

## **Irish Film Tourism, Neocolonialism and Star Wars: Charting a Course Towards Ecologically and Culturally Considered Representation and Tourism on Skellig Michael**

**Authors :** Rachel Gough

**Abstract :** In 2014, Skellig Michael, an island off Ireland's western seaboard and UNESCO world heritage site became a major setting in Disney's Star Wars franchise. The subsequent influx of tourists to the site has proven to be a point of contention nationally. The increased visitor numbers have uplifted certain areas of the local economy, the mainland, but have caused irreparable damage to historic monuments and to endangered bird populations who breed on the island. Recent research carried out by a state body suggests far-reaching and longterm negative impacts on the island's culture and environment, should the association with the Star Wars franchise persist. In spite of this, the film has been widely endorsed by the Irish government as providing a vital economic boost to historically marginalised rural areas through film tourism. This paper argues quite plainly that what is taking place on Skellig is neocolonialism. Skellig Michael's unique resources, its aesthetic qualities, its ecosystem, and its cultural currency have been sold by the state to a multinational corporation, who profit from their use. Meanwhile, locals are left to do their best to turn a market trend into sustainable business at the expense of culture ecology and community. This paper intends to be the first dedicated study into the psychogeographic and cultural impact of Skellig Michael's deterioration as a result of film tourism. It will discuss the projected impact of this incident on Irish culture more broadly and finally will attempt to lay out a roadmap for more collaborative filmmaking and touristic approach, which allows local cultures and ecosystem's to thrive without drastically inhibiting cultural production. This paper will ultimately find that the consequences of this representation call for a requirement to read tourism as a split concept — namely into what we might loosely call "eco-tourism" and more capital-based "profit-bottom-line tourism."

**Keywords :** ecology, film tourism, neocolonialism, sustainability

**Conference Title :** ICFITVFL 2022 : International Conference on Film-Induced Tourism and Visit Film-Locations

**Conference Location :** London, United Kingdom

**Conference Dates :** March 11-12, 2022