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Yeats's Legacy and Literary Tourism: A Study of the Yeats Winter School in Sligo

Mary McGuckin

Abstract

Literary tourism is of increasing importance within the field of cultural and heritage tourism yet remains under-represented in academic literature. Smith, et al. (2010, p. 108) define it as a “tourism activity motivated by interest in an author, a literary creation or setting, or the literary heritage of a destination”. The typical profile of a literary tourist is that of a well- educated holidaymaker who is seeking an authentic experience, may have heard about the place’s linkage with a writer but may not have high levels of knowledge about the actual work of the writer. The socio-economic characteristics of literary tourists indicate a pre-dominance of more educated visitors from a higher social class and income grouping (Smith, et al., 2010; Timothy & Boyd, 2003). These characteristics are particularly relevant to the concept of the ‘literary pilgrim’ who has an emotional connection as well as a “more intimate relationship with the author” (Robinson and Andersen, 2004). Gentile and Brown (2015) describe the “widening scope of literary tourism, its arguable transition from niche to mass tourism, and its attempt to link high and popular culture”. The growing popularity of literary festivals as well as other related literary trails, routes and events provides evidence of this.

This study focuses on the importance of Yeats’s literary connection and legacy in attracting visitors to Sligo and it provides a profile of the literary tourist that includes the literary ‘pilgrim’ or enthusiast visiting Sligo. The study further explores characteristics, motivations, and literary awareness as well as experiences and levels of satisfaction among visitors or literary ‘pilgrims’ attending the Yeats Winter School in 2016. Overall, respondents are positive about their experiences of Sligo as a literary destination and consider Yeats’s legacy to be valuable from a tourism perspective. However, the outcomes of this study indicate a need for a more strategic and collaborative approach to the development and marketing of Sligo as a literary destination including a cohesive communications strategy.

Key Words: Literary Tourism, Literary Tourist Motivations and Experiences, WB Yeats and Sligo

Introduction

People like to come to Ireland to talk literature. It is a comparative advantage of this country and it is due to a rich literary tradition here...Irish writing has for many years allowed this country to punch above its weight internationally.

(McWilliams, 2015, p2)

Although the quality and diversity of Ireland’s rich literary heritage is widely recognised, there remains a dearth of research in the area of literary tourism. WB Yeats is a world-renowned poet and playwright, the first Irish person to become a Nobel Laureate in Literature.

In 1923, the Chairman of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy in his presentation speech described Yeats as having “given expression to the spirit of a whole nation” (Hallström, 1923). Yeats wrote evocatively about many real Irish places, to the extent that many literature lovers make the pilgrimage to Ireland and, in particular, to Sligo to directly experience where Yeats found such inspiration for much of his best known and loved works. The aim of this research study is to examine the importance of Yeats’s literary connection and legacy in attracting visitors to Sligo. It explores the literary connection between WB Yeats and Sligo as a tourism destination.

WB Yeats was more than a literary icon. He was a journalist, a politician and a leader of Ireland’s literary revival who played a prominent role in shaping Ireland’s cultural foundations. Although Yeats was born in Dublin on June 13th, 1865, he and his siblings spent much of their childhood in Sligo, the home of their maternal grandparents the Pollexfens, a local merchant family. Yeats called Sligo “The Land of Heart’s Desire” and Sligo has become known as ‘Yeats country’. The Sligo landscapes, people, heritage and character as well as its western seaboard inspired Yeats to the extent that the region was perceived to be his ‘spiritual home’ Many of Yeats’s poems identify locations and scenes from Sligo including Innisfree, Sleuth Wood, Glencar, Cummen Strand, Knocknarea and Lissadell. WB Yeats’s final resting place is in the shadow of Ben Bulbin, at the cemetery at the church at Drumcliff where his paternal great-grandfather had been rector. (<https://yeats2015.com>)

In 1958, the Yeats Society was founded in Sligo to commemorate and honour the memory of WB Yeats and promote a greater awareness of Yeats’s talented family. The Society offers a programme of lectures, events, visits and activities including its International Summer School held annually. The Yeats Winter School involves a collaboration between the Yeats Society and the Sligo Park Hotel held annually in January/February. The weekend event provides a series of lectures, poetry readings, discussions and a tour of ‘Yeats Country’. It seeks to create a visitor experience where participants are encouraged to read, explore and think about Yeats’s work in the place where he found much of his inspiration. It attracts approximately 100 Yeats enthusiasts each year. (<https://www.yeatssociety.com>)

The aim of this study is to examine the importance of Yeats’s literary connection/legacy in attracting visitors to Sligo. The research objectives are as follows:

- To understand the context and meaning of literary tourism, the literary place and the literary tourist;
- To identify visitor characteristics, literary awareness and motivations for visiting;
- To explore visitors’ experiences and levels of satisfaction with the winter school;
- To assess visitors’ perceptions of Sligo as literary tourism destination and the preservation of its Yeats legacy.

Literary Tourism and Tourists

Although the relationship between tourism and literature dates back to the Roman Empire, scholarly interest in this subject has only evolved over the past three decades. In 2007, Watson suggested that the strong relationship between literature and tourism has developed into a cultural phenomenon, as literary interests are attracting visitors to destinations. Smith, et al. (2010, p.108) define literary tourism as a “tourism activity motivated by interest in an author, a literary creation or setting, or the literary heritage of a destination”. Similarly, Gentile and Brown (2015, p.40) redefine literary tourism as “a set of activities aiming at the popularisation of literature and other forms of art through intertwining display with discourse in order to link more intimately art with ordinary life”. Eight typologies of literary-inspired sites including writers’ homes, graves and literary festivals are identified (Robinson and Andersen, 2004, Busby and Klug, 2001 and Butler, 1986). More recently, destinations with a literary theme have increased in popularity due to film and television adaptations of literary works as there are close connections between film/media-based tourism and literary tourism. Hoppen, et al. (2014) provide examples of “living” literary tourism including “Ian Rankin’s Edinburgh” to depict how literary tourism has evolved into the virtual world of the internet and mobile applications.

Literary tourism can be viewed as a niche within the wider field of cultural and heritage tourism. The relationship between literature and place is explored within the field of cultural or humanistic geography. Squire (1993) explains that cultural geography is about de-coding meanings and understanding how these meanings are interpreted and communicated. Literature can depict images, often evocative, of places or landscapes as well as the people who live there. The literary tourism sector has evolved from people’s interest in literature itself, also the places that formed the setting for the literature as well as actual literary places. These places can be attractive because of the emotional values or meanings visitors attach to them. Ridanpaa (2007) explains that tourists’ ‘imaginaries’ of the place or location can be constructed as mystical, magical, sacred, unique or ‘other’ through literature and this can influence their travel decisions. A minority of visitors have a pre-existing sense of meaning or emotional attachment but, for many, this will occur through the experience of visiting the literary place.

Robinson and Andersen (2004) classify literary tourism sites into three categories: factual, imaginative and socially constructed. Factual places relate to the writer’s life including homes and haunts as well as burial places. Yeats’s connection to Sligo creates a ‘factual site’ within the context of literary tourism. Imaginative places can carry meanings perceived to be ‘real’ to the visitor in that they evoke involvement and emotions (Herbert, 2001). According to Pocock (1982), the image of Heathcliff evoked more excitement in fans of Emile Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* than simply visiting Haworth to tread in the footsteps of the Bronte sisters. In addition to the pursuit of authenticity, the qualities of these literary places can draw tourists places (Herbert, 2001). Such qualities may include, for example, places linked to the writer, to settings in a story and to the tourist’s own memories (Robinson and Andersen, 2004). The tourist senses a relationship with a place through the writer or their writing.

Generally, two categories of tourists visit literary places: literary pilgrims and generalist heritage visitors. Smith (2003) identified a ‘core of literary enthusiasts’ at literary sites. What distinguishes the dedicated literary traveller from the more general visitor tends to be his/her literary awareness (MacLeod, et al., 2009). Literary tourists can be well-educated

holidaymakers who are seeking an authentic experience, may have heard about the place's linkage with a writer although they may not have high levels of knowledge about the actual work of the writer. Heritage sites are more likely to be visited by older visitors although general heritage tourists belong to a range of age categories. In terms of gender representation, females have greater representation at heritage, cultural and literary sites. Studies by Smith et al. (2010) as well as Timothy and Boyd (2003) suggest that socio-economic characteristics of literary tourists indicate a pre-dominance of more educated visitors from a higher social class and income grouping. Such characteristics are particularly relevant to the concept of the 'literary pilgrim' who has an emotional connection as well as a more intimate relationship with the author according to Robinson and Andersen (2004). However, as literary tourism becomes more popularised, for example, through literary festivals or film/television adaptations, its reach extends to a more diverse range of tourists.

Literary Tourists' Motivations and Experiences

Seamen (2016, p.147) explains that

literary tourists, similar to the destinations they visit, appear to exist along a continuum wherein devoted readers motivated by specific literary works embark in pilgrimages to literary destinations can be viewed on one end, and happenstance attendees and non-readers on the other.

The majority of literary tourists are attracted to literary places for a variety of reasons, including: general curiosity, historical values or even simply the offering of "pleasant environments" (Smith, et al., 2010). Additionally, educational motivation or the desire for a learning experience is a primary factor for those choosing to visit a literary destination. The prior knowledge of the visitor and the destination's specific literary connection can also influence the visit (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). According to Herbert (2001, 1996), visitors' expectations and motivations can vary depending on the literary site's qualities and location or the writer's popularity. He suggests that the motivations of literary tourists relate primarily to the writer's biography and those places related to or immortalised in their literary works. Other 'push' motivational factors include cultural and spiritual enrichment, emotional connections, escape, historical/heritage engagement and desire for aesthetic pleasure (Poria, et al., 2006). Some tourists choose to visit literary destinations to connect with the past or for nostalgic motivations. According to Robinson and Andersen (2004), nostalgia reflects deeper cultural sensitivities, a level where tourist spaces created from literature convey meanings that exist beyond the text but are fundamental to our cultural understanding of literary tourism. Offering an authentic experience is very important in cultural and heritage tourism. Tourists choose to visit places linked to literature in their search for authenticity, both in toured objects as well as a search for a 'real self' (Yiannakis and Davies, 2012). Stiebel (2004) considers that "the authentic site requires markers but our notion of the authentic is the unmarked". Tourists are looking for the authentic experience yet literary places require commodification or 'markers' to shape the experience.

Each literary site offers a unique appeal attracting tourists with different expectations. For those involved in developing literary tourism places or destinations, an understanding of these expectations, motivations or the level of literary connection is important. Although literary

tourism is not a new phenomenon, there are gaps in extant research in this area, particularly with regard to visitors' motivations, expectations and experiences. Many destinations have some form of literary 'connection' and studies have illustrated the contributions of many authors to the popularity of these regions e.g. the Italian author Gabriel D'Annunzio (Gentile and Brown, 2015), Lord Byron (Busby & Shetliffe, 2013), Dylan Thomas and Jane Austen (Herbert, 1996; 2001) and Beatrix Potter and Lucy Maud Montgomery (Squire, 1996; 1993).

Methodology

In this study, a survey of visitors to the Yeats Winter School was conducted using an on-site questionnaire between 31st January and 2nd February, 2016. Fifty-two questionnaires were completed through a face-to-face interview format. Respondents were selected using a convenience sampling method. This method was chosen as most appropriate to this small scale, exploratory study. Similar studies of literary tourists' motivations have used this type and design of research approach (Busby and Shetliffe, 2013; and Pocock, 1992). The researcher attended the Winter School and explained the purpose of the study to participants. Interviews were conducted in a quieter location within the hotel where the Winter School was being held. The questionnaire design involved the visitor responding to a range of structured and open-ended questions. Responses were recorded for later analysis. One interviewer carried out all the interviews. The first section of the questionnaire focused on building a geo-demographic profile of the visitor. Second, the questionnaire examined visitor behaviour and travel patterns with regard to influencing factors, motivations and interests in addition to visitors' levels of satisfaction with the region. The final section focused on gathering qualitative data from visitors to explore their levels of awareness of literary tourism and specifically, their perceptions of the region's links to Yeats.

The organisers estimated that there was approximately 100 people in attendance at the Yeats Winter School. A sample group involving 52 attendees at the School provided the research findings detailed in this study. This presented limitations with regard to the generalisation and replicability of findings from a wider literary tourist/tourism perspective. However, the researcher's intention was to explore the importance of Yeats's literary connection and legacy in attracting visitors to Sligo, thereby providing a profile of the literary tourist that includes the literary 'pilgrim' or enthusiast visiting Sligo. Furthermore, the study explores characteristics, motivations and literary awareness as well as experiences and levels of satisfaction among visitors or literary 'pilgrims' attending the Yeats Winter School. The 52 respondents are identified through a numeric coding system from respondent 1 to 52 throughout the following sections of this paper.

Findings & Discussion

The primary research conducted in this study focused on gathering data relating to the following areas:

- Identifying visitor characteristics, literary awareness and motivations for visiting the Yeats Winter School and Sligo;
- Exploring visitors' experiences and levels of satisfaction with regard to the Winter School;
- Evaluating visitors' perceptions of Sligo as a literary tourism destination and the extent to which it has preserved its Yeats legacy.

The findings of the study would lead to a greater understanding of the context and meaning of literary tourism, the literary place and the literary tourist, using Sligo and its Yeats Winter School as a case example.

Profile of Visitors

Sixty seven percent of respondents in this study were female. This is similar to previous research that found higher levels of appeal among female visitors with regard to literary sites (Squire, 1996; 1993). All respondents were in third-level education or had completed a third-level qualification. This corresponds with the findings of Herbert (2001) who concluded that more highly educated people were more likely to visit literary sites. The predominance of a group of students from an American university in attendance at the Winter School may have skewed the profile of literary tourists in this study.

Purpose of Visit and Influencing Factors

As previously identified in the literature, the desire for a learning experience or educational motivation is a primary factor for visitors choosing a destination with a literary heritage. Research suggests that visitors' expectations and motivations differ across literary destinations and depend upon the site's location, qualities and the popularity of the literary figure with which it is connected (Tetley and Bramwell, 2004; Herbert, 2001).

As illustrated in Figure 1, the primary reason for 55% of respondents to visit Sligo is a literary event, in this instance, the Yeats Winter School. Closely linked is the significance of a learning experience for visitors of heritage sites (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). This is reflected in the study findings given that 26% of respondents chose education as the purpose of their visit.

Figure 1: Purpose of Visit

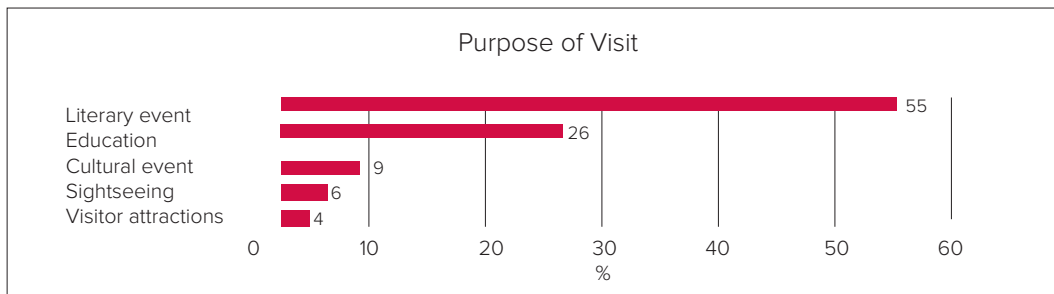
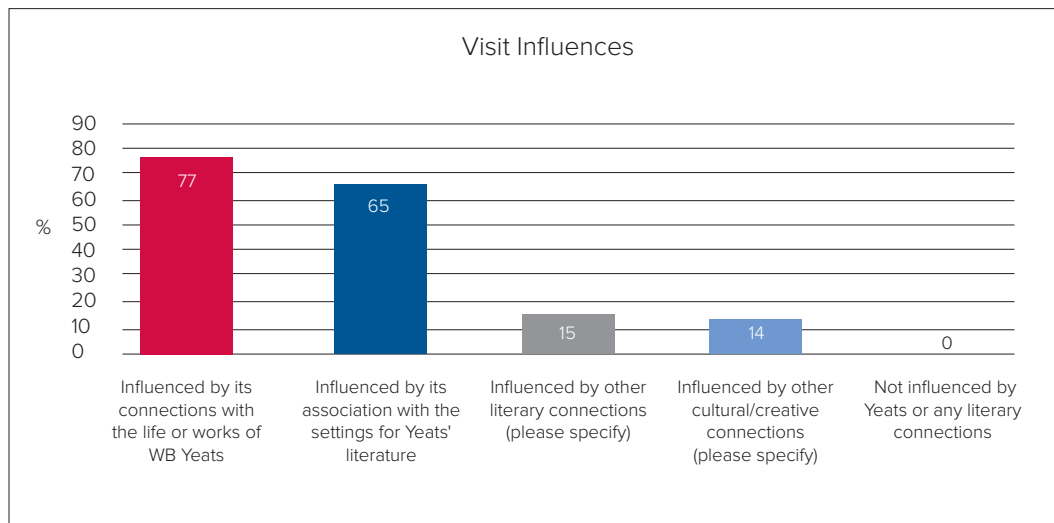


Figure 2 illustrates the literary factors influencing respondents' decision to visit the region. The life/works of WB Yeats and/or association with the settings for Yeats's literature influenced the majority of visitors. Seventy-seven percent of respondents were influenced by Sligo's connections with life or works of WB Yeats. Sligo's association with the settings for Yeats's literature was an important influence as 65% of respondents identified this influencing factor. These results correlate with the "emotional and intellectual engagement" aspects of the literature-tourism relationship (Robinson, 2002). It also concurs with the findings of Busby and Shetliffe (2013) which differentiates between the visitors with a higher level of dedication to the literary theme and the general heritage, or leisure visitor, as they attempt to segment the literary tourist market.

Figure 2: Yeats'/Literary Connections Influencing Visit



Respondents identified the source(s) of information they used to find out about the region. Figure 3 illustrates their responses. Friends/relatives/ business or college associates were the primary source of information for 44% of visitors and 19% used the internet as a source of information.

Figure 3: Sources of Information

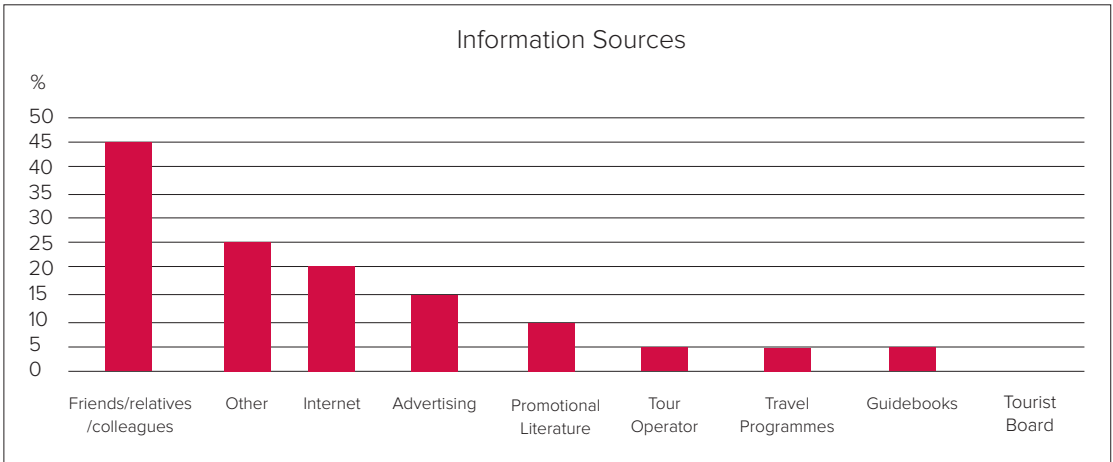
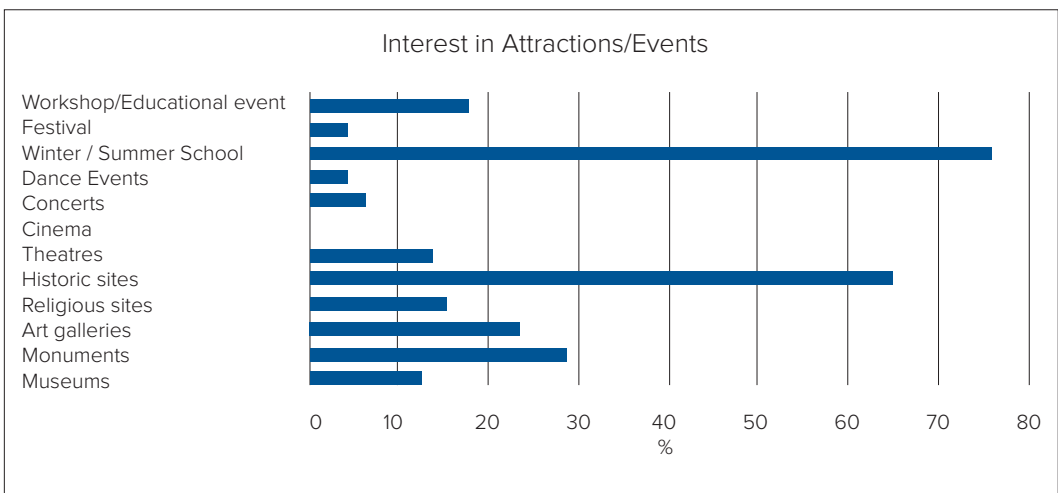


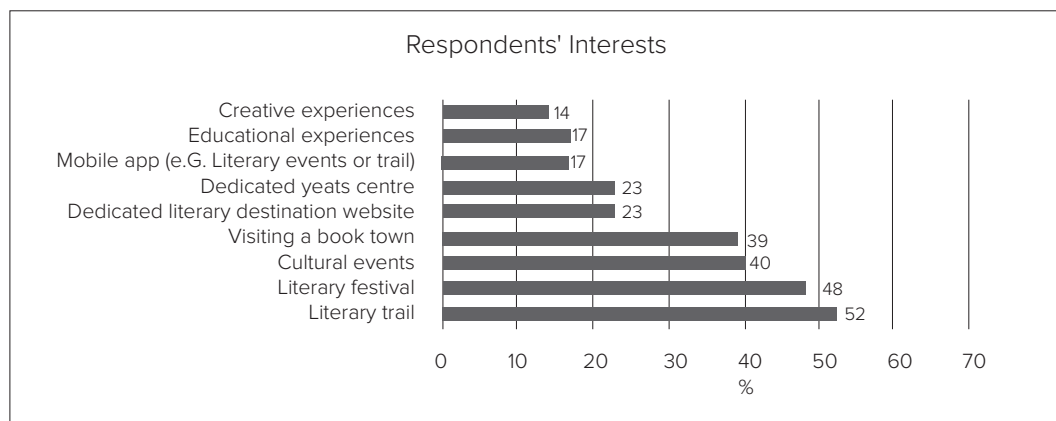
Figure 4 exhibits the cultural/creative attractions or events visitors have visited or are planning to visit in the region. Winter/summer school(s) (75%), historic sites (64%) and monuments (29%) were the attractions/event most visited or planned to visit. Timothy and Boyd (2003) highlight that education or learning experiences as well as the historic values of literary destinations can inspire tourists to visit.

Figure 4: Visitors' Interest in Attractions/Events



Respondents outlined their interests in specific literary/cultural/creative aspects of the tourist experience. As illustrated in Figure 5, this provides interesting insights into the ‘pull’ factors drawing tourists to a destination. Fifty-two percent of respondents expressed an interest in a literary trail. Respondent 52 suggested the development of a Yeats Trail...like Joyce’s Bloomsday and a food trail/poetry trail or dinner and performance was an idea put forward by respondent 46. Likewise, trails with walking was a recommendation made by respondent 46 and more time hiking outside was a suggestion from respondent 17. Carson, et al., (2013, p.49) in their Brisbane study state that “literary trails have the capacity to support local and non-local tourist activities in a sustainable way and in ways that meet the demands of the new tourist”. Forty eight percent of respondents were interested in literary festivals. This concurs with the work of Busby and Hambly (2000) who identified the ‘leisure factor’ as a motive for literary tourists including a desire to be entertained at literary festivals. The number, geographic reach and popularity of literary festivals has flourished for over fifty years as these increasingly serve a range of literary, commercial and civic interests.

Figure 5: Respondents’ Interests



Respondents were asked to identify other places they had chosen to visit because of their links to a writer or literary work. These included

- Merriman Summer School
- Kate O’Brien, Limerick
- London, Stratford upon Avon, Amsterdam
- Mark Twain’s house, Hertford, CT
- Birthplace of Laura Ingalls Wilder and Jane Austin sites UK
- Parts of Louisville and Connecticut
- Joyce Bloomsday and Hay Festival, Kells

- Heaney centre, Bellaghy
- Brontes in Haworth, West Yorkshire, Shakespeare at Stratford upon Avon, Kate O'Brien, Limerick – Beltable/Mary Immaculate college
- Haworth (Bronte), Burwash (Kipling) and Rye (Henry James)
- Granada
- John McGahern (Leitrim)

The Yeats Winter School

This research study gathered data regarding participants' perceptions of their visit to the region and their experiences at the Winter School. Herbert (2001) argues that each visitor has a unique chemistry with a literary place as reflected in the findings of this study. Overall, respondents were positive about their experiences at the Yeats Winter School as they complimented many aspects including:

- *the quality of the input from the speakers*
- *the stimulation and the cultural differences*
- *learning a lot about the culture – everything was well timed out and planned*
- *the integration between locals and international students was fantastic*
- *the camaraderie experienced*
- *the lectures by Declan Kiberd ...and the experience of Sligo Park Hotel's hospitality*
- *the people are enjoyable and dedicated to literature's impact on life*
- *the food...with extremely local produce, beer and cheese*

(Respondents 1, 52, 30, 38, 33, 43, 48 and 46)

A number of respondents provided a range of miscellaneous recommendations for the Winter School experience including:

- *the events are run separately rather than parallel with different places running different events*
- *a meet and exchange of views session informally arranged (and optional of course) would allow and facilitate people to meet each other*
- *more books (to be made) available to understand Yeats better*
- *provide Yeats information for 'beginners'*
- *there is a need to diversify – consider the music of Sligo weekend, Dermot Healy weekend...celebrate poets and poetry*
- *a tour about the significance of Sligo as a major port and the largest port for the famine*

ships to America and try and link with other organisations with a Yeats week e.g. Sea Shanty competition in Rosses Point

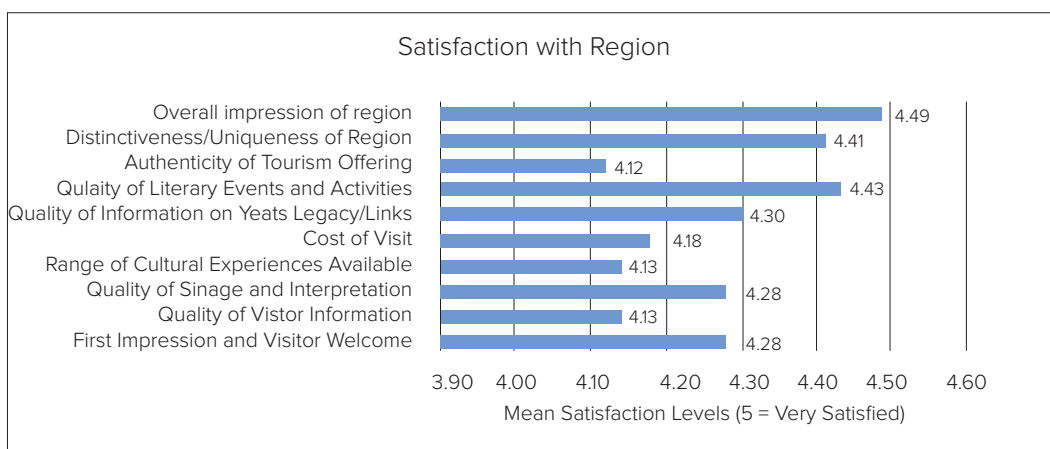
- use the theatre to engage...promoting the productions of the Blue Raincoat Theatre as they maintain superb standards

(Respondents 44, 3, 38, 31, 47, 33 and 2)

Sligo as a Region and its Yeats Links

In general, there were very positive indicators in relation to respondents' satisfaction with the region. As illustrated in Figure 6, the quality of literary events/activities and the quality of information on Yeats's legacy/links scored 4.43 and 4.3 respectively (on a scale with 5 representing 'very satisfied').

Figure 6: Visitor Satisfaction with Region



When respondents were asked what they enjoyed most about their visit to the region, sixty percent of those interviewed highlighted the scenery, the landscape and the setting for Yeats's work. Attendees were complimentary of the natural, cultural and historic offerings of Sligo as well as its people. Respondent 47 enjoyed *the landscape, the hotel, the people, the cultural experience and WS39 enjoyed the connection of the landscape to Yeats' life and work...the effect of nature on poetry and art. Respondent 38 explained that the nature was absolutely beautiful. I did not feel like a tourist but more of an adventurer.*

Other enjoyable aspects of their visit to the region enjoyed by participants include:

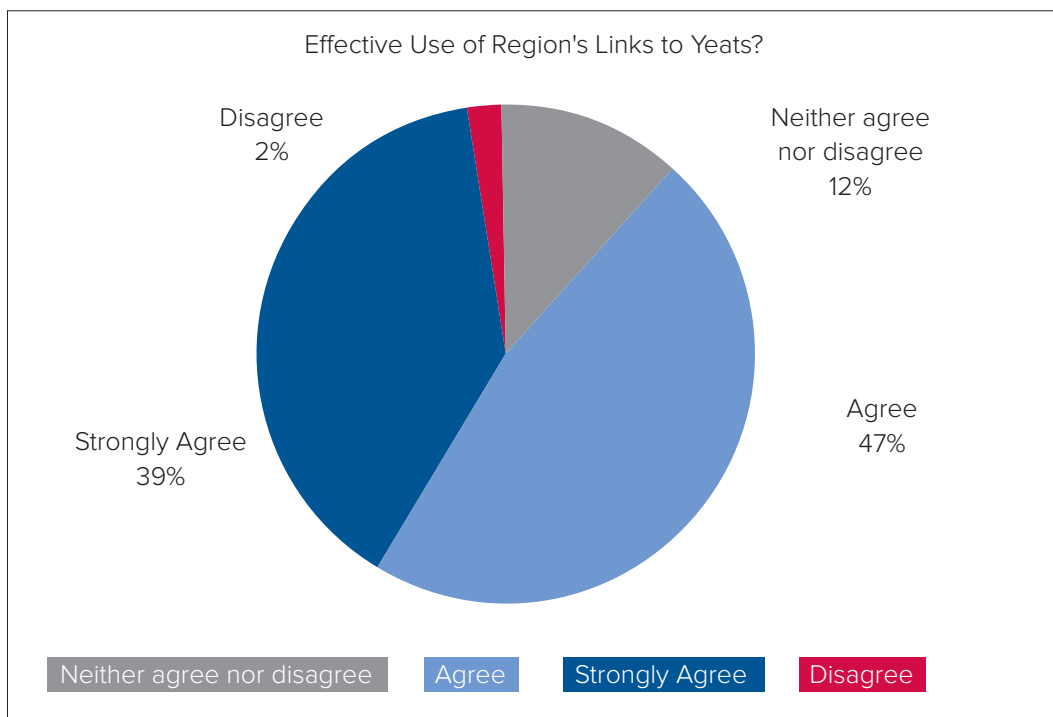
- Listening to Yeats poetry, learning about Irish history and seeing the landscape.
- For me, Sligo is magical, all the more so because of its association with Yeats
- The landscapes and history

- The scenery is gorgeous and hearing Yeats poems about it are cool to put it into perspective learning the connections between landscape and Yeats' poetry
- The gorgeous scenery and the chance to see all the places behind Yeats works
- I love learning about Irish culture and Sligo is a great representation
- I very much enjoyed my visit to WB Yeats grave at Drumcliffe and Glencar Waterfall and Lissadell House
- The friendliness and hospitality of the people.

(Respondents 11, 12, 14, 19, 20, 24, 26 and 44)

Smith, et al.,(2010, p.109) suggests that 'pleasant environments' play an important role in motivating visitors of literary location. Similarly, according to Herbert (1996, p.79), the general qualities of a literary place including its attractive or picturesque setting should be equally balanced against the 'pulling power of the writer'. This is reflected in many of the responses provided by the participants of the Yeats Winter School. Similarly, this study highlights the attendance of 'literary pilgrims' who have a strong interest in Yeats corresponding with similar types of visitors as previously identified by Herbert (2001) and Pocock (1992)

Figure 7: Use of Region's Links to WB Yeats/Yeats family



Eighty-eight percent of those surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that the region effectively uses its links to Yeats (Figure 7). However, in terms of recommendations by attendees as to how the region could further develop its links with WB Yeats and/or the Yeats family, following are responses from some of the attendees: Respondent 29 suggests that the region *should not commodify Yeats but select activities that deepen understanding and wider debate – like the Winter School does in a discrete fashion*. Respondent 2 explains

Sligo is such an important part of Yeats' poetry and plays. If you love Yeats, you must visit Sligo again and again. I'm from Co Waterford. Perhaps more could be made of Yeats in Sligo. If we can set aside Shakespeare, he's arguably the greatest poet in the English language. I'm slow to tell the Sligo people what I think they should do but they could make more of Yeats for me. I feel pretty sure Sligo could exploit the Yeats' name and reputation to a greater extent.

The connection with the Pollexfen family could be explored more by the Yeats Society was proposed by respondent 43. Respondents 27 and 52 would have liked more information about Yeats's links to sites around Sligo and Dublin (Sandymount/Howth/his Senate work).

Respondent 49 sought *Yeats weekends in other venues and pilgrimages to local places he wrote about* and respondent 38 suggested that

it would have been really cool to have the museum in the memorial building open or the hours more obviously posted. I popped in when we had the chance and was terribly disappointed to see it closed.

Respondent 2 goes further with the following recommendation:

Perhaps the town should have a more all-embracing Yeats centre and museum where the great man could be more richly presented as lesser figure have more comprehensive centres devoted to them.

Similarly, it was suggested that *perhaps a more clearly marketed Yeats centre with more interactive exhibits, a better exhibition or movie about the Yeats family and a website or mobile app for a self-guided tour* be provided (respondents 39, 8 and 36). Respondent 43 explained that this was his/her seventh visit to the Winter School and proposed that *the Yeats Society could develop the website*. These suggestions concur with the findings previously depicted in Figure 5 in addition to secondary data findings, for example, according to Carson, et al. (2013, p. 45), "online delivery of literary tourism sites allows for greater access to information for a wider audience of people, while mobile technology means this information is both portable and current".

Implications for Practice

Although many of the attendees at the Yeats Winter School could be described as ‘literary pilgrims’ in terms of their primary motivation, this may also be reflected in the small numbers in attendance. Seamen (2016, p.154) explains that “while literary links are powerful tools in creating and maintaining a destination’s identity and attracting visitors, the depth of knowledge that tourists possess about these links and the original texts that inspired them has been greatly over exaggerated”. Audiences at well-known literary events and festivals often reflect a more diverse audience with a wide range of interests. Rather than overly focusing on lectures and guest speakers, event and festival planners could incorporate more participatory activities that would appeal to a wider audience. Greater collaboration and engagement between providers of tourism activities, cultural and creative offerings in Sligo could provide a more distinctive and memorable experience for visitors to such events as the Yeats Winter School.

Conclusions

This exploratory study aimed to provide an understanding of the importance of Yeats’s literary connection/legacy in attracting visitors to Sligo. It examined visitor characteristics, literary awareness and motivations for visiting as well as their experiences and levels of satisfaction. Visitors were predominantly female and higher educated. They were motivated to visit Sligo because of its literary events, the region’s connections with Yeats and the learning experiences offered. Overall, respondents were very complimentary about their experiences of Sligo as a destination for literary tourism. Yeats’s legacy and his close connections to Sligo are particularly valuable from a tourism perspective. Brown (2016, p.135) notes that “literary tourism is important not just for the opportunity it offers a destination to diversify its product and to attract a tourist whose motivation is to experience something of the culture of the place”. This is evident in the findings of this study where respondents were appreciative of Sligo’s cultural offerings yet recommended a more diversified visitor experience.

Hoppen, *et al.* (2014, p.44) recommend that “collaborative approaches to destination marketing via tourist “routes”, “trails” or “clusters” offer significant opportunity for new product and experiential destination development”. The scope of literary tourism is broadening from its niche tourism classification as evidenced through the growing popularity of literary festivals and events. Although anecdotal evidence would suggest that literary festivals are increasing in popularity worldwide, there is limited scholarly research to date on these types of unique events. Further research on literary festivals and events is required, exploring why increasing numbers of destinations are hosting literary-themed events as well as how these events are planned and formatted. Given the findings of this study, further research with regard to literary tourism within an Irish context would be useful including research dedicated to literary routes, trails, festivals and events.

The promotion of positive images of those destinations with a literary heritage has become more commonplace. Local authorities, destination management organisations and entrepreneurs have identified the concept of literary tourism as an opportunity to enhance or develop a destination to attract literary enthusiasts as well as general visitors. A strategic and

collaborative approach to the development and marketing of a destination like Sligo with its strong literary heritage should be a priority. Safeguarding the region's core cultural values as well as preserving the authenticity and integrity of Yeats's legacy must remain the cornerstone in the development of Sligo as a sustainable literary place.

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