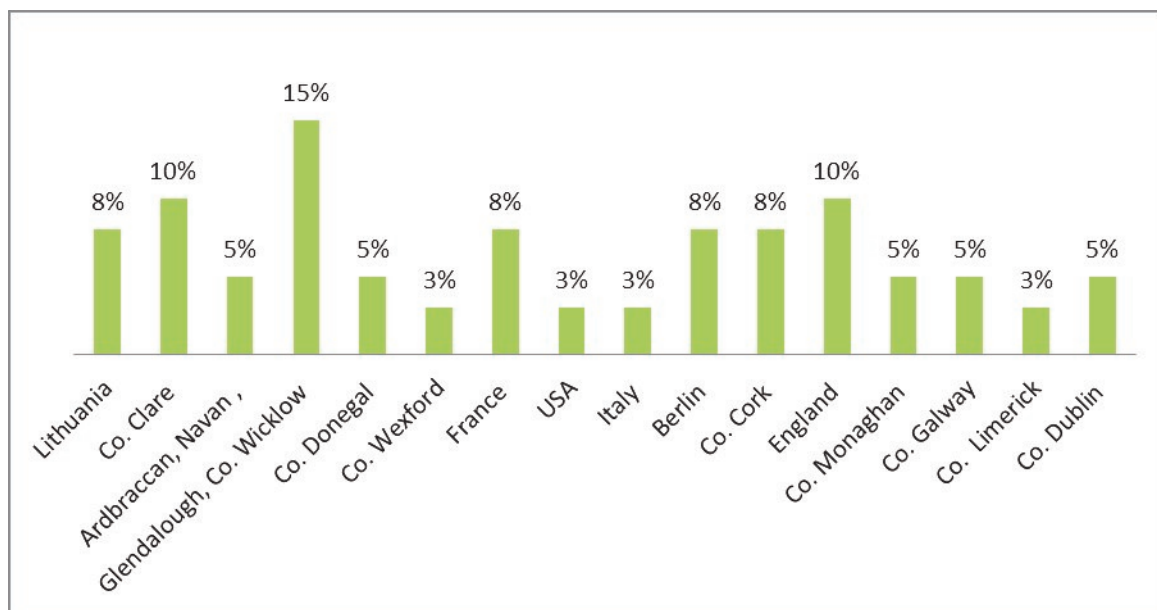
Respondent profile (Irish)

There was a broad age distribution (Q.1) between all participants, with the majority (37%) falling into the age bracket of 45-55. 32% of participants were aged between 31-44, the next largest group (16%) were 18-30 years old. The least numerous were the age group of the 56-60 with only 5%, and the age group of 60+ had only 11%. Regarding gender ratio (Q.2) in the sample, the majority were females 74% (26% were males) and in addition, 90% of respondents (Q.3) were Irish - the other respondents were English and Scottish.

Respondent profile (Lithuanian)

The age distribution (Q.1) of Lithuanians was similar to the Irish age distribution. The majority respondents (40%) falling into the age bracket of 45-55, with a further 25% of respondents in 18–30 age group. The remaining groups were small with only 20% of respondents being 31-44 years old; 10% were under 18. and only 5% were over 60. The gender ratio (Q2) of the Lithuanian profile was identical to Irish with females representing 70% and males only 30% of the sample. Furthermore, all of the respondents in Lithuania (Q3) were native Lithuanians.

Figure 9 : Labyrinth Locations



Objective 1: Establishing the most popular types of Walking Labyrinths

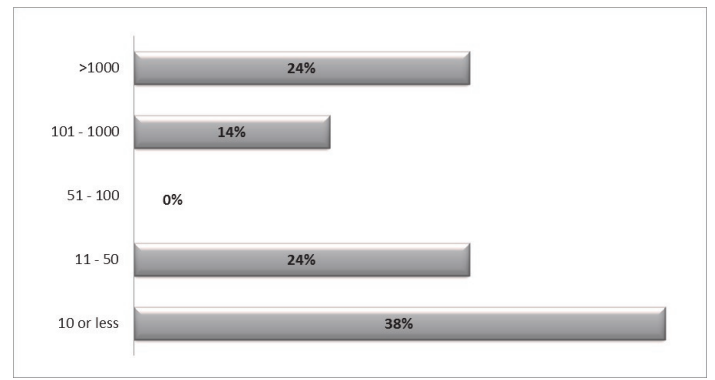
Types of Labyrinth

The majority (38%) of both Irish and Lithuanian respondents were familiar with the classic type of Labyrinth (Figure 8). Another 29% were aware of Chartres Labyrinths, and a further 15% were familiar with the Reims type of Labyrinth and only 9% of respondents were aware of other types of Labyrinths - 9% didn't know any of these types.

Awareness of Other Labyrinths.

The highest percentage of respondents (63%) were aware of other Labyrinths (Figure 9) - both in their own countries and abroad - and the remainder (37%) were not aware of any other types of Labyrinth. Figure 8 illustrates the sites identified by respondents. Many were familiar with several labyrinth locations in Ireland and abroad. The most popular indicated by Irish respondents (15%) was Glendalough Labyrinth in Co. Wicklow. The other best known labyrinths among respondents were in Co. Clare and England with 10% respectively. Eight percent correspondingly of respondents listed following locations: Lithuania,

Figure 10 : Number of Times Respondents have Walked a Labyrinth



France, Berlin and Co. Cork. As Figure 8 shows, other locations listed are in Co. Meath, Donegal, Monaghan, Galway and Dublin with only 5% respectively. In addition to this 3% of respondents were familiar with labyrinths in Co. Wexford, Limerick, in the USA and Italy.

Frequency of Walking Labyrinths

Only a quarter of respondents indicated that they were walking a labyrinth for a first time on the day they were filling in the questionnaire. The responses of the

Figure 11 : Respondent Reaction to Walking Labyrinths (Irish)

Effect	Much More	More	About the Same	Less	Much Less	Not Applicable
1. Relaxed	57%	30%	9%	0%	4%	0%
2. Anxious	0%	0%	4%	4%	96%	0%
3. Clear	43%	30%	26%	0%	0%	0%
4. Peaceful	61%	26%	13%	0%	0%	0%
5. Centred	52%	26%	22%	0%	0%	0%
6. Open	35%	35%	30%	0%	0%	0%
7. Quiet	65%	22%	13%	0%	0%	0%
8. Agitative	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
9. Reflective	74%	9%	17%	0%	0%	0%

Figure 12 : Respondent Response to Walking Labyrinths (Lithuanian)

Effect	Much More	More	About the Same	Less	Much Less	Not Applicable
1. Relaxed	60%	25%	10%	5%	0%	0%
2. Anxious	0%	10%	15%	20%	55%	0%
3. Clear	30%	45%	10%	0%	15%	0%
4. Peaceful	55%	20%	5%	0%	20%	0%
5. Centred	40%	25%	5%	10%	20%	0%
6. Open	35%	25%	5%	10%	25%	0%
7. Quiet	50%	30%	5%	0%	15%	0%
8. Agitative	0%	5%	5%	25%	65%	0%
9. Reflective	30%	15%	10%	5%	40%	0%

remaining 75% from both countries are presented in Figure 10. 38% of respondents did not indicate the frequency of their Labyrinth walking. Of the 62% that responded, 24% are frequent users of labyrinths, followed by 16% of the respondents who use labyrinths daily and the same percentage who use labyrinths rarely. Other responses to this question included 12% that walk labyrinth once a year and an equivalent percentage who do not often walk them. A minority of respondents (only 8%) answered that they walk a labyrinth occasionally and weekly. An estimate of how often respondents have walked Labyrinths is presented in Figure 9.

Objective 2: Comparing the visitor experience in Ireland and Lithuania

Comparing how Respondents felt walking the labyrinth with how they felt afterwards

As Figures 11 and 12 demonstrate, there is no significant difference between the profiles of Irish and Lithuanian respondents. In general respondents from Ireland were ‘much more’ effected or remained ‘about the same’ regarding the positive effects of using the labyrinth than respondents from Lithuania.

Additional Words to Describe Respondents’ Labyrinth Experience

When asked to provide additional words to describe their Labyrinth experience, respondents from Ireland were more active and all 20 provided various descriptions about their labyrinth experience. Respondents from Lithuania were not so active and only half of them gave descriptions. The majority of both respondent groups described their experience as grateful, fulfilling, positive, happy, peaceful and calming. Less common, but also evident were

statements expressing their experience as regenerating, renewing, uplifting and connecting the participant to something greater.

Purpose for Walking the Labyrinth Today

The result in Figure 13 indicate that participants in both counties had various purposes to walk a labyrinth. The largest group of 25% indicated personal intentions, peace in the Ukraine and the world as a main purpose to walk a Labyrinth. For 20%, the main intention was meditation and relaxation. The following 12% were looking for guidance in life and life direction. The remaining respondents were asking for love or health, another 9% were just observing. 6% were receiving fulfilment through energy and 3% were seeking to deal with relationship issues. 15% walked a Labyrinth with an undisclosed purpose and 20% had no real purpose.

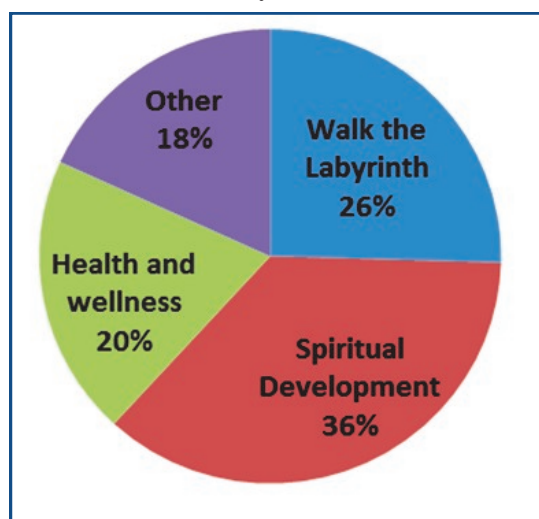
General Comments About Labyrinth Experience Today

With reference to additional comments about their labyrinth experience, the following are citations from the questionnaires:

- Enjoyable and helpful*
- Reflective*
- Rewarding*
- Everybody should experience a labyrinth walk*
- Very positive and nourishing*
- After walking a labyrinth I feel much more relaxed*
- I find peace with myself*
- I would highly recommend it and walk again*
- Guidance*
- Fulfilling*
- Harmony*

Figure 13 : Did you Walk the Labyrinth with a Specific Purpose, Question or Intention



Figure 14 : Respondents' Main Purpose to Visit Labyrinth

Balancing

Nothing unusual

Love and light

100% of respondents from both countries expressed positive labyrinth experiences. Respondents from both countries mostly felt peace and love while walking the labyrinth. The remaining respondents share various experience descriptions such as:

Feel very good and did something for the world I will be back

It is wonderful to walk the Labyrinth alone but even nicer to walk it as a community

Everyone should experience a labyrinth walk

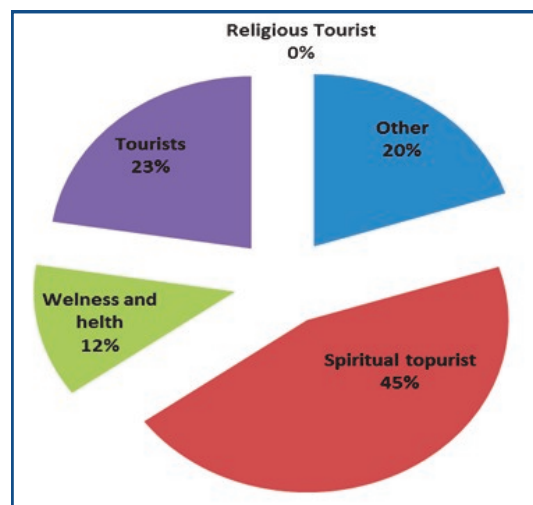
Reflection on the purpose of my life, my aims in life'.

Main Purpose of Trip Today

As the results in Figure 14 indicate, 36% of respondents identified that their main purpose to visit a labyrinth site is spiritual development. The following 26% of indicated that they came to the site only to walk a labyrinth. The remaining 20% specified health and wellness as the main purpose and the remaining 18% had other purposes.

Type of Tourist

As figure 15 shows, 49% of respondents of both countries consider themselves as Spiritual Tourists. The following 23% consider themselves as ordinary Tourists and 12% of respondents consider themselves as Wellness and Health Tourists. 20% of respondents consider themselves as 'other'.

Figure 15 : Respondents' Description

Discussion

For respondents from both countries (38%), classic type labyrinths are the most popular. The second popular type of labyrinth amongst the respondents was Chartres type (29%) followed by Reims type labyrinths (15%). The results of this study concur with the Labyrinth Locator information outlined in the literature review. Fifteen out of twenty-two registered labyrinths in Ireland appear to be the classic type. It is possible that the popularity of this type of labyrinth can be related to the design features used to build a classic labyrinth - which are relatively easier to construct than Chartres or Reims types.

Respondents are familiar with labyrinths in various locations not only in Ireland, but also in Europe and the USA. The largest number of respondents (15%) listed the labyrinth in Glendalough, County Wicklow.

When asked about how many times they have walked Labyrinths, 38% indicated that they have walked ten times or less. These results are close to the findings of Dr. John W. Rhodes' studies, in which the majority of respondents (27%) have used labyrinths ten times or less. 24% of respondents indicated that they had previously used a labyrinth from eleven to fifty times, while an amazing 24% had used them more than a thousand times. The results show that there is no significant difference when comparing the frequency of walking a labyrinth with the physical effects reported by the respondents.

In order to compare the visitor experiences of walking labyrinths in Ireland with Lithuania the survey participants from Ireland and Lithuania were asked to complete five-step Likert Scale rankings (Rhodes, 2006) for nine effect / feeling descriptions. The results show that 60% of the respondents from Lithuania felt 'much more' relaxed after a labyrinth walk than before; for respondents from Ireland, the response was 57%. Respondents from Ireland reported that they felt 'much less' anxious (96%), after a labyrinth walk than beforehand, where respondents from Lithuania reported on anxiety, that they felt 'much less' (55%), 'less' (20%) or about the same (15%) after a walk that before a labyrinth walk. The survey shows that respondents from Ireland reported that they felt 'much more' (43%) or 'more' (30%) clear after a labyrinth walk, Lithuanian respondents reported that they felt 'much more' (30%) or 'more' (45%) clear after a labyrinth walk that before. Respondents from Ireland reported that they felt 'much more' (61%) or 'more' (26%) peaceful after a labyrinth walk. Lithuanian respondents reported that they felt 'much more' (55%) or 'more' (20%) peaceful afterwards. The survey shows that respondents from Ireland felt 'much more' (52%) or 'more' (26%) centred after a labyrinth walk while surprisingly, Lithuanians felt 'much more' (40%), 'more' (25%) or 'much less' (20%) centred afterwards than they felt before a labyrinth walk. Interestingly, 100% of the respondents from Ireland felt 'much less' agitated after a labyrinth walk than before a labyrinth walk. Respondents from Lithuania reported that they felt 'much less' (65%) or 'less' (25%) agitated.

However, in general, despite some minor variance, the difference between respondents from Ireland and Lithuania in this study was not significant. Respondents from both countries were more or less affected similarly after a labyrinth walk. This confirms Rhodes (2006) study, that walking the labyrinth might increase levels of relaxation, peacefulness and clarity, while decreasing levels of agitation, anxiety and stress.

Respondents from both countries were asked to describe their labyrinth experience and again, the results showed no significant differences. All of the participants from both countries experienced positive feelings. The majority of respondents described their labyrinth experience as grateful, fulfilling, positive, happy, peaceful, calming and connected to the greater. Without exception, all of the general comments about their labyrinth experience were positive with no significant differences between the countries.

Furthermore, respondents from both countries were asked to indicate a specific purpose, question, or intention for walking a labyrinth. The results showed that the majority of respondents between both countries had motivations in mind to walk a labyrinth. The largest group (25%) reported personal intentions and, peace in the Ukraine and the world, as the main purpose. Meditation and relaxation were identified as important motivations (20%) for respondents from both countries, however, 20% of respondents indicated that they walked a labyrinth with no specific purpose question or intention.

This study showed that demographic differences such as age, gender or nationality, do not appear to have any impact on reported effects or experiences between Ireland and Lithuania.

Respondents from both countries were asked to indicate the main purpose of their trip to the labyrinth site. The study showed that 36% of respondents reported spiritual development as the main purpose of their trip. Amazingly, 26% of respondents reported that they came to the site only to walk a labyrinth and 20% of respondents reported health and wellness as their main purpose for visiting the site.

However, the results of this study confirm the statement by Heelas in *Definitions of Religious, Spiritual and Wellness Tourism* that 'people have what they take to be spiritual experiences without having to hold religious beliefs' (cited in Timothy & Olsen (2006:4)). In addition, Zuker & Sharma (2012) have stated that there is a link between mindfulness, spirituality and health. The results of this study showed that 20% of respondents reported wellbeing and health as a main purpose of their trip.

The results show that the majority of respondents (45%) from both countries describe themselves as a 'spiritual tourist', the following (23%) would consider themselves as 'tourist' only; 12% would consider themselves as 'wellness and /or health' tourists, while 20% of respondents described themselves as 'other'. Surprisingly, not a single respondent from either country would consider themselves as a 'religious tourist'.

The results of this study showed that majority of respondents consider themselves as spiritual tourists rather than religious. As Timothy and Olsen (2006:4) suggest: 'many people who consider themselves spiritual would not see themselves as religious and vice versa'. This study supports this statement and confirms

the connection between spirituality and wellness or health. However, this leads to the 'New Age' movement as mentioned in *Definitions of Religious, Spiritual and Wellness Tourism* by Smith (2006:21):

the essence of the New Age movement is self-spirituality, that is the notion that self is sacred and that spirituality lies within the individual person'.

Historically, labyrinths have a connection with religion, as they were found in churches since medieval times (as discussed by Carnes, 2010). Yet, today, none of the respondents in Ireland or Lithuania described themselves as a religious tourist walking the labyrinth. Furthermore, the majority of respondents see themselves as spiritual tourists. This relates to Timothy and Olsen's (2006) comment that the notion of secularisation of religion is a shift away from formal religion and indicates that spirituality is slowly growing. This might be related to the 'New Age' movement and its essence which is self-spirituality, that is the notion that self is sacred and that spirituality lies within the individual person.

Conclusion

This paper examines the relationship between religious, spiritual and wellness tourism, and how the common features amongst all these forms of tourism overlap. The first objective of this paper is accomplished by establishing the different types of walking labyrinths and the research shows that the most popular type, both in Ireland and Lithuania, is the classic type. The second objective of this study is achieved by comparing the visitor experience at the walking labyrinths in Ireland and in Lithuania. This research shows no significant difference between the respondents' experiences in both countries. Demographic indications are that age, gender or nationality did not change an individual's experience features of the walking labyrinth.

Generally, the majority of respondents expressed positive feelings after visiting the walking the labyrinths. The respondents from both countries reported that they felt much more relaxed, focused and calm after the labyrinth walk than before it. It can be concluded that walking labyrinths might increase relaxation, calmness and peace and decrease agitation, stress and anxiety.

Despite the number of times which some respondents have of walked labyrinths, their feelings have remained positive each time. This has major implications for satisfaction levels and the related repeat visits.

Future Work

This project is based on limited exploratory research, however it makes an attempt to tackle the dearth of work in relation to the 'walking labyrinth' as this is a relatively new emerging topic of investigation. This gap in academic literature about 'walking labyrinths', requires much more in-depth future research.

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