

## Introduction: Tourism in the Irish economy

Tourism has been targeted by the Irish government as a sector offering good prospects not only of generating foreign exchange but, more importantly, of providing much-needed job opportunities at a time of incessantly rising unemployment levels. Tourism has been identified in this respect both for its strong growth performance internationally and its labour-intensive nature.

The government's plans for tourism development were encapsulated in the "Operational Programme" for tourism for the period 1989-93 which was agreed with the Commission of the European Communities in December 1989 as part of the Community Support Framework under which Ireland receives EC structural funding (Ó Cinnéide and Walsh, 1991). This programme provides for a total investment in the tourism sector of some IR£300 millions over the period of the plan. The programme envisaged a doubling of incoming tourist numbers to 4.2 million, an increase in tourism revenues of IR£500 millions (about 75 per cent), and the creation of 25,000 additional tourism related jobs (an increase of one third). These were very ambitious targets, given that global tourism has been growing at an average annual rate of only five per cent in recent years.

The first two years of the Operational Programme *did* produce vigorous growth in tourist numbers and revenue, and particularly in investment (Tansey Webster and Associates, 1991; Dunne, 1992). However, there was a slight decline in numbers in 1991, due principally to a slump in the North American market (attributed mainly to the impact of the Gulf War), although aggregate revenue continued to expand.

Overall, tourism (domestic and overseas) accounted for about seven per cent of both GNP and total employment in Ireland in 1990. However, in the period 1985-1990, tourism contributed 37 per cent of net employment growth in the economy. Tourism also makes a very important contribution to the Irish balance of payments, accounting for seven per cent of total exports of goods and services in 1990 and, perhaps more importantly, over half the overall net current account surplus in that year (Tansey Webster and Associates, 1991).

Irish tourism has an important regional dimension, in that tourists are attracted disproportionately to the more rural and remote western part of the country, where incomes are generally below the national average. Table 1 shows that the western regions, with below-average incomes, attract above-average levels of tourism revenue, with the result that tourism makes a much greater contribution to personal incomes in these regions than it does in other regions.

Given the emphasis being placed by the Irish government on tourism as a means of income and employment expansion, and the resultant growing importance of the industry in the national economy, there has been a surprising dearth of critical analysis of the implications of tourism development. Such issues as the nature of the employment

**Table 1: Regional Distribution of Income from Tourism (1990)**

Region	Share of Tourism Income %	Share of population %	Per Capita Income Index*	Tourism Revenue as % of Total Personal Income %
East	29.8	40.9	112	3.7
Midlands	7.2	10.2	86	4.7
South East	9.6	10.9	90	5.6
South West	22.1	15.1	99	8.4
Mid West	9.7	8.8	95	6.6
West	12.8	8.3	87	10.1
North West	8.7	5.9	85	9.9

\*Ireland = 100

*Source: Data from Tansey Webster and Associates (1991) and Census of Population 1991*

provided by the tourism industry have been largely ignored (but see Deegan and Dineen, 1991).

This paper seeks to fill some of this gap by critically examining the structure of employment in the Irish tourism industry, drawing on detailed surveys carried out by the Council for Education, Recruitment and Training (CERT), the state agency responsible for the training of personnel for the industry. This examination highlights the numerical importance of women workers in the industry, which contrasts with the generally low participation rate of Irish women in the paid labour force, by OECD standards (Callender, 1990). The high profile of women workers in tourism employment is linked to the low levels of skill, and high levels of seasonal and part-time work, in the industry. Given that tourism, therefore, is characterised by a large proportion of poor-quality employment, questions must be raised concerning the wisdom of devoting substantial levels of public resources to tourism development in Ireland.

## The structure of employment in the tourism industry

Because of its highly heterogeneous nature and the fact that it overlaps with many other economic activities, tourism employment is not easily quantifiable. However, in the case of Ireland, detailed surveys carried out by CERT provide an excellent database for analysing the structure of employment in the industry (CERT, 1987, 1988, 1991).

In 1987, an estimated 57,000 people were engaged directly in providing tourism services; however, because many of these were employed part-time, or were simultaneously providing services to non-tourists (retailing, catering, and the like), this figure converts to 38,500 full-time equivalents (CERT, 1987). This figure accords well with other estimates of

**Table 2: Employment structure of the Irish tourism industry, 1987 (1)**

Sub-sector	As % of total tourism employment	Women as % of sub-sector
Accommodation	49	70
Catering	11	38
Transport	16	18 (2)
Tour Operators	6	76
Administration (3)	5	44 (4)
Leisure/Recreation	6	50
Retailing	8 (5)	40 (6)
Total	100	54

**Notes:**

- (1) Unless otherwise stated, all data derived from CERT (1987)
- (2) Based on national gender division for transport sector (Blackwell, 1989).
- (3) Refers to public servants involved in tourism administration.
- (4) Based on overall gender division in civil service (Blackwell, 1989).
- (5) Refers to full-time equivalents.
- (6) Based on national gender division in retailing (Blackwell, 1989).

employment in the industry (Tansey Webster and Associates, 1991). When one includes indirect employment (supplying goods and services to the industry) and further employment induced by the multiplier effects of tourist expenditure, total tourism-related employment for that year rises to 63,000, representing about six per cent of total employment and ten per cent of service employment.

Table 2 gives a breakdown of tourism employment by sub-sector and gender. While the CERT surveys provide much detail on the gender division of labour in most areas of tourism employment, it is not complete. It has therefore been necessary to estimate the gender division for some sub-sectors from other sources. The proportions given in the table therefore should be regarded as roughly approximate rather than precise.

Table 2 shows that, in 1987, women accounted for some 54 per cent of all those employed in Irish tourism. This is significantly in excess of the proportion of total services employment accounted for by women (44 per cent), and almost twice the female proportion of the overall workforce (31 per cent). If one excludes the male-intensive transport sub-sector (mainly involved in bringing tourists into the country), women account for 60 per cent of tourism employment. For accommodation, which accounts for one half of tourism employment, the proportion rises to 70 per cent.

## Women's employment in the hotel sector

**Table 3: Structure of employment in the hotel sector**

Employment Category	As % of hotel employment	Women as % of category
Full-time Permanent	52.1	59.2
Part-time Permanent	12.5	79.4
Full-time Seasonal	13.6	73.5
Part-time Seasonal	2.4	88.2
Casual	19.4	n.a.
Total	100.0	66.0*

\*Excluding casual

Source: Computed from data in CERT (1988)

It is clear, therefore, that tourism is an atypical sector in the Irish economy, in that it is characterised by a predominantly female workforce. In order to explain this, a closer examination will be carried out of the accommodation sub-sector, in which women workers are particularly prominent. This examination is based on a detailed survey carried out by CERT (1988) of employment in hotels and guest houses (hereafter simply the "hotel sector") which account for the great bulk of employment in the subsector. The hotel sector is particularly oriented to the tourism industry, with 80 per cent of employment being tourism-related (CERT, 1987).

Table 3 provides a breakdown of employment in the hotel sector into different employment categories, and gives the female proportion of employment in each category. Just over one half of all employment is full-time permanent, with a further one-eighth being permanent but part-time. The remaining one-third of jobs are seasonal (both full-time and part-time) or casual.

Excluding casual workers (for whom no gender breakdown is available) women comprise two-thirds of all employment in hotels - over twice the overall female participation rate in paid employment in the country. However, the female proportion is lower for full-time permanent jobs (59%) and higher for all the other categories: part-time permanent (79%); full-time seasonal (74%); and part-time seasonal (88%). This employment structure is very similar to that noted by Bagguley (1990) for the British hotel and catering sector.

The domination of part-time and temporary employment by women is a common feature of advanced western economies. The fact that these employment categories constitute such a large proportion of total employment in the hotel sector - almost a half compared to just 16 per cent in the national workforce - therefore goes a long way to explaining the disproportionate representation of women workers in the sector. However, the fact remains that women are also disproportionately represented among full-time permanent workers in the sector.

The second key explanatory factor in accounting for the high level of female employment in the hotel sector is the low level of skill required of the sector's workforce: less than one-third of all workers may be regarded as skilled in the sense of having received at least some formal training (See Appendix). Even among full-time permanent workers, only a minority (44 per cent) have received any formal training. Skill levels are particularly low (only one seventh of all workers having had formal training) among part-time, seasonal and casual workers, the great majority of whom are women.

In all work categories, men are more likely to be skilled than women. And the higher the skill level of an occupational category, the more likely it is that it is full time, permanent and male. Of managerial positions (eight per cent of all employment in the hotel sector), 90 per cent are full-time permanent and three-quarters are formally trained, but only 40 per cent of such positions are held by women. By contrast, less than half (44 per cent) of unskilled "accommodation assistants" (chambermaids; nine per cent of all jobs) are full-time permanent, and all are women. Similarly, over 90 per cent of waiters/waitresses (21 per cent of all hotel employment) are women, and less than 30 per cent of jobs in this category are full-time permanent.

## Gender segmentation in the hotel sector

There is considerable variation in female representation as between the different "departments" of the hotel sector. Women are particularly prominent in the Accommodation (99% of all workers) and Restaurant and Banquet (86%) departments, but only comprise a minority in Management (40%) and the Bar and Nightclub (48%) departments. The remaining departments, Kitchen (61%) and Reception and General (57%) occupy intermediate positions.

*Within* departments, there is also a high level of gender segmentation by occupation. Of kitchen staff, the vast majority of head chefs (skilled) and porters (unskilled) are men, while almost all kitchen assistants and wash-ups (both unskilled) are women. While Restaurant and Banquet are predominantly female, the category of "head waiters/waitresses" is mainly made up of men. In the Reception and General department, those working as receptionists or in accounts are almost entirely women while porters, "doorpersons" and maintenance workers are almost all male. In management, of 161 managing directors and general managers, only one is a woman.

However, there *are* some occupational categories where segmentation is not so apparent. Almost one-half of the categories of chef (other than head chefs) and barperson consist of women (although in the latter case, women are much less likely to be full-time permanent employees). And, while there are virtually no female managing directors or general managers, of those with the simple grade of "manager", 44 per cent are women, with the proportion rising to 49 per cent for assistant/duty managers and exactly one-half for trainee managers. This could mean improving opportunities for women to progress to top management positions in future years. Alternatively, it could simply mean that women gradually get squeezed out as they move up the managerial ladder. Hicks's (1990) findings would tend to support the latter interpretation.

## Flexibility in hotel employment

Much attention has been devoted in recent times to the growing trend towards increasing flexibility of the workforce (especially in the manufacturing sector) in advanced economies (Atkinson, 1985; Schoenberger, 1988). This includes both *numerical flexibility*, whereby workers are taken on and let go on a ready basis by employers, and *functional flexibility*, whereby individual workers carry out a range of different tasks in a particular workplace. In contrast to manufacturing, however, labour flexibility is a long-established feature of the hotel sector. In Britain, while functional flexibility emerged in the 1960s in response to labour shortages, it tended to be superseded in the 1970s by increasing numerical flexibility, mainly in the form of part-time and seasonal work (Bagguley, 1990). While part-time work is more conducive to functional specialisation than functional flexibility, it has many attractions for employers. These include the ability to adapt to daily and weekly fluctuations in customer demand and the ability to avoid social insurance contributions, holiday and sick pay for part-time workers. The fact that part-time and temporary workers are more difficult to organise by trade unions is also seen as beneficial by many employers. There is also the fact that part-time and seasonal work is also attractive in particular to many women (especially married) workers. Thus Dineen (1989) found that, in 1987, the majority of female part-time workers in Ireland preferred part-time work, mainly because of family responsibilities.

According to Bagguley (1990), in Britain, functional flexibility is particularly common among management staff in full-time jobs. In Ireland, CERT (1988) found a very high - and growing - level of functional flexibility outside management grades, with 73 per cent of hotel and 88 per cent of guest houses reporting flexible practices in non-management grades. The main area of functional flexibility involves movement between bar, restaurant and receptionist work. As the latter two categories are overwhelmingly female in content, it can be concluded that most functionally flexible workers in the hotel sector are women. The same applies, of course, to numerically flexible workers.

CERT (1988) also found that functional flexibility is particularly concentrated among non-Grade A hotels. To a certain extent this is due to greater scope for functional specialisation in the larger Grade A establishments. However, it is also noteworthy that trade unions are strongly established in the Grade A sector, but are almost entirely absent from the lower hotel grades. Irish hotel workers are mainly organised by SIPTU, the dominant union for general workers. SIPTU has negotiation agreements with 54 Grade A hotels representing three-quarters of all rooms in the Grade A sector (SIPTU, 1991). However, less than half the hotel rooms in Ireland are of Grade A standard, and trade unions are almost entirely absent from the other grades, where functional and numerical flexibility are particularly prominent.

## Regional distribution of hotel employment

**Table 4: Regional Distribution of Hotel Employment (%)**

Region	Hotel Employment (1988)	Total Employment (1986)	Ratio
East	29.0	43.7	0.66
Midlands	5.5	8.8	0.62
South East	10.9	10.4	1.05
South West	21.8	14.7	1.48
Mid West	11.4	8.9	1.28
West	12.1	8.1	1.50
North West	9.4	5.4	1.74

*Source: Cert (1988); Census of Population 1986*

CERT (1988) also provides information on the regional distribution of hotel employment. Table 4 relates each region's share of hotel employment to its share of total employment. A ratio of greater than one in the right hand column indicates a disproportionate concentration of hotel employment in a region. The table shows that hotel employment is particularly strongly concentrated in the western half of the country. This corroborates the findings by Tansey Webster and Associates (1991), noted earlier, that tourism makes a disproportionate contribution to personal incomes in western regions. This is undoubtedly significant, in that these are the most underdeveloped regions in the country, with below-average incomes and inferior employment opportunities compared with the east of the country. Of particular relevance in this context is that, in the past, employment opportunities for women tended to be relatively poorer in the west (Gillmor, 1985). Tourism, with its disproportionate tendency to provide work for women, therefore contributes in an important way to expanding work opportunities for the female labour force in this part of the country.

On the other hand, given the unskilled and frequently part-time or seasonal nature of employment in the hotel sector, it is clear that the disproportionate concentration of this employment in the west does not augur well for the prospects of closing the average income gap with the east, where high-quality service employment is heavily concentrated. Hotel employment, therefore, does provide a considerable level of employment in areas where job opportunities of any kind are in short supply, but at the cost of exacerbating inter-regional income disparities.

### The structure of employment in other tourism sectors

CERT (1991) provides detailed information on employment in a wide range of tourist-related activities outside the accommodation, catering and access transport sectors. Most

**Table 5: Structure of employment in the miscellaneous tourism sector**

Employment Category	As % of total employment	Women as % of category
Full-time Permanent	49.9	48.0
Part-time Permanent	10.4	54.9
Full-time Seasonal	22.1	55.8
Part-time Seasonal	17.5	58.0
Total	100.0	52.3

*Source: Computed from data in CERT (1991)*

of the activities in question (referred to hereinafter as the "miscellaneous tourism" sector) relate to leisure and recreation, but some other activities, such as internal transport and other tourist support services, are included. In employment terms, the most important activities involved are golf, craft centres, car hire, language centres and historic houses. Most of these activities also cater for non-tourists (e.g. golf, theatres), so that not all the jobs involved can be attributed to tourism. However, from CERT (1987) we can estimate that around 60 per cent of the employment concerned is tourism-dependent. This in turn amounted to almost 20 per cent of all direct employment in tourism in Ireland in 1990.

Data on the gender make-up of employment is available for sub-sectors accounting for three-quarters of all employment in the miscellaneous tourism sector. It is from these sub-sectors that Table 5 has been compiled. A comparison between Tables 3 and 5 shows that the nature of employment in the miscellaneous tourism sector is rather similar to that in the hotel sector. CERT (1991) does not provide for a "casual" employment category, but a comparison of the two tables suggests that such jobs are mainly subsumed into the "part-time seasonal" category in the miscellaneous tourism sector. Thus, in both the hotel and miscellaneous sectors, about one-half of all jobs are full-time permanent, with a further 35-40 per cent in the seasonal/casual category.

Just over half of all the employment in the miscellaneous sector is taken by women. This participation rate, while considerably less than that for the hotel sector (66%), is nevertheless in excess of the female participation rate in services employment in general (44 per cent), and considerably in excess of the proportion of women in the overall workforce (31 per cent). As with the hotel sector, women are under-represented in the full-time permanent category and over-represented in the part-time/seasonal categories; however, the divergences from the overall average female participation rate are not as marked as in hotel employment, where women are overwhelmingly dominant in the latter categories.

Of the 40 separate activities covered in the CERT survey, just seven account for almost sixty per cent of all employment. While the survey does not provide the detailed and systematic analysis of skill levels contained in the CERT (1987) survey of the hotel sector,



some general indications can be gleaned from the report. Thus, only one-quarter of employment in caravan/camping sites is full-time permanent, and two-thirds of this is male, whereas two-thirds of seasonal employment is female. Most jobs in this activity are unskilled.

By contrast, over four-fifths of employment in car hire is full-time permanent, and this is mostly male. This coincides with a high level of good-quality employment in sales, maintenance and administration. Golf courses portray an even division between full-time permanent and other forms of employment, but in both cases, some two-thirds of employment is male. In historic houses the bulk of employment is either part-time or seasonal, with over 80 per cent of seasonal workers being female, compared with one-half of those who are full-time permanent.

Irish language courses provide almost entirely seasonal employment, most of which provides supplementary income for teachers and those providing accommodation (both largely female). Language centres (mainly involved in teaching English to continental Europeans) provide a sizeable amount of full-time permanent employment (about two fifths of the total), although the majority of jobs are seasonal. Teachers are the main occupational group involved, and these, in turn, are mainly women.

Craft production is something of an exception to the general pattern of women primarily being involved in either seasonal or unskilled (or both) forms of employment in this sector. The great bulk (70 per cent) of employment in this activity is full-time permanent, a high proportion is skilled (almost one-third are craft workers), yet women predominate (70 per cent of all workers).

Overall, however, it is clear that the general pattern of employment in the miscellaneous tourism sector replicates that of the hotel sector, with women being disproportionately represented in the sector's workforce by comparison with other sectors outside tourism, and that this is particularly the case with part-time and seasonal work, which itself is much more common throughout the tourism industry than it is in the economy generally.

## Conclusion

The foregoing analysis shows that tourism is a highly seasonal and unstable economic sector in which part-time and unskilled employment are common features. Around one-half of employment in the industry consists of seasonal and/or part-time jobs, while only a minority of workers have received any formal training. The low proportions of full-time, permanent and skilled jobs in the industry are strongly linked to the high proportions of the workforce consisting of women: some 60 per cent of tourism jobs (excluding transport) are taken by women - twice the proportion for the total national workforce.

Irish tourism is also characterised by high levels of gender segmentation by occupation and high levels of numerical and functional specialisation. Flexible workers are, again, mainly female. While flexibility presents many advantages to employers, it also has attractions to many women workers, especially those with family responsibilities. Finally, tourism employment is disproportionately concentrated in the western regions of Ireland. While this significantly enhances employment opportunities for women in these regions, it also exacerbates regional income inequalities, due to the low-pay status of much of this employment.

These findings suggest that serious questions should be raised concerning the high levels of resources currently being invested in tourism development by both the Irish government and the European Community. The high proportion of poor-quality employment which typifies tourism ensures that the industry holds out little hope of helping Ireland close the income gap with the EC heartland. A strong emphasis on tourism growth therefore serves to confirm Ireland's peripheral status within the Community, relying on the spending in Ireland of wealth generated in highly-productive advanced economic activities in the core regions of Europe and other parts of the developed world.

The current surge of investment in tourism is, at least in part, stimulated by the need to create jobs, of whatever quality, as a short-term response to the mounting national unemployment problem. This reflects, once again, the tendency of successive Irish governments to allow short-term considerations to crowd out the formulation of long-term perspectives (Kennedy et al., 1988). As both the Telesis and Culliton Reports have argued, Ireland can only create a high-wage and high-employment economy through the development of a successful, indigenously-based manufacturing sector. It can be argued that the Irish workforce would ultimately be better served if the considerable public resources currently being directed into tourism were instead diverted to the pursuit of this latter objective.

## Appendix:

### Assumptions used in estimating skill levels

Because of information gaps in the CERT (1988) survey of the hotel sector, a number of assumptions have been made in estimating skill levels in the sector. The most significant of these are as follows:

- (i) For most occupational categories, the number of workers who have been "formally" or "informally" trained is given. It is assumed that formally trained workers are "skilled" and the remainder are "unskilled".
- (ii) For some occupational categories, the level of training is not given (i.e. those for whom CERT training is not relevant). The most significant of these categories have been classified for present purposes as follows:  
Skilled: Maintenance, gardener, office/accounts, telephonist.  
Unskilled: Porter, storeperson, doorperson, cleaner.
- (iii) Levels of training are only given for permanent workers. It is assumed that the same levels of training apply to seasonal workers with the important exceptions of seasonal waiters/waitresses, barpersons and "accommodation assistants" (i.e. chambermaids), all of whom are deemed to be unskilled.
- (iv) The respective hotel and guest house workforces are analysed separately. Frequently, levels of training are not given for occupational categories in the guest house sector (usually because of the small numbers involved). In these cases, the corresponding ratios for the hotel sector have been applied to the guest house sector.
- (v) Levels of training are not divided by gender. It has therefore been necessary to assume that men and women have equal levels of training in each occupational category, although in many cases this is likely to understate the level of training among men and to overstate it among women.
- (vi) No gender division is provided for casual workers in the CERT surveys. It is assumed that this division is the same as for other categories of worker (full-time and part-time permanent and seasonal) combined.

## References

- J. Atkinson, "Flexibility: planning for an uncertain future". *Manpower Policy and Practice*, Vol. 1, 1985, pps 26-9.
- P. Bagguley, "Gender and labour flexibility in hotel and catering". *Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 10, 1990, pps 737-747.
- R. Callender, "Women and work: the appearance and reality of change", *Labour Market Review*, Vol. 1, 1990, pps 18-36.
- CERT, *Scope of the Tourism Industry in Ireland*, 1987.
- CERT, *Manpower Survey of the Irish Hotel and Catering Industry*, 1988.
- CERT, *A Profile of Employment in the Tourism Industry: Non-Food and Accommodation*, 1991.
- J. Deegan and D. Dineen, "Irish tourism policy: employment, economic development and environmental interdependencies", paper to 14th Annual Economic Policy Conference of the Dublin Economics Workshop, Kenmare.
- D. Dineen, *Changing Employment Patterns in Ireland: Recent Trends and Future Prospects*, Irish National Pensions Board, 1989.
- J. Dunne, "World recession leads to empty rooms", *Irish Times*, August 1, 1992.
- D. Gillmor, "Recent changes in the employment of women in the Republic of Ireland", *Irish Geography*, Vol. 18, 1985, pps 69-73.
- L. Hicks, "Excluded women: How can this happen in the hotel world?", *Services Industry Journal*, Vol. 10, 1990, pps 348-363.
- K. Kennedy, T. Giblin and D. McHugh, *The Economic Development of Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, Routledge, 1988.
- M. Ó Cinnéide and J. Walsh, "Tourism and regional development in Ireland", *Geographical Viewpoint*, Vol. 19, 1991, pps 47-68.
- E. Schoenberger, "From Fordism to flexible accumulation: technology, competitive strategies, and international location", *Environment and Planning Series D*, Vol. 6, 1988, pps 345-362.
- SIPTU, *The SIPTU better hotel guide*, 1991.
- Tansey Webster and Associates, *Tourism and the Economy*. Prepared for the Irish Tourist Industry Confederation, 1991.