



# Whitaker Institute Policy Brief Series

## Policy Brief No.: 59

April 2020

**Cluster:** Environment, Development, and Sustainability

**Theme:** Sustainable and Inclusive Societies

### Further Reading:

Anderson, DM (2010). Estimating the economic value of ice climbing in Hyalite Canyon: an application of travel cost count data models that account for excess zeroes. *Journal of Environmental Management* 91: 1012-1020.

Farrell, E. et al. (2018). [The challenges of protecting rural coastal communities from climate change and human impacts – a case study: Maharees Conservation Association CLG.](#)

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## The Economic Value of Outdoor Recreation on a Coastal Beach and Dune System in Ireland's Southwest

In Ireland, 1.9 million people (40% of the population) reside within 5km of the coast. Legally, the coastal zone in Ireland has no defined limits, yet is our most stressed environment due to rising anthropogenic pressures and evolving climate hazards. Sandy beaches and coastal dunes are experiencing chronic degradation and the diverse array of 'natural' ecosystem services they provide to coastal communities and economies, including coastal defences and outdoor recreation opportunities, are being lost. Environmental economists have been vocal in advocating for the non-market economic valuation of coastal ecosystem services as a means of instigating and justifying equitable policies that conserve the natural capital of these often rural areas.

### Research Findings

This research is the first study to estimate the recreational value of Irish coastal beach-dune systems. A negative binomial individual Travel Cost Model (TCM) was developed using data collected through on- and off-site surveys in the Maharees and Castlegregory communities, Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry, during summer 2019. Consumer Surplus [CS] value of €3.09 per person per beach-dune visit was estimated, comparing favourably with CS values of Mediterranean destinations. Aggregated seasonal CS figures amount to €165k based on summertime visitation levels. Using survey data, summer visitors to Castlegregory and the Maharees spend in excess of €9mn in the local economy through accommodation, food, recreation bookings, and transportation expenses. Additionally, a qualitative cross-comparison of over 30 alternate Irish coastal destinations named by survey respondents revealed that only Achill Island, Co. Mayo could match the Maharees in terms of fully providing the key natural amenities enjoyed by visitors. This finding highlights the Maharee's uniqueness and socioeconomic value for beach-dune recreation.

### Policy Implications

Quantifying the value of ecosystem services in coastal areas provides requisite information for policy development and resource management in line with advancing efforts to more fully estimate the value of Ireland's 'blue economy'. In a political and business climate where decisions are typically guided by cost-benefit analyses and market development, explicitly rendering 'hidden' ecosystem service and natural capital values can guide policy makers to allocate vital government resources toward underserviced rural areas in a more socially equitable manner. Thus, as well as being a practical natural resource planning and management tool, ecosystem services valuation can empower rural advocacy efforts and counteract policy marginalisation. Coastal areas like the Maharees possess high natural capital values, justifying the call to increase efforts to stem chronic degradation, support their conservation, and ensure their continued delivery of their ecosystem services which serve as the foundation for life and livelihood for these rural communities.