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Dear Readers,

Welcome to Volume 12 of Irish Business Journal. We hope you enjoy the variety of papers published in this edition of the journal. As usual, all papers published undergo a double-blind peer review process, and we are indebted to our expert reviewers for their constructive and helpful advice to contributors.

Since the inception of this journal in 2005, we have endeavoured to provide authors with a forum for presenting research across a broad spectrum of topics. In this edition, Mary McGuckin investigates William Butler Yeats legacy from a literary tourism perspective in the Sligo region. Anna Dynan and Barry J. Ryan present a case study on student-centred and peer-supported learning in a third-level institutional setting. Aisling ConwayLenihan and Helen McGuirk investigate the economic value of regional development. In their paper, Donagh Davern, Leo Jago, and Margaret Deery provide empirical evidence from the Irish hotel industry in relation to employer branding for talent management. Finally, Edward Dennehy explores the yin and yang of business strategy.

We would like to thank all authors who responded to our call for papers, and congratulate in particular first-time authors. We also thank our editorial advisory board for their interest and look forward to working with them for future editions of the journal.

Dr Rose Leahy and Prof. Margaret Linehan,
Editors,
Irish Business Journal,
Faculty of Business and Humanities,
Cork Institute of Technology.
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 Bulben, 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’ ‘imaginarie’ 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 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 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**

![Bar chart showing sources of information. Friends/relatives/colleagues are the primary source at 45%, followed by Internet at 30%. Other sources include Advertising, Promotional Literature, Tour Operator, Travel Programmes, Guidebooks, and Tourist Board.]

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**

![Bar chart showing interest in attractions/events. Workshop/Educational event is the most popular at 80%. Other top interests include Festivals, Dance Events, Concerts, Cultural attractions such as Theatres, Historic sites, Religious sites, Art galleries, Monuments, and Museums.]

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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 – Beltal/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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https://www.yeatssociety.com

https://yeats2015.com

An Explorative Case-Study of the use of PeerWise to Foster Student Centred, and Peer Supported, Learning in a First-Year Business Module

Anna Dynan & Barry J. Ryan

Abstract

Peer based learning is not a new concept in business studies in higher education; however, the integration of technology enabled and asynchronous peer learning has limited reported use and even less evidence based evaluation. In this explorative case study, the online tool PeerWise was used to scaffold and support an asynchronous peer-learning environment for a group of 212 first year business studies students. Students were required to create, answer and rate multiple choice questions on topics aligned to their curriculum within the peer constructed PeerWise question database. While there was no statistically significant correlation between PeerWise engagement and final module exam performance, conversely, considerable positive changes in student motivation, self-understanding and reflective learning were observed, informed by thematic analysis. With these key findings in mind, a set of themed recommendations for practice are offered to support staff seeking to integrate PeerWise, or technology enhanced peer learning more generally, into their teaching and learning practice.

Key Words: PeerWise, peer learning, technology enhanced learning, assessment

Introduction

Overview

This paper outlines the integration of PeerWise, an online peer-based learning space, within a first year business studies cohort, and examines the impact of this teaching and learning approach on the student learning experience. The literature is reviewed and synthesised by way of introduction to technology enabled peer based learning and the subsequent research case-study. The findings are discussed both in terms the case at hand and in light of the peer-reviewed literature; leading to conclusions and recommendations that align to the original research question.

Peer learning

Peer learning is a robust, powerful method of learning (Topping & Ehly 2001, Biggs 2003), that is a well-established approach to improving students' learning and engagement (Ning & Downing, 2010). Peer learning tends to focus on pairs, or small group, activities to assist students meet the desired learning outcome(s). The involvement of peers in learning can be categorized by Wiliam and Thompson’s framework (2008) incorporating an element of formative assessment. Here three main processes (identifying where learners are in their learning, where they are going, how to get there) are supported and actioned by three
categories of actors (teacher, learner, peer). Supporting this multi-faceted, peer-based approach, Allal and Lopez (2005) identified the need for active student participation in all aspects of formative assessment including; student self-assessment, peer assessment, and the joint construction of assessment by students and teachers together. However, the success of peer learning is based on acceptance the pedagogical approach by students, and this often depends upon resolving the question of how peer learning can be summatively assessed in ways which are credible, transparent and fair (Boud et al., 1999).

Assessment and Learning

Assessment is the process of identifying, accumulating and interpreting information about learning outcomes, and is a vital part of the teaching, training and learning cycle. The evolution of technology in education, and its integration into assessment, has made alternative forms of student-centred assessment and assessment data mining possible (Copeland, 2005). Building from Dempster and Perkins's (1993) argument that for effective assessment, frequent testing should occur soon after instruction; current technology enhanced learning and assessment paradigms have allowed a more tailored formative assessment framework to increase student engagement, improve learning outcomes and to personalise learning approaches (William, 2011). However, continual work is required to integrate research on assessment for learning with more fundamental research on instructional design, feedback, self-regulated learning, and motivation required. Research in the business disciplines have made progress in this area; McConnell and co-workers (2008) developed the Course Embedded Assessment (CEA) process to systematically assess student learning, resulting in a particularly effective reporting on student learning achievement. The CEA process also allows academic staff to implement changes, such as asynchronous and technology enhanced learning, to improve instruction and evaluate impact on student performance within the same academic year.

Asynchronous and Technology Enhanced Learning

Asynchronous tools are instructional resources that allow students to access subject materials according to their necessities, beyond the classroom limit and to use them at their own pace, at any time and in any place (Lan, 2014, 2015; Moore, 2011; Shahramiri & Gorjian, 2013). Providing asynchronous learning opportunities can be an effective method to empower students to take ownership of their own learning, particularly e-activities that permit continuous student self-assessment (Pinto-Llorente et al., 2017). Furthermore, asynchronous learning allows students to self-identify their weaknesses and receive the necessary feedback to eliminate them and understand the curriculum (Gamiz, Montes, & Perez, 2014). Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) has been a key pedagogical approach to underpin impactful asynchronous learning. One of the benefits of TEL is the personalization of the learning experience; facilitated by content and formative assessment adaptation (Mulwa et al., 2010). However, motivation, academic emotions and self-regulated learning strategies all strongly influence academic achievement in TEL environments (Zheng & Li, 2016). On a more basic level, the level of engagement and use of the asynchronous learning tools is a key determinant in student learning outcome attainment Pena-Sanchez (2016).

PeerWise; an open and asynchronous learning solution?

PeerWise is an online resource that provides an innovative approach to enhance standard asynchronous learning practices by requiring students to participate in the construction and
evaluation of Multiple Choice Question (MCQs). As of 2019, over 1500 universities, schools and technical institutes across the world use *PeerWise*; all availing of the resource that encourages students to take ownership of their learning, utilising higher order skills to ask, answer, comment and rate on MCQs (Denny et al., 2008). MCQ validity in a peer-based system is always a potential issue, however, the benefits in student learning outweigh poorly constructed or incorrect questions (Purchase et al., 2010). The impact of *PeerWise* on student learning and engagement has been investigated in fields as diverse as chemistry (Ryan, 2013), medicine (Walsh et al. 2015), pharmacy (Hudson et. al. 2018), physics (Mac Raighne et al., 2015) and computer science (Levin et al. 2008); with on-going use in a wide range of subjects, including; Anthropology, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Physics, Population Health, Pharmacology and Medicine. However, to date there are no peer-reviewed publication exploring neither the application, nor the impact, of *PeerWise* as an asynchronous peer learning tool specifically in the area of undergraduate Business Studies.

**Research Rationale**

This research explores the introduction of an asynchronous peer learning tool, *PeerWise*, with instantaneous scoring and automated feedback with a view to enhancing the student learning experience for first year Business Studies degree students. The rationale behind adopting this approach was both scholarly and practical. Several *PeerWise* studies have demonstrated an enhanced student learning experience through the integration of an assessment method that gives the responsibility for learning directly back to the student. This approach to teaching, learning and assessment fosters a sense of freedom, independence and self-responsibility (Bates, 2011). From a practical perspective, engaging large classes in active, student-focussed learning can be challenging, even more so during non-contact time; *PeerWise* potentially offered a low/no cost solution to this this perennial problem for large cohort, first year business classes. This rationale underpinned the research design and questions for the case study at hand:

*Primary Research Question*

What is the student experience of *PeerWise* in a large cohort, first year, business degree module?

*Secondary Research Questions*

How effective is the use of technology in supporting peer learning in a large first year Business degree class, and,

What recommendations for practice can be derived from the student experience?

**Research Methodology and Methods Overview**

In order to understand the impact of *PeerWise* on the student learning experience generally, and to address the research questions at hand specifically, a mixed methods data collection approach within the context of an explorative case study was implemented (Sammons and Davis, 2017). The qualitative data focussed primarily on a single survey, with 7 open text questions, and 13 Likert scale questions divided into the three categories of Activities
supporting PeerWise, Assessment, and Knowledge building. Quantitative data were collected through terminal assessment performance in the module that encompassed this research and also the students overall Grade Point Average (GPA) for the academic year in question. In both methods, a purposefully sampled population was used.

Researchers Overview

PeerWise, by its very nature, ensures that this research is based on the social constructivist ontological perspective. Both researchers approached the data analysis phased from an interpretivist epistemological basis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The methodology and methods executed in this study were directly influenced by the researchers ontological and epistemological stances and this affected the analysis and appreciation of the data and findings produced.

Case Study Outline and Participant Sampling

This investigative case study focussed entirely on one module, Business IT Skills (INFO6014), delivered over the course of one semester in an Irish third level Institute of Technology. The module assessment was split in half and comprised; 50% final MCQ, taken in the last week of the semester, and 50% computer laboratory assessment. PeerWise engagement was reward through the completion of five assignments over the course of the semester and contributed a maximum of 10% towards the 50% final MCQ (see Table One). A purposeful sampling approach, of students that participated in this module, was taken for both modes of data collection. The sample size for research participation varied based on the research method and in-line with the voluntary nature of informed consent. In the qualitative survey the sample size was 212 students. The sample participants for the quantitative data ranged from 86 to 66 respondents (from a potential population of 212).

Table One: Overview of the assignments that catalysed the student engagement with PeerWise, their weighting and their timing within the module based on module week. A Genius badge is awarded when a student answers at least 10 questions "correctly" (as indicated by the question author) in a row. A Super Scholar badge is awarded when a student answers at least 50 questions "correctly" (as indicated by the question author).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Description</th>
<th>Module Weighting (%)</th>
<th>Module Timing (Week number in a 12 week semester)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write 2 Questions for Chapter 1 - Business Information Systems</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer 2 Questions from Chapter 1 - Business Information Systems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write 2 Questions for Chapter 2 - Global E-Business &amp; Collaboration</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer AND Rate 10 Questions from Chapter 2 - Global E-Business &amp; Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write 2 Questions for Chapter 5 - IT Infrastructure</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer AND Rate 10 Questions from Chapter 5 - IT Infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain a Genius Badge from Chapters 1, 2 &amp; 5</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain a Super Scholar Badge from Chapters 1, 2 &amp; 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write 2 Questions for Chapter 8 - Telecommunications &amp; Security</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer AND Rate 5 Questions from Chapter 8 - Telecommunications &amp; Security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Quantitative data were gathered in the form of a detailed online survey comprising of 20 questions, completed by the student volunteers after all assessable components of the module were completed. These data were analysed through the use of descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel. An inductive strategy was used for the analysis of the qualitative data, where thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report different themes throughout the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The actual coding process was heavily influenced by the approach outlined by Bree and Gallagher (2016). In brief, and in order to ensure appropriate data validity and rigour, the raw survey responses were firstly open coded, independently by both researchers. Subsequently, both researchers independently axially coded the data set. Finally, the codebook was reduced to, at a maximum, six codes per survey question, and the researchers completed on final independent pass of the survey data. Once three independent coding passes had been completed, the researchers compared their codebooks, and sought to identify the same/similar codes to merge to create the final codebook. The researchers engaged in a structured, discussion based, approach to find coding consensus for the codes that could not be immediately merged. Once every response to the survey was coded using the final, merged codebook, the data was organised into themes. A thematic overview map was used in order to see the relationship between codes and the difference between themes throughout the survey as well as sub-themes, which were also present within the data sets. Data saturation was observed, as based on the coding method outlined. This inductive and collaborative approach to qualitative data analysis allowed key themes to emerge to address the research question (Saldana, 2009). Triangulation was achieved through the methods of data collection, supplemented by researcher reflective diaries and the scholarly literature.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from the data collected were thematically analysed and converged onto three major themes; two of these major themes contained subthemes, yielding a total of three major themes and three aligned sub-themes. The thematically detailed data are investigated and discussed under the same headings, below, to ensure consistency across the data set. Themes one and two are examined following the mixed method data collection approach; whereas theme three is based entirely on qualitative data. The combined findings are also explored in relation to the existing literature to offer context and support for the subsequent conclusions and recommendations.

Theme One: (Self)-Motivation

A significant motivating factor for students in this study were the in-class activities (see Figure One). The students suggested that the use of in-class Kahoot sessions motivated them to engage more with PeerWise outside class. Questions used in the in-class Kahoot questions were drawn from the student generated questions from the PeerWise database, and while anonymous, the purpose of this exercise was to give the contributing student a sense of personal achievement through their questions being showcased to their peers. This is consistent with the findings noted previously (Mulwa et al. 2010), where TEL made a radical difference to student learning, specifically the quality and effectiveness of the personal learning experience. Aligned with this, the presentation of the PeerWise leadership board
in class was also seen as a motivating factor. The rationale behind this functionality was to promote a level of competitiveness with the class group. Finally, a large proportion of students stated that possibility that their question would be placed on the final exam was a motivating factor.

**Figure One:** The in-class activities that were related to, and supported, *PeerWise*, that were reported as being motivating through the Likert scale survey (n=86). Kahoot refers to the use of questions extracted from the *PeerWise* database that were subsequently used in class with the personal response polling software Kahoot. Leaderboard refers to the displaying of the *PeerWise* leaderboard in class after each assignment (see Table One). The leaderboard displayed the anonymous usernames of the *PeerWise* participants only. Exam Q refers to the perceived reward of student authored questions being selected, by the academic and based on question standard, from the *PeerWise* database to be used in the final module exam.

Zheng and colleagues (2016) argue that when students are intrinsically motivated, they will exert greater effort in their learning and use effective self-regulated learning strategies to achieve goals. Figure Two chimes with this finding and shows that a high percentage of students felt that many of the assessment activities were a motivating factor. Interestingly, this study shows that 91% (n=190) of students saw the allocation of marks for this engagement as extremely important, with 70% (n=148) stating that they would not have used *PeerWise* if marks were not allocated. Aligned to this, 20% (n=17, see Table Two) of students believed that the biggest problem with *PeerWise* was the effort required by the student to earn the rewards (see Table One). The feedback findings from the assessment activities supports the position of Gibbs and Simpson (2004) who note that appropriate alignment of the learning outcomes with the assessment, the assessment approach itself and the quality of feedback
provided to students can all influence the overall perception of assessments by students. This study reiterates the importance of the credit reward versus the effort and timeline pressures. When asked if they felt that PeerWise empowered their independent learning, 55% (n=44) of the respondents noted that they felt learner centred empowerment. Involving students in the development of assessment items in this fashion puts the educational process in focus and empowers students by providing a greater degree of control (Denney et al., 2008).

Figure Two: The assessment activities that were related to PeerWise that were reported as being motivating through the Likert scale survey (n=85). Marks refers to the awarding of up to 10% of the module grade for PeerWise engagement. Communication refers to the personalised communication by the lecturer outlining each student’s performance in their aligned continual assessment after each assignment (see Table One). Badges relates to the digital badges that are available in PeerWise for achieving specific engagement thresholds. Peer Comments refers to the peer commentary function within PeerWise whereby when a student completes a PeerWise question they are encouraged to provide a comment on the question. No Marks relates to the opinion that if marks were not awarded for engagement, then students would not have participated in PeerWise. This question was use an internal validation of the data set and links to Marks responses.

Table Two: The codebook for the open text survey responses. The open ended questions (n=7), along with the responses (ranging between 66 and 86 responses), the final agreed code and code percentage are noted. For completeness, the individual initial open coding agreement (%) is also detailed.
## What do you believe is the biggest benefit of using PeerWise? (n= 85)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam Preparation</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self directed learning, understanding and study</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging and Accessible</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Benefits</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Individual Initial Open Coding Agreement (%)*  57

## What aspects of using PeerWise did you find the most useful? (n= 86)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Useful Aspect</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Checking</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Database Scale</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision, Study and Exam Prep</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating Questions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Individual Initial Open Coding Agreement (%)*  68

## What aspects of using PeerWise did you find the most enjoyable? (n= 81)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enjoyable Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating, answering and authoring questions</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game based learning</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining exam marks</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility &amp; anonymity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Individual Initial Open Coding Agreement (%)*  70

## What do you believe is the biggest problem with PeerWise? (n= 86)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question/comments standard</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website functionality</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Effort v Reward</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Individual Initial Open Coding Agreement (%)*  40

## Can you recommend something that would make PeerWise more effective for learning in class? (n= 66)

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*Final Combined Coding (%)*
Question Standard | 39
---|---
No Recommendations | 27
Credit Reward versus Effort and timelines | 20
Alignment | 14
Individual Initial Open Coding Agreement (%) | 73

If you contributed more than the minimum requirement, why did you choose to do so? (n=74)

Exam Preparation | 45
Self-Directed Learning | 28
Self motivation & Game based learning | 23
Did not contribute more | 4
Individual Initial Open Coding Agreement (%) | 63

Do you feel using PeerWise empowered your independent learning; if so, how? (n= 80)

Learner Centred Empowerment | 44
Focussed Learning | 35
No Empowerment | 21
Individual Initial Open Coding Agreement (%) | 64

**Theme Two: Student Centred Learning and Understanding.**

The correlation between students’ final examination scores and their level of usage of the PeerWise system have appeared repeatedly in the literature as possible indicators of student learning gain (Denny et al., 2008; Walsh et al, 2015). An unanticipated and rather surprising finding from this study was that there was no statistically significant difference in student results from each quartile (see Figure Three). Based on previously published findings, the anticipation would be that students that engaged most with PeerWise over the course of the semester would perform better in the final examination. However, Luxton-Reilly and colleagues (2012) cautioned the use of correlation as a measure of learning outcomes and suggested that students are likely to perform well on some questions in their final examinations that are similar to those encountered in PeerWise. Hudson and co-workers (2018) reiterated this point and claim that one possible explanation is the discrepancy in the standard of questions generated by students compared to those generated by the instructors for the examination. For example, if student-generated questions were biased towards the lower levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy and the examination was pitched towards the higher level of Bloom’s Taxonomy, then practicing the lower level questions may not transfer to answering higher level questions (Luxton-Reilly et al. 2012). The current study supports this point also, as 70% (n=51) of students surveyed noted that the biggest problem with PeerWise was the standard of questions and comments. When asked to recommend something that would make PeerWise more effective for learning in class, 65% (n=39) again noted the standard of questions written, with 21% (n=14)
of the respondents citing ‘alignment’ between the course, the question database and the final exam. This finding from this study, echoing Purchase (2010), emphasises the need for the quality of the repository to be improved by providing guidance to students (particularly in the lower two quartiles) on how to devise distractors, the best kind of explanations, choosing appropriate tags, and how to include more than one topic within a single question.

**Figure Three:** A quartile comparison of whole class PeerWise engagement, categorised based on their final module grade. Engagement was classified as High PeerWise Activity (HPA Av%; completed the minimum requirements, see Table One) or Low PeerWise Activity (LPA Av%; did not complete the minimum requirements, see Table One). The class was split into quartiles (Quart) based on their whole year Grade Point Average (GPA), the error bars noted are the population standard deviation.

For those that engaged in appropriate question authoring, more than 80% (n=169, see Figure Four) of students surveyed felt that developing an original question on a particular topic developed their knowledge about that topic. Furthermore, providing a rationale for each answer and answering other student’s questions developed knowledge about what they knew; whereas answering other student’s questions helped identify gaps in knowledge. These points were supported through the qualitative analysis, where 54% (n=46) of the respondents believed that the biggest benefit of using PeerWise was exam preparation, followed by self directed learning, understanding and study (61%, n=52). Students indicated that the most useful aspect of PeerWise was the ability to check their knowledge against the available repository of questions (69%, n=60) and revision, study and exam preparation (22%, n=19). Additionally, self-directed learning and exam preparation were the main reasons...
why students contributed more the minimum requirement. The vast majority of respondents (91%, n=79) believed that PeerWise empowered their independent learning and focussing their learning. The findings in this study indicate that while there was no correlation between student engagement and final exam results; student self-development was extremely positive and effective (Walsh et al., 2015; Denny et, al 2008). Unfortunately, student perceptions of efficacy do not necessarily correlate with learning outcome attainment (Kolluru, 2012).

**Figure Four:** The activities that related to learning within the PeerWise activities as identified through the Likert scale survey (n=83). Create refers to generating the question; Rationale refers to the student providing feedback for each question they created, Answer relates to answering other students questions, and, Identify refers to students using questions they answered incorrectly as a way to recognise gaps in their own understanding.

Theme Three: Accessibility and Interactivity

One of the key attributes of PeerWise is its usability; students have consistently opined that PeerWise is simple to use and encourages their participation (Denny, Luxton-Reilly & Hamer, 2008). Students in this case study expressed similar views under the theme of engagement and accessibility; 28% (n=24) of the participants stating that engagement and accessibility were one of the biggest benefits of PeerWise. The theme of accessibility was also noted in the response to the most useful features of PeerWise (15%, n=13), followed by the rating of questions (7%, n=6). The theme of accessibility and anonymity (7%, n=6) also surfaced when asked what aspects of using PeerWise were the most enjoyable?

Building on the ease of use, and the anonymous nature of PeerWise interactions, PeerWise
was noted as fun and game-like by respondents. Gamification can encourage increased engagement of participants through fun and reward. In education, this aspect of fun and engagement increases students’ engagement with learning activities and improve learning experiences (Cheong, Filippou and Cheong, 2013; Sitzmann, 2011). The interactivity of PeerWise was rated as being extremely enjoyable with 44% (n=36) of the respondents referring to the theme of game based learning in their response. The theme of game based learning (31%, n=23) also influenced students’ decision to contribute more than the minimum requirements (see Table One); the students enjoyed the PeerWise learning environment and it didn’t feel like a prescribed learning activity. The emergence and familiarity of online gaming may also influence the student's perception of online and game based learning. Indeed, Singh (2015) contends that promise of scalability, allowing large number of students to become involved in learning activities that are otherwise difficult to implement and manage without technology, will encourage a wider use of this approach to teaching.

**Recommendations for Practice**

**Spreadsheet Proficiency Requirements**

In order to extract data from PeerWise and award marks for activities (see Table One), a certain level of proficiency is needed in a spreadsheet package, such as Microsoft Excel.

1. The PeerWise administrator should be familiar with Text functions, in order to convert the exported PeerWise data into the appropriate format for analysis.

2. The PeerWise administrator should be familiar with the Lookup functions in order to extract student scores based upon activity and align them against the correct student.

3. The PeerWise administrator should be able to complete email-based mail merges, so that the administrator can communicate with students on the PeerWise registration process and subsequently, scores for each assignment

**Training & Support on MCQ Creation**

This study reiterates the importance of appropriate training and support on the creation of, and commenting on, MCQs. A number of different approaches can be taken, either collectively or separately.

1. Facilitate an interactive session(s) demonstrating the creation of questions and the aligning of these questions against an appropriate set of standards; e.g. Bloom's Taxonomy, thereby providing clarity on the transition of questions from the lower levels of the taxonomy to the higher levels.

2. Feedback should be given to the class group, after each assignment, showing examples of good/poor questions created by students. These questions should be collectively explored and discussed as to why they are considered good/poor.

3. Administrators should continually reference the importance of rating questions, so that they understand the importance of writing good quality MCQs.
PeerWise Engagement and Assessment Activities

In this study, the assessed activities related to PeerWise were reported by the students as being motivating. The following approaches are recommended as a result of this study:

1. Create PeerWise “Tags” for individual chapters or areas of study to facilitate assignments, study and revision.

2. Award marks for PeerWise engagement, requiring each student to complete specific activities with a specific time period i.e. Write two questions and answer twenty on a specific chapter (that is tagged, see point one above).

3. Communicate with each student (via email mail merges), thus creating a personalised communication for each student, showing the grade received for assignment.

4. Utilize the PeerWise digital badges to achieve specific transparent engagement thresholds and encourage competitiveness.

5. Display the PeerWise Leaderboards after each assignment to encourage competitiveness within the class group and to give individual students a sense of achievement.

6. Use tools, such as Kahoot, to showcase good questions created by the students in-class, in a fun and engaging environment.

7. Consider awarding prizes for the top students in the Leaderboard at the end of the Semester.

8. Place questions taken directly from PeerWise in the final paper as a further incentive for students.

Credit Reward Versus Effort & Timelines

In this study many students commented on the effort versus reward for the assignments given. The following approaches are recommended as a result of this study:

1. Care needs to be taken with the requirements around digital badges in assignments, as badges such as Einstein badges can be extremely difficult and time consuming to achieve, and may act as a demotivating factor as opposed to a motivating factor. However it is interesting to note in the current study that 25% of the entire class group received the full 10% mark allocation.

2. Appropriate timelines need to be put in place so that assignments are equally spread throughout the semester, and not to clash with other assessments in other modules.
Conclusions

Academics are continually challenged to select appropriate learning activities and carefully align the assessments to ensure that students can attain the learning outcomes of their modules. Appropriate alignment of the learning outcomes with the assessment, the assessment approach itself and the quality of feedback provided to students can all influence the overall perception of assessments by students (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). Careful integration of appropriate technology, both in the presentation of material and the assessment, can be extremely beneficial to both the student and the academic. This research shows that the integration of PeerWise into a first year Business Studies module had a generally positive effect on the student learning experience; however, it did not reflect previous studies where increased engagement with PeerWise resulted in improved final grades.

The end product for this case-study is a recyclable, adjustable and engaging assessment; with future iterations informed by the key findings of this study (see Recommendations below). The students that responded to the mixed methods of data collection noted that the standard of peer generated questions was a barrier; however, the students did develop into reflective learners, capable of identify gaps in their knowledge, self-regulating their study and engaging with their peers to develop understanding. This echoes Wickersham & Chambers (2006) belief that assessments should activate students; encourage them to take ownership of their learning and to become reflective. The technology allowed students to engage with each other, and the learning resources, at times and locations that suited them. Interactivity, gamification and accessibility encouraged peers to engage with, and learn from, each other. However, PeerWise integration comes with the health warning; the initial learning curve for the academic can be steep depending on the academics prior experience and technological skills (e.g. additional workload in terms of resource preparation and grading of digital assessments are all hurdles to consider and be overcome; Tyagi and Kumar, 2011). With this in mind, and underpinned by the key findings from this study, a set of detailed recommendations are provided to support academics seeking to adopt and integrate PeerWise into their teaching practice.

Ethical considerations

A strong emphasis was placed on ensuring the highest ethical standards were maintained throughout this research. These standards were primarily informed by the British Educational Research Authority (BERA, 2018). In brief, and in line with best practice, the research ethics included: fully informed consent, voluntary participation, ability to withdraw, anonymity, appropriate data storage methods and privacy. Additionally, prior to engaging with the research data collection instruments, students were given a detailed information sheet outlining the purpose and the benefits of the research.
Limitations and Bias

In this study, the lead researcher adopted the role of an ‘insider-researcher’, as she was both the lecturer for the module and also the lead researcher. This position of power had to be negated to ensure an unbiased data set as possible. Appropriate methodology, leading to data triangulation, validation and rigour, was used to circumvent this bias. The benefit of the insider researcher role was deemed an advantage to this research (Chavez, 2008).

The major limitation of this study is the relatively small population sample that formed the basis of this research. Data collected from students based in one School, within a single higher education institution, were central to this study.
References


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The Economic Value of a Place-Based Resource for Regional Development

Aisling ConwayLenihan & Helen McGuirk

Abstract

Regional economic development has long been acknowledged as an important objective of government policy. Natural resources are also recognised as drivers of economic development. However, the importance of place-based resources such as peripheral coastlines and Harbour areas are less understood. This research provides insights into an industry based on its region’s natural resource and the value it generates for sustainable economic development. Using the world’s second largest natural Harbour region, the current research measures the economic activities associated with the Marine Leisure Industry in Cork Harbour, and estimates the economic impact on the local economy. The research establishes a multiplier specific to the industry, one that has the potential for use across Ireland. Cork Harbour, located in the south-west of Ireland generates approximately €6.6m direct expenditure by the industry. Based on the multiplier, the Marine Leisure Industry is estimated to account for approximately €11m of output supporting 29 direct jobs and 290 indirect jobs. With potential to grow berthing capacity, the region has real opportunities to increase the economic impact of this indigenous industry for the city, its hinterland and beyond. Our findings challenge policymakers to consider creating an enabling environment for the marine leisure industry to flourish and recognise the value of place-based resource as a driver of regional development.

Key Words: Multiplier, Regional Development, Economic Impact, Natural Resources

Introduction

Regional economic development is an important part of public policy. Natural resources have the potential to contribute favourably to an economy’s development. However, the importance of place-based resources such as peripheral regions, coastlines and harbours are less understood. The research provides insights into an industry based on its region’s natural resource and the value it generates for sustainable economic development. Using the world’s second largest natural harbour region, Cork, in southern Ireland, the current research measures the economic impact generated from the Marine Leisure Industry.

The remainder of the paper is as follows: the next section provides a background to the regional and economic literature and the specific details of the Cork Harbour area. This is followed by the methodology section outlining details of the data, the multiplier and methods used to calculate the economic impact of the industry. A discussion on the findings, followed by recommendations for policy and future research concludes.
Background to the study

Regional economic growth has, for many decades, focused on the expansion and upgrade of infrastructure such as roads, rail, broadband connectivity and sanitation. Coupled with public policy programmes to attract foreign direct investment are examples of headline catching, ‘one-size-fits-all approach’ (Barca, McCann and Rodríguez-Pose, 2012). Driven by globalization and competition between regions, slow economic growth following the financial crisis (circa 2010) has led to challenges for regions and imbalanced regional development (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose and Tomaney, 2017). The contemporary ‘place-based paradigm’, which indicates that places can grow when policy making recognises spatial differences, has been considered by the literature as an effective alternative to the more tangible, compensatory approaches to regional development, and has been presented by some as a more effective alternative to this ‘old’ approach (Barca, McCann and Rodríguez-Pose, 2012; OECD, 2011; Pugalis and Gray, 2016). A place-based approach calls for the identification of local potential and the need to employ unused economic potential (Tomaney, 2010; Pugalis and Gray, 2016). Furthermore, all places have development potential (and constraints) specific to the particular area, highlighting the need for a tailored approach to economic development (Pugalis and Gray, 2016). Many authors (Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose and Storper, 2018) argue for the need to maximise the local and aggregate potential for economic and regional development. The sustainable activity and the natural advantage unique to Cork Harbour has potential to progress regional development in the area (Potts, 2010). Conflict over space can arise between use of such natural resources and can constrain development (Funck, 2006; Penn et al., 2016).

Considering the unique resources to a local region and its potential to contribute to sustained economic growth, this is the main focus of this research. It is this potential, for a place-based approach to regional development, which this research contributes.

The analysis is based on the economic activities associated with the Marine Leisure Industry in the Cork Harbour region, as illustrated in Figure 1. Located in the southwest coast of Ireland, this region boasts the second largest natural Harbour in the world (second to Sydney Harbour in Australia) and the second largest shipping port in Ireland (second to Dublin Port). The aim of this paper is to quantify the economic contribution of the place-based activity of the marine leisure industry on the local economy of Cork Harbour and the wider Cork region.
Cork Harbour region, stretching from Cork city (Ireland’s second largest city) to the Atlantic Ocean, and is the location of many indigenous and international firms and is served by a network of roads, rail, air and sea transport. The Harbour has many habitats of conservational interest such as tidal mudflats, salt meadows, and tourist attractions including the award winning Spike Island (Europe’s leading tourist attraction) and the Titanic experience in the Harbour town of Cobh.

The marine infrastructure in the Cork Harbour area include both leisure and commercial landing/Harbour facilities. In 2009, the total contribution of Port of Cork was estimated to be €286.7 million, linked to approximately 1,849 full time equivalent jobs (Moloney, 2011). Commercial marine activity in the area accounts for approximately 10% of total commercial marine traffic arriving into Ireland (CSO, 2017). Luxury cruise-liner traffic has dramatically increased by approximately 30% between 2017 and 2018, and is worth €12 million per year to the local economy (English, 2017). Marine related businesses in the Harbour area include chandlers, boatyards, sail making, boat sales and passenger boat/ferry services.

For the purposes of this research, the marine leisure industry is based on definitions used by (ConwayLenihan and McGuirk, 2017, p. 6) “All leisure boating activity – capturing marine activity from the traditional residential and visiting yachting/cruising activities to the domestic/local dingy racing activities. Yachting (racing and cruising), dinghy sailing, kayaking, water skiing, diving, sea angling from boats, sailing, rowing boats, cruising power boats, RIBs, or boats with in-board/outboard engines and whale/dolphin watching boat trips.” The next section provides details of the data and the methodological approach employed to estimate the economic impact of the marine leisure industry.
Methodology

This research employs both primary and secondary data. Primary data included semi-structured interviews with users (local marina owners/managers and Port of Cork representative) of Cork Harbour to quantify the usage of the marinas in Cork Harbour. Based on the literature, this research adopts the multiplier method to measure the economic impact of the marine leisure industry to the local economy. The multiplier refers to a final increase in income following an initial injection of spending in the economy. Leddin and Walsh (2013) calculated a multiplier of 1.11 for the Irish economy and more specifically (Government-of-Ireland, 2011) established a multiplier of 1.60 for the Tourism Industry in Ireland (ITIC, 2015). A Scottish study established the economic impact of the sailing tourism market in Scotland and they applied a multiplier of 1.68 (EKOS, 2016). The British Marine Federation (BMF) commissioned a study to generate the economic impact of United Kingdom (UK) boating tourism. (BMF, 2014) identified a multiplier of 1.60 for the recreational services sector, where marinas and moorings reside. This paper employs a multiplier based on the literature of 1.60, suggesting for every €1 million of output/expenditure generated by the marine leisure industry, it would raise National Income by €1.6 million. That is, a further €0.6 million of output is created in the remainder of the economy (Leddin and Walsh, 2013).

Berthing and Mooring Capacity

This paper establishes the berthing (fixed berth) and mooring (swing mooring) capacity in Cork Harbour in 2016, which contributes to the estimated expenditure in the findings section. Berths, broadly defined as a boat/vessel’s allotted place at a wharf or dock and moorings (swing) for boats alongside the shore or riverbank with one or more secured anchors with buoyed riding chain. As stated in the background section, Cork Harbour is home to six marinas. Table 1 details the annual resident berths (available and occupied) in Cork Harbour.

Table 1: Annual Resident Berths (available and occupied) for Cork Harbour 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marina</th>
<th>Available Berths</th>
<th>Occupied Berths</th>
<th>Occupancy Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Royal Cork Yacht Club</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crosshaven Boat Yard</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SalveMarine</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork Harbour Marina Monkstown</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork City</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marnogue (East Ferry)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Analysis of statistics by authors.

* Cork City Marina have visitor berths up to a maximum of 6 nights and long term resident berths are not available

\[\text{This does not include the cruise liner business}\]
As referred to in Table 1 above, the occupancy berth rate is the number of occupied berths expressed as a proportion of the available capacity. Of the 555 berths available across the six marinas in Cork Harbour in 2016, 441 were occupied (79% occupancy rate). The Royal Cork Yacht Club has the highest occupancy rate whereas Cork Harbour Marina Monkstown has the lowest capacity. The Cork City Marina has visitor berths up to a maximum of 6 nights and long term resident berths are not available. Table 2 details the number and location of moorings for 2016, the number of moorings have not changed between 2007 and 2016.

Table 2: Annual Resident Moorings (available) for Cork Harbour 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marina</th>
<th>Available Moorings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crosshaven area</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monkstown</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Ferry area</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aghada</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitepoint</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenbrook</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrigaloe</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackrock</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobh</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rushbrooke</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballinacurra area</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ringaskiddy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1035</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Kopke et al., 2008)

The occupancy mooring rate is the number of occupied moorings expressed as a proportion of the available capacity. Of the 1,035 moorings available in 2016, 1,000 were occupied (97% occupancy rate). Moorings are not restricted to the six marinas as there is thirteen locations for moorings in Cork Harbour. Similar to berths, moorings are concentrated in the Crosshaven area with 44% of Cork Harbour moorings located there. Crosshaven is home to the oldest sailing club in the world, Royal Cork Yacht Club, and has a number of sailing related services in the area.
Findings (Economic Impact of the Marine Leisure Industry)

This section estimates the economic impact of the marine leisure industry and its contribution as a place-based approach to the region’s economic growth. The annual expenditure and associated output of both residents and non-residents in Cork Harbour is estimated for 2016. For the purposes of this research, residents are persons who berth or moor their vessel annually within Cork Harbour. Non-residents are visiting vessels to Cork Harbour. The direct and indirect employment associated with the marine leisure industry in Cork Harbour is reported below.

Annual Direct Expenditure and Total Output by Cork Harbour Residents

The total number of occupied berths and moorings is 1,441 (1,000 moorings and 441 berths) as reported in the data section above. To estimate the economic impact of berths and moorings, it is necessary to establish the expenditure by the users. The Cool Route Traffic Study (Cool-Route, 2016a) found cruising vessels within the Cool Route have an average standing cost of €6,800. This cost includes marina fees, insurance, repairs and maintenance, launching and storage fees. As the average boat size in Cork Harbour is smaller than the cruising vessel in the Cool Route Traffic Study (Cool-Route, 2016; Cool-Route, 2016a), the current research employs a lower average standing cost (€4,500) for Cork Harbour. This figure (€4,500) was established in consultation with marine leisure users in Cork Harbour. There are 400 day sailors/dinghies located in Cork Harbour with an estimated annual expenditure of €400, resulting in total expenditure of €160,000.

\[
\text{Annual Direct Expenditure} = (€4,500 \times 1,441) + (€400 \times 400) = €6.64m
\]

\[
\text{Total Output} = \text{Multiplier} \times \text{Annual Direct Expenditure of Cork Harbour Residents}
\]

\[
1.60 \times €6.644m = €10,631,200
\]

The estimated annual direct expenditure by resident berths and moorings is €6.64 million and the estimated annual total output is approximately €10.631 million.

Annual Direct Expenditure and Total Output by Non-Cork Harbour Residents

Non-residents include any visiting vessel to Cork Harbour in 2016. This includes Irish visitors from outside Cork Harbour and foreign visitors to Cork Harbour in 2016. In 2016, 500 private leisure vessels visited Cork Harbour. 85% (425) were Irish and UK visitors and the remaining 15% (75) travelled from Europe, United States, New Zealand and Australia (Figure 2).
The Cool Route Traffic study (Cool-Route, 2016a) estimated the average expenditure per visitor boat night is €130 (€50-€1,000 per night) with an average of three persons on board. On average, the minimum spend per night is €50 and the maximum spend per night is €1,000. The Cool Route Cruising Preferences Survey (Cool-Route, 2016b) found on average, visitors spend three nights (1 night – 5 months) at a final destination. On average, the minimum stay is 1 night up to a maximum stay of 5 months in Cork Harbour.

Annual Direct Expenditure = (3 * €130) * 500 = €195,000

The estimated annual direct expenditure from non-residents of Marine Leisure activities is €195,000 and estimated annual output is €312,000.

Total Output = Multiplier * Annual Direct Expenditure of Non Cork Harbour Residents

1.60 * €195,000 = €312,000

Total Output = Cork Harbour Residents Output + Non-Cork Harbour Residents Output

€10,631,200 + €312,000 = €10,943,200

Therefore, the total current output generated by resident and non-resident vessels in Cork Harbour is an estimate of €10.94 million. This is based on the number of occupied berths (441) and moorings (1000).
Cork Harbour Employment – Direct and Indirect

This section reports the jobs directly and indirectly supported by the marine leisure industry in Cork Harbour. The data for this section was estimated following semi-structured interviews with users of Cork Harbour. 29 direct jobs (full-time equivalent) were supported by the Marine Leisure industry in Cork Harbour in 2016. Direct employment includes marina engineers, marina staff, general manager, administrative staff and boat repairs staff.

\[
\text{Direct Employment} = 29
\]

British Marine Federation (2014, 19) found that “for every job directly employed in the boating tourism sector, there are an additional 10 jobs supported in the wider economy through the direct and indirect effects of expenditures of boaters and boating tourism businesses”. Based on the British multiplier, the estimated indirect employment is 290 jobs for Cork Harbour. Examples of indirect employment include bars, restaurants, tour operators etc.

\[
\text{Indirect Employment} = 29 \times 10 = 290
\]

Discussion and Conclusion

There are two key contributions of this research. Firstly, it highlights the potential for a place-based approach to regional policy. That is, where a bottom-up, demand-side approach to public support for regions to promote local economic development. Secondly, it establishes and applies a multiplier to the marine leisure industry in an Irish context.

This research estimates the economic impact of a place-based activity (marine leisure industry) to the local economy in Cork. A 79% occupancy rate for berths and 97% occupancy rate for moorings was established. Kopke et al., (2008) also found almost full mooring capacity and that moorings in Cork Harbour are left unused in only exceptional situations. Berthing and mooring capacity is limited in Cork Harbour and as (Funck, 2006) identified, there is an issue of conflict for space and traffic. With potential to grow berthing capacity (currently 79%), the region has potential to increase the economic contribution of this indigenous industry for the Harbour, its hinterland and the wider region. Marine leisure contributes to the regional economy approximately €11 million and with expansion has the potential to improve region’s growth and sustainability.

The total output generated by the marine leisure industry is €10.943 million. This is based on the number of occupied berths (441) and moorings (1000). If Cork Harbour was operating at full capacity, the number of available berths would be 555 and number of moorings would be 1035. Full capacity within Cork Harbour is likely to generate a further €1.073 million (approximately) per year. Taking account of the multiplier effect this will generate €7,200 per resident berth/mooring. If Cork Harbour was to attract an additional 100 visitor vessels per year, this would generate €62,400 (approximately), €390 per boat, based on a 3-night stay.

There is potential to grow berthing capacity and number of visiting boats in certain parts of Cork Harbour, evident in the planning application for additional berths at Cork City Marine
Monkstown. The Port of Cork (2009) identified Cork Harbour had significant potential for further development growth, while (Kopke et al., 2008) concluded the need for the development for more marinas and larger marinas within Cork Harbour. They found that Cork Harbour cannot accommodate an increase in moorings from its current capacity of 1035, the findings of this current research confirm this.

This research estimates that the marine leisure industry contributes approximately €11 million, supports 29 direct jobs and 290 indirect jobs to the local economy. On average, small companies (10-49 employees) in Ireland employ 19 employees contributing €15.1 billion to the Irish economy. On average each small company generates €973,000. In comparison, the marine leisure industry generates approximately €11 million and supports 29 direct jobs (European-Commission, 2017). National regional strategies (Government-of-Ireland, 2018) recognise that leisure opportunities exist around our coastal regions and the value of Ireland’s marine territories. However, our research challenge policymakers, to consider creating an enabling environment for the marine leisure industry to be sustainable not just in Cork Harbour but all around our coast. Landry et al., (2016) found that Cape Hatteras coastline along the Outer Banks of North Carolina is a natural and recreational resource like Cork Harbour, which fuels the local economy through recreation and tourist activities.

Our findings highlight the value of such resources and its contribution to the Cork Harbour region. Such valuable use of resources in Cork Harbour is evidence that the contemporary place-based approach to economic development considered in the literature (OECD, 2011; Dubois, Kistensen and Teras 2017; Pugalis and Gray, 2016) is worth pursuing by policy makers. This heterogeneous approach to regional development and the place-based argument suggests a focus on building local capabilities and the promotion of innovation by all stakeholders (e.g., users, providers, residents and public agencies) to deliver such public policies (Grillitsch and Asheim 2018; Uyarra, Flanagan and Magro, 2017).

While a possible limitation of this report (beyond the scope and definition of the marine leisure industry), many ‘non-boating’ visitors contribute to the local economy. For example, the valuable impact of the many festivals and regattas enjoyed by land based spectators generates additional expenditure in the area. A sample of activities include the Royal Cork Yacht Club’s Cork Week, Blackrock Race, Dragon Boat Challenge and Ocean to City Rowing race contribute economically to the region. Open water swimming events are also a growing activity which attracts visitors and contributes to the local Cork Harbour area and surrounding hinterland. This is a topic for further research and potential growth.

The regional collaborative initiatives (bottom-up) approach of the recently published ‘Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020’ (Government-of-Ireland, 2019, p.7), which includes the Cork Harbour region, and is cited as one of the six strategic objectives - “Support growth in the region’s marine and maritime sector”. This is a welcomed start for a place-based approach to regional policy where the value of the natural resources unique to a place is valued as a contribution to regional development strategies. This should focus on the untapped potential and developing opportunities for those living in places like coastal communities and Harbours (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).
Acknowledgements

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The Influence of Employer Branding in Talent Management in the Hotel Industry

Donagh Davern, Leo Jago & Margaret Deery

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the influence of employer branding in attracting and retaining talented employees, with a particular focus on millennial staff. The paper reviews literature in the area of talent management, employer branding and the millennial generation in the hotel industry and draws on the results of interviews with hotel General Managers. At a time when there is a shortage of talent to fill available positions in the hotel industry, this paper seeks to give hoteliers an improved understanding of the concepts of talent management and employer branding and their usage in the attraction and retention of staff, at a time when staff are in short supply and the traits and aspirations of the millennial generation are a concern for the sector.

Key Words: Talent Management, Employer Branding, Millennials, Hotel Industry.

Introduction

Leaders, practitioners and academics value the area of talent management, however, academic knowledge on the area is limited and further research is needed to give it an exact definition and to understand its boundaries (Krishnan and Scullion, 2016, Thunnissen, 2015, Christensen Hughes and Rog, 2008). D’Annunzio-Green (2008, p. 807) refers to talent management as ‘a holistic approach to human resource planning, aimed at strengthening organisational capability and driving business priorities, using a range of HR interventions’. From a business perspective, interest in the area of talent management emerged from the work of McKinsey in the 1990’s, which highlighted the talent shortage in England during the high tech/boom of the late 1990’s and which differentiated one organisation from another (Collings, 2018, Olaka et al., 2018). Fuelled by the war for suitable talent and due to the dynamic and uncertain nature of today’s highly competitive markets, businesses face major challenges globally in terms of talent management and the area is of continuing strategic importance, while a long-term approach is needed towards developing talent to ensure employees support the strategic mission of a company (Joyce and Slocum, 2012, Vaiman et al., 2012, Christensen Hughes and Rog, 2008). Collings (2018) argues that a key challenge facing organisations today is ensuring that the area of talent management is aligned with the overall organisational strategy, but there is a strong belief that it is a central concern of organisation leaders (Collings, 2014).

Companies who display positive talent-management practices are strategic in their sourcing, attraction, selection, training, development and promotion of employees in the organisation (Barron, 2008). Declining birth rates, an aging workforce and other changes in the demographic patterns of countries, mean that the area of talent management is of significant
importance (McDonnell et al., 2017, Lub et al., 2012, Vaiman et al., 2017). In particular, the expectations of the millennial generation in the workplace have heightened the challenge posed by talent management and it is proposed that the area of talent management be considered key to the achievement of postmodern business success (Maxwell and Maclean, 2008, Scott and Revis, 2008). At a time where talent is scarce and there are many choices available in the employment market, the attraction and retention of talent is vital to a company’s competitiveness (McDonnell et al., 2017, Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2007).

Defining Talent Management

There is both a lack of clarity in the definition of talent management and a debate as to its conceptual boundaries, and although the concept originally focused only on the area of recruitment, it’s focus has broadened and it now also includes the attraction, retention, development and transitioning of talented employees in the organisation (Vaiman et al., 2012, Collings and Mellahi, 2009, D’Annunzio-Green, 2008). Talent management concerns the development and fostering of new workers and is related to areas such as the interviewing, hiring, orientation and integration of new employees into an organisation’s culture, along with their subsequent development and retention (Barron, 2008). It is proposed by Vaiman et al. (2012) that talent management encompasses organisational activities which embody the attraction, selection, development and retention of employees, particularly for roles which are essential to overall organisational effectiveness. The implication is that the use of talent management involves a more strategic and sophisticated approach and the alignment of internal organisational systems with factors in the external environment (Christensen Hughes and Rog, 2008).

Empirical research on the area of talent management is limited, however there is evidence of ‘wide differences between the rhetoric of formal policies and the reality of what happens in practice’ (Vaiman et al., 2012, p. 926). Collings and Mellahi (2009) propose that the pursuit of a talent management strategy begins with the systematic identification of those positions which are the prime contributors to the organisation’s achievement of competitive advantage.

Collings (2018) posits that talent management includes the development of a human resource architecture which is differentiated from other firms, ensuring the development of individuals to fill strategic roles in the organisation. It is worrying to note that in the PWC (2017) HR Director Pulse Survey, only 12% of participants deemed their organisation’s Employer Value Proposition (EVP) to be an effective talent sourcing tool and only 31% of Irish businesses actually operated a clearly defined talent management programme to identify key talent in the organisation.

Talent Management in the Hospitality Industry

A key factor in understanding the use of talent management is the industry context that is being considered (Maxwell and Maclean, 2008). The area of talent management is a problematic concept in the context of the hospitality industry due to its poor perceived reputation as an employer, and the sector has found it difficult to attract motivated, trained and qualified
employees who will deliver on its service promises (Barron, 2008, Baum, 2008). Talent management is of great importance in the tourism and hospitality industry, particularly as it faces such challenges in the areas of recruitment and retention, spurred on by the labour intensive nature of the industry, the high levels of customer service expectations, management’s focus on minimising labour costs, a lack of job security, a lack of promotional opportunities and the low status of occupations in the industry (Deery and Jago, 2015, Christensen Hughes and Rog, 2008). Indeed, high levels of both employee turnover and labour mobility in the hospitality workforce are major issues and hospitality employees are increasingly departing from the sector to work in other industries, which boast better working conditions (Robinson et al., 2014, Lub et al., 2012). Commitment to providing employees with a positive experience and in-turn strengthening the company’s employer brand, is becoming more prevalent in the hospitality sector. It is widely recognised that investment in talented individuals in the hotel industry will lead to immediate organisational benefits (Christensen Hughes and Rog, 2008, Scott and Revis, 2008).

The area of talent management is a prime challenge for the hospitality sector, as the sector struggles to maintain a stable workforce and where areas such as pay, work-life balance, training, excessive workloads and organisational culture are particular challenges (Deery, 2008). Those organisations that project a positive employer brand, along with opportunities for career progression, will in-turn motivate candidates to apply to work in those organisations (Willie et al., 2008).

The expectations of the millennial generation in terms of their employment in tourism and hospitality, offers a heightened challenge in terms of the concept of talent management (Maxwell and Maclean, 2008). Operators in the hospitality sector need to have an open-minded approach to both training and development, allowing all staff to enhance their skills and knowledge, while constantly identifying and acknowledging talent in their own organisations (Baum, 2008). The development of a talent management system will ensure that potential candidates for open positions are identified and prepared in a timely manner (Scott and Revis, 2008). Indeed, the successful integration and development of skilled workers is posited as the key to a successful hospitality and tourism sector (Barron, 2008).

**Talent Management and Millennials**

Each generation has its own unique set of values, skills and characteristics which are shaped by their stage in life and the millennial generation is no different, meaning that employers have to comprehend the underlying value structure of this generation (Gursoy et al., 2013, Saba, 2013, Park and Gursoy, 2012, Zopiatis et al., 2011). The birth years of demographic groups which are present in the workplace, are a source of debate as highlighted by authors such as Stewart et al. (2016) and Lub et al. (2012), but for the purposes of this work, millennials are referred to as those aged from eighteen to their late-thirties. In this research, Generation X refers to those in their late thirties to mid-fifties and the terms millennial and Generation Y are used interchangeably. The hospitality sector is reliant on the millennial generation as a source of labour and authors such as Zopiatis et al. (2012, p. 118), suggest that adaption to the millennial employees needs will be ‘one of the most challenging tasks of hospitality stakeholders in the next decade’. The importance of recognising the needs of millennial
workers is highlighted by the fact that they became the majority generation in the workplace in 2015 (Heymann, 2017). Vaiman et al. (2012) propose that the area of talent management decision making in an organisation will strongly influenced by the millennial generation.

Awareness of the differences between generations can lead managers to a more positive work environment and greater productivity in the workplace (Gursoy et al., 2013, Cahill and Sedrak, 2012, Glass, 2007). Millennials have significantly different demands to previous generations and managers in the hospitality industry face significant challenges in dealing with millennial cohort members in the workplace, as they grew up in an era of instant communication, they value freedom and leisure time, and they have higher expectations in terms of pay and promotion (Gursoy et al., 2013). Therefore, the first step which a company must take is to adapt its HR policies and practices to suit the generational needs of millennials (Gursoy et al., 2013, Barron, 2008, Glass, 2007). It is suggested by Rothschild (2016) that retention issues are at their peak when dealing with millennials and that the hotel industry requires new paradigms to attract, motivate and retain this generation of workers – a generation which is much different from its generational predecessors (Rees, 2017, Wiggins, 2016). Managers now have to fully understand the motivators of the millennial generation, in order to mitigate negative incidents which might occur due to the lack of employee motivation or increased employee turnover (Brown et al., 2015). The motivation of millennials and management’s response to their attitude toward organisational membership and commitment are areas which HR must address, and it is now recognised that the organisation shouldn’t try to mould millennials to fit the organisation and should instead adapt their organisation to suit the needs of millennials (Rees, 2017, Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010).

By better understanding the characteristics of generations, appropriate management styles can be adopted and HR strategies can be introduced which address the particular needs and expectations of a particular generation (Barron et al., 2014, Lub et al., 2012, Glass, 2007). The millennial generation has a range of unique work-related characteristics which need to be understood by employers so that they can implement strategic employment initiatives targeted at this generation, such as the importance of employer branding in the attraction and retention of talent to an organisation (Vaiman et al., 2012). The changing generational attitudes that are being experienced in the hospitality sector are a prime reason to review the impact and importance of talent management on the sector (Barron, 2008). The greater mobility of talent, the under-representation of females in senior management and the creation of trust, pride and fun in the organisation, are all key considerations in developing a talent management strategy linked to the corporate culture of the organisation (Vaiman et al., 2012). Lub et al. (2012) argue that the needs and behaviours of the various generations in the workforce must be acknowledged when it comes to the concept of talent management in the hospitality industry. Management and strategic decision makers in firms in the area of talent management will need to understand the important role which employer branding plays in the attraction and retention of employees from the millennial generation (Vaiman et al., 2012).

**Talent Management and Employer Branding**

Watson (2008) cites the image of the hospitality industry as a key issue to be considered for the enhancement of talent management. The concept of the employer brand has become
an essential component of the HR function in international hotel companies (Cheung et al., 2014). The employer brand is quite different to the marketing image that the public/customers of the firm may have, as it is the image associated with the company as an employer and exhibiting a positive employer brand is very important to the attraction and retention of talent in an organisation (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2007). An employer brand includes areas such as employee flexibility and the creation of an improved work atmosphere, which can be important elements in attracting and retaining talent in an organisation (Krishnan and Scullion, 2016). Investment in employees is a key area in managing talent and differentiating one firm’s HR offering from others and Collings (2018) argues that this investment is far broader than simply rewarding employees. Indeed Collings (2015) encourages a focus on developing talent for an organisational context and combining both internal development with external recruitment as part of the development of a suitable talent pool.

Traditionally, the hospitality industry has suffered from a poor employer image at an industry level based on its reputation for menial jobs, lack of career opportunities and limited rewards, making it a less likely career choice for the millennial generation (Barron, 2008). The general reputation of the firm in question, or its employer brand, is highlighted as a strong retention driver among staff and it is essential that organisations identify the company attributes which employees find most attractive, if they are to link the employer brand with the identity of the organisation and the interests of employees (Maxwell and Knox, 2009, Moroko and Uncles, 2009). There are many advantages to a company creating a positive employment brand, including the increased retention of employees, improved employee relations, along with being able to offer lower salaries than those of competitors with poor employer brands (Berthon et al., 2005). Comparative analysis carried out by Kucherov and Zavyalova (2012), found that companies who had a strong employer brand had lower staff turnover, and invested more in training and development and as a result this contributed towards increased employee retention. Indeed strong employer brands lead to an improvement in both employee relations and employee retention (Franca and Pahor, 2012).

Research Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with eighteen hotel General Managers in Cork City and County as part of a larger research project. For this research, convenience sampling was chosen as the sampling technique and a sample was selected which focused on the members of the Irish Hotels Federation (IHF) within the Cork Region. Cork is Ireland’s second largest city and comprises various sizes of hotels, a mix of branded and unbranded products and a range of star grades. The entire sampling frame for this study was the Cork IHF branch membership, which has sixty-four members and the eighteen interviews represent just over 28% of the total population. The purpose of these interviews was to gather information from key senior hotel managers on the subject of employer branding, the retention of the millennial generation and their use of talent management in their hotels. An interview guide was constructed and utilised throughout the interview process and all interviews were transcribed. The data analysis methodology which was adopted to analyse the interviews used in this research was template analysis. Template analysis is a way of thematically organising and analysing qualitative data, which is usually produced in the form of interview scripts (Stein et al., 2018, King, 2004). Codes are produced which represent themes which occur in the textual
data and a template is produced which represents the relationships which the researcher defines, most commonly in a hierarchical structure (King, 2004). The coding template is the central component of the technique and it can be applied to further data, revised and refined as necessary (Brooks et al., 2015). The method has been widely used in both organisational and management research and allows the flexibility to adapt itself to the particular needs of a study (Brooks et al., 2015). The hierarchical nature of coding used in template analysis allows the research to be analysed at varying levels of specificity – with broader higher codes giving a good general view of the overall direction of an interview, while lower-detailed codes allow for fine distinctions to be made both within and between the cases (King, 2004). Template analysis normally commences with some pre-defined or a priori codes, which can assist in guiding the analysis (King, 2004) and in the case of this research, these were identified from the review of literature.

The interviews were coded using QSR’s NVivo software package and layered into the previously coded secondary research which had been created from the literature review, to identify themes which emerged. To ensure consistency, both in terms of the interview coding and aligned thinking, an internationally recognised form of inter-rater reliability testing (IRR) was administered in order to provide external validation of the coding. To safeguard anonymity, direct quotations used are broadly referred to in the findings.

### Interview Findings

#### Staff Retention

One of the largest areas for concern in the service sector is staff retention and this issue is particularly acute when it comes to the millennial cohort. It is clear that issues with regard to retention have a negative effect on the customer experience (Mosquera, 2015, Robinson et al., 2014, Knox and Freeman, 2006, Earle, 2003). Irish hoteliers are operating in a challenging environment when it comes to staff retention, with fourteen of eighteen interviewees finding the current situation either difficult or challenging. The retention of food and beverage staff is an area of particular concern for hoteliers, as is the reception area, where it seems staff are attracted to other industries such as call-centres which offer better hours and less-pressurised working conditions. A number of the hoteliers felt that retention was suffering as staff were looking for set hours and a better work-life balance outside of the hotel industry, with one interviewee stating that he has lost chefs to a work environment which is a lot less exciting for them, but which offers set hours in a lower pressure environment.

#### Strategic Talent Management

Only six of the hoteliers interviewed had a strategic talent management plan in place for the attraction, identification, development, retention and deployment of talent for the business, with three of these hotels forming part of an international hotel group and the other three being part of an indigenous Irish hotel group. A number of the other respondents seemed to have integrated the concept using an exclusive approach, offering it only to a number of staff. A passive approach was taken by one hotelier, who commented that “we’re conscious of the fact that we need one, but we haven’t got around due to business”.

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A number of the hotels were moving towards more strategic talent management, while others were far ahead in their strategic direction with one group hotelier responding “yes, we have a specific talent management department with four people in it which has been put in place over the last twelve months”. Another hotel, which has just been taken over by a group, is changing its strategic direction, as the General Manager indicated that for their new owners the areas of employee retention and succession planning are a priority.

In one of the 5 Star Hotels, the General Manager emphasised the importance of talent attraction by responding that “...from the moment someone comes in for an interview we want to show that we are committed to them, so I meet them and show them our commitment to our team and make positive statements, reinforce the brand and the environment they will work in”. However, the integration of a talent management strategy is not just important at the upper end of the market, as one group hotelier in a three star hotel confirmed indicating that they had a talent management strategic plan in place “and it is utilised”.

A number of the respondents are now looking at succession planning, with one hotel identifying forty people in a recent succession planning meeting looking at the further roles in the organisation that needed to be developed. Another hotelier emphasised the importance of grooming staff for future positions in the organisation and developing a body of knowledge on the staff so as to recognise their talents when positions become available.

**Generational Influences**

One hotelier felt that there is a body of work to be done in convincing Generation X parents, along with their Generation Y children, about the viability of the industry as an employer and that there is a need to change people’s mind-sets, which are based on their past experience of the industry. Another hotelier believes that members of Generation Y are not afraid to speak their mind and are more open and so will tell you more, including if they are suffering from stress or depression. She also finds it a challenge that members of the Generation X cohort were used to going directly to the manager with issues, so she now tries to direct them to the Heads of Department first out of respect for their position.

**Employer Branding**

Nearly half of the interviewees stated that the image of the hotel industry in Ireland as an employer was not good, with some stating that it had a mixed image of good and bad, while others said the image was improving. A number of the hoteliers believe that more work was needed in schools and with parents to promote the sector’s image as an employer, with one respondent stating that members of Generation X that had worked in the industry and are now parents, need to be convinced that the poor experiences which they may have had working in hotels are a thing of the past. One hotelier stated that the industry was still seen as a stop-gap rather than a career, while another expressed frustration at hearing people ask those in the industry when they are going to get a real job. A number of respondents believe that work needs to be done on the perception of the industry, while one hotelier expressed his desire that the Government invest, through incentives, in getting those who had left the industry for family reasons back into employment in the sector. The perception of unsocial hours in the industry was a concern for one hotelier, but he stated that management practices have changed, however, and so have younger employee’s perceptions of the nature of what a job should entail. The emergence of indigenous hotel groups was suggested by
one respondent as bringing a more formal HR structure that is aiming to improve employee retention. One hotelier expressed his belief and worry that the sector’s image has actually worsened since he was a student and employment in the industry is now perceived to be “pretty much at the bottom of the food chain”. The majority of interviewees felt that the hotel sector suffered from a perception of long hours and challenges in terms of gaining a work-life balance, with some stating that a perception of low wages was an issue which needed to be dealt with by the industry.

All of the hoteliers interviewed believe that the majority of their employees identified with the business and had pride in being part of it, with one hotelier emphasising the need for employees to buy into the organisational culture, while another stated that it was important to get the message out to the team that success for the business is success for everyone. He also expressed the need to identify those employees who may not be happy and “either bring things to an end, or recover”. The majority of General Managers interviewed expressed their belief that a successful business has a better employer brand, with one hotelier referring to the knock-on effect that one has on the other and another stating that “success breeds success” in this regard.

One respondent says that a lack of communication of the improved conditions which are evident in the hotel sector is an issue, while a number blamed the historically negative perception of the industry for the image issue. They also expressed concern that middle management, who were hired during periods of staff shortages, haven’t helped the reputation of the sector in many cases as they had weak management skills and didn’t treat their teams as they should. There is a lack of awareness of the hotel industry as a career according to one respondent and the sector is underrated as it hasn’t been promoted properly. One hotelier referred to what he believes was the past “exploitation” of employees in the hotel sector. Whilst this is of concern, worryingly one hotelier believes that

“I think the poster boy for the hospitality industry is somebody earning €9.55 an hour, not being upskilled, not being trained in any great way and that person feels as if they are being abused (which is a strong word), but they feel they’re being taken advantage of by the conditions that they are forced to endure”.

One respondent stated that there have been lots of activities to promote the industry in the past few years, but with the best intentions they have not succeeded and he believes that the sector needs to be promoted to children at a much younger age. One hotelier warns that with the younger generation, who are more image focused

“No one wants to be part of an environment which is frowned upon, or seen as a poor employee, as they miss that sense of pride.”

It is interesting to note that despite some misgivings, all of the interviewees would support a family member who expressed an interest in being employed in the Irish hotel industry, with some stating that it makes a young person more outgoing and social due to their interaction with the public, and that it was great training. All but one of the respondents would encourage a family member who expressed an interest in studying a hotel-industry related course at third level. In terms of how they felt about the way that their own hotel’s employer brand is perceived in the market, half of the interviewees believed they had a strong or positive employer brand, while five felt that their employer brand was improving. One hotelier stated that his hotel had
made a significant investment in upgrading staff facilities recently, in order to improve the employer brand and employee satisfaction. One respondent stated that when it comes to the employer brand, it is crucial that “it’s not all talk, that there is actually action”, while another worried that some people might be frightened by their employer brand due to their exacting standards. A body of work has to be performed to fill the gap between the perception of their hotel brand in the market and their brand as an employer, according to one respondent, while another expressed his satisfaction with how his employer brand was perceived on social media channels. One hotelier stated that he has found it easier to recruit staff due to an improvement in his employer brand in recent years. Three respondents expressed their belief that the development of a positive employer brand in the local community was essential to success.

Ten of the interviewees stated that they consciously brand their business as an employer of choice, with others stating that they were embarking on that strategy. One hotelier stated that they are constantly trying to provide a different bespoke experience for customers and are now trying to do the same for their staff by “offering a different type of place to work” and this begins with their professionally graphically designed job advertisements. A number of hoteliers said they promote their hotel’s employment experience on social media, with one considering the use of a Snapchat account to reach millennial cohort members. The importance of word-of-mouth promotion through existing employees was also identified as important. One hotelier said that they have advanced their hotels employer branding strategies by taking on a company who promote the employment experience and they have made social media videos to promote this, while another has commissioned a video promoting the team and the hotel’s family-values to be used for promotional purposes. Another hotelier, whose hotel is part of an international brand, stated that they appoint employees as “brand ambassadors” to promote their two hotel brands.

All but one of the interviewees believes that branding an employer improves employee retention. Fourteen of the hoteliers interviewed expressed the belief that the hotel industry in Ireland recognises the importance of developing an employer brand. One hotelier said that this has arisen as the sector becomes stronger and less seasonal and as there is less home-grown talent from which to choose. However, another hotelier stated that this was due to the needs of the new generation coming into the workplace. One respondent said that larger hotel groups would have a significantly higher regard for the importance of the employer brand than smaller players, with another agreeing that the large companies have brought improved structures, while one hotelier stated that while there is an appreciation of its importance particularly in a tight labour market, there are still, what he termed, “cowboy employers” who don’t care. The need for greater promotion and public relations regarding positive hotel sector employer brands was emphasised by another respondent, while another questioned what he believes to be the myth that Irish hoteliers don’t care about their employer brand.

In order to improve the image of the hotel industry in the minds of millennial cohort members, one hotelier felt that a public relations campaign was needed which would be supported by Government, along with industry representative bodies such as the IHF and Restaurant Association of Ireland (RAI), to show the industry in a more positive light. A number of respondents concurred stating that the industry needs to better brand and market itself. One hotelier proposed a public relations campaign for the industry, while another felt that
it was important to connect with students at second level to increase their appreciation for the industry. One respondent goes beyond this, stating that the sector needs to access children at primary school level to convince them of the merits of working in the sector. Staff development and career-path establishment are strategies which hoteliers feel are essential to improving the perception of the hotel industry, with one hotelier proposing that working on shift patterns, hours of work and the eradication of split shifts in the sector, are essential strategies in order to improve the industry’s brand.

**Conclusion**

It is essential that talent management practices are strategic in nature and offer support to the foundation capabilities of a business and act as a supporting strategy leading to desired overall business goals (Joyce and Slocum, 2012). The area of talent management is critical to strategic human resource management, is an area which is constantly evolving and must be linked to the overall strategy of a company (Vaiman et al., 2012). It is proposed that this strategic approach to talent management, combined with an employer branding strategy, can offer competitive advantage to a business, as earlier proposed by Watson (2008). At a time when the unemployment rate is low and there is high demand for skilled talent, this causes increased pressure on firms as Collings (2015) posits that labour markets drive talent management. The boundaries of the term talent management are still not well defined, but in its broad focus which includes employee attraction and retention, it is clear that it can be combined with a positive employer brand to tackle the issues which the hotel industry faces in the war for talent. Talent Management is used to differentiate organisations in a competitive labour marketplace and employer branding is a key element to distinguish a company as a good employer, just as its marketing brand distinguishes it from competition in the consumer marketplace. These strategies are essential at a time when the hotel industry is struggling to both attract and retain members of the millennial generation.

It is essential to differentiate the organisations human resource architecture to both attract and retain talent for an organisation and the area of talent management is a source of competitive advantage in a tight labour market (Vaiman et al., 2012). Projecting a positive image of the employer brand in terms of the attraction and retention of staff, and in terms of gaining commitment and motivating the talent pool, should be an integral part of the overall human resource strategy. This is essential in the Irish hotel sector, where a poor perceived reputation has led to an overall poor employer brand for the sector. Promotion of the possibilities for rapid advancement, developmental opportunities, job security and flexibility are essential if the hotel industry is to counteract the negative perception of its employer brand and compete with other sectors in a labour market which is already tight.

This study proposes that the hotel sector needs to be more strategic in its approach to talent management, in the development of a positive employer brand and in counter-acting the perceptions which older generations have of working in the industry and which they are now passing on to the emerging generations. It is suggested that a sectoral public relations drive be put in place to promote the industry as an employer and to highlight its positive traits in terms of areas such as progression opportunities, development and flexibility. This employer branding exercise needs to start in schools, but should also target third level students, school guidance counsellors and parents.
References


The Yin and Yang of Business Strategy

Edward Dennehy

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a ‘grounded’ approach to business strategy formulation on the basis that the generic strategy approach lacks contextual sensitivity. Today’s strategists need to constantly assess the degree to which their businesses are achieving both market effectiveness and organisational efficiency. Drawing on primary and secondary research the paper examines business strategy formulation as a balancing act between achieving organisational effectiveness and efficiency and provides a matrix that can help identify where a business lies in this process.

Key Words: Business Strategy, Generic Strategies, Strategic Management, Efficiency, Effectiveness

Introduction

Generic strategy models such as Porter’s (1985) framework have long been popular in strategy circles as they are perceived as offering guidance for strategy formulation or at least describing organisational strategic positions (Leitner and Güldenberg, 2010; Moon et al., 2014; Parnell, 2006; Speed, 1993). The use of such typologies can be seductive in so far as they help us to make sense of complex phenomena by acting as heuristic devices for strategic decision-making (Wright et al., 2013). For example, if one follows Porter’s (1985) model, one understands that there are four (and only four) discrete business strategies to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and that if one attempts to ‘mix’ or ‘combine’ these strategies (or elements within) a business will become ‘stuck in the middle’ and become uncompetitive (the latter assertion being particularly controversial) (Allen and Helms, 2006).

While such models may be useful for strategists as a starting point, dissatisfaction with generic strategy models has been expressed on the basis of a lack of a common interpretation as to the nature of the strategies and an unclear link with performance (Bowman, 2008; Allen and Helms, 2006; Campbell-Hunt, 2000). Some scholars have attempted to revise/revamp Porter’ model by ‘tweaking’ it in so far as adding strategies to the model to add greater complexity (Bowman and Faulkner, 1997; Mintzberg, 1988; Murray, 1988), nevertheless, the essence is still the same – a typology of strategies from which to choose in strategy formulation with in some cases a set of specific actions (see Allen and Helms, 2006). However, given that industries and organisations vary considerably in nature and are constantly evolving, there is a danger that such models may lack of sensitivity to contextual differences, organisational or industrial, that contradict these ‘rules of thumb’(Bowman, 2008).

An alternative to following such formulaic strategic models is to develop a more ‘grounded’ approach to strategy formulation - one based on the unique circumstances within each business finds itself. One approach to maintaining contextual sensitivity in strategy
formulation is to return to the essence of our understanding of ‘management’ where in its essence, ‘management’ can be described as ‘doing the right things (effectiveness) in the right way (efficiency) (Drucker, 2007). As strategic management is simply a subcategory of ‘management’ (a point perhaps sometimes forgotten), one can draw on this description as a guide for understanding and formulating business strategy.

**Doing the Right Things**

From a strategic management perspective, ‘doing the right things’ can be understood as achieving sustained market success through sales revenue as a result of achieving customer satisfaction (Martinez, 2014). This market success is achieved through a coherent and attractive marketing mix that stems from a deep insight into customer needs. In this way businesses can be seen to supply ‘quality’ products/services where ‘quality’ in this context is defined by the customer (Mehra and Ranganathan, 2008; Sureshchandar et al., 2002; Petersen, 1999). This market-definition of ‘quality’ is, of course, a ‘moveable feast’ – a whole range of factors such as PEST and industry variables (not least competition) shape this interpretation of ‘quality’. For example, a business’s failure to conform to a new regulatory requirement is a ‘quality’ failure, likewise, so is a company’s products or services failure to adapt to changing cultural practices. The failure of a business’s products or services to remain attractive vis-à-vis its competitors may be the ultimate quality deficit. Thus, ‘effectiveness’ can be seen to be an external measure of process output or quality.

**The Right Way**

In contrast, the principle of ‘the right way’ is more internally-focused as it balances customer needs with the needs of the business to provide the products/services in a manner that achieves organisational financial goals. After all, there is little point in achieving external market success through measures that achieve customer satisfaction if the organisation is unable to make a sustainable financial return from those activities. However, importantly, what constitutes the ‘right way’ or ‘efficiency’ is contingent on the notion of ‘effectiveness’ for a business’s product/service. For example, if an integral selling point of a product is that it is ‘hand-made’

e.g. the Ferrari, an ‘efficient’ manufacturing process in this context is highly different to that employed in the production of a mass-market car such as the Tata Nana. Nevertheless, in both of these cases the principle is the same i.e. to ensure that the organisation is as efficient as possible in developing the ‘right things’.

‘Efficiency’ has become somewhat the ‘ugly duckling’ of strategy literature where strategy gurus have dismissed it as ‘dangerous’ or simply as an ‘operational’ (and therefore non-strategic) issue (see Mintzberg, 2014; Porter, 1996). For example, in Porter’s seminal work aptly entitled ‘What is Strategy?’ (Porter, 1996), the first sentence, a headline, proclaims that “[O]perational Effectiveness is not Strategy” (p.2). Porter also states that “operational effectiveness includes but is not limited to efficiency…it refers to any number of practices that allow a company to
better utilize its inputs” (p.2). However it is contended here that how an organisation utilises its inputs is the essence of what constitutes ‘organisational efficiency’. If Porter claims that efficiency is not a component of strategy (and by extension strategic management), this brings us to the question, what is meant by the term ‘strategic management’?

In an attempt to identify some common interpretation/usage of the concept of ‘strategic management’ in the much contested and somewhat fragmented field of ‘strategic management’ literature (see Mintzberg et al., 2005; Spender, 2001) Nag, Hambrick and Chen (2007) asked a large panel of strategic management scholars to analyse 447 abstracts of articles appearing in major management journals as to whether the articles were ‘strategic management’ articles or not. The authors identified common elements amongst these articles and arrived at the following definition:

The field of strategic management deals with the major intended and emergent initiatives taken by general managers on behalf of owners, involving utilization of resources, to enhance the performance of firms in their external environments. (p.945)

‘Resources’ are defined by (Barney, 1991) as “all assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge, etc. controlled by a firm that enable the firm to conceive of and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness” (italics added). Therefore it is contended that the notion of ‘efficiency’ is embedded in the concept of strategic management as it is commonly understood, after all, to ignore efficiency is to ignore the obvious fact that organisation have limited resources. Of course, similarly to ‘effectiveness’, efficiency is also a relative term - defined or understood in the context of ever-changing market circumstances. For example, technological changes can make a business’s manufacturing or logistical methods obsolete or outdated therefore efficiency is inherently linked to the marketplace.

Business Strategy – Balance of the Yin and Yang

The principles of Yin and Yang emanate from Taoism, an ancient Chinese philosophy/religion, and are used to explain the fundamental nature of the universe (Li et al., 2011). To briefly summarise, Yin (feminine energy) stands for passivity, or intuition, softness, contraction and yielding, whereas Yang (masculine energy) stands for rational thought, hardness, expansion and assertiveness. Balance between these two symbiotic energies is important and ensures harmony (Li et al., 2011). Ignoring the unfortunate gender stereotypes, here the term ‘Yin’ will represent ‘effectiveness’ and it can be seen as soft in the sense that it is subservient in that it aims to achieve customer satisfaction. Yang will represent ‘efficiency’ as it seen as hard in the sense that the organisation is machine-like and not focussed on people per se (see Figure 2 for some of the ‘levers’ used to manage Yin or Yang elements in organisations). Achieving this balance can be a tricky task, for example, a restaurant owner may be concerned about the level of operational costs and decides to cut the number of staff (Yang) but in effect this reduces customer satisfaction (Yin). In contrast another restaurant might have decided to increase the number of waiting staff in order to improve customer satisfaction (Yin) but effectively only raise the cost base of the business (Yang).
Figure 1: The Yin/Yang Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efficient</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Producing the wrong goods/services in an efficient manner (The Busy Fool)</td>
<td>Producing the right goods/services in an efficient manner (The Master)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing the right goods/services in an inefficient manner (The Hopeless)</td>
<td>Producing the right goods/services in an inefficient manner (The Dreamy Artist)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Martinez, 2014)

The Busy Fool

The culture in these businesses are essentially inward-looking where efficiency targets are prioritised over market needs – in some cases the production/operations department may be dominant in setting organisational priorities with marketing values secondary. While such organisations may succeed in an environment with little or no competition such as in some areas of the public sector, they are highly unlikely to succeed in fast changing industries. Organisations who have been successful for a long period of time may become complacent and fail to take into account changing customer needs e.g. Kodak in the digital era (see Morozov and Morris, 2009).

The Dreamy Artist

In contrast businesses operating in this quadrant produce market-desired products or services but in a manner that does not make the best use of available resources (internally or externally). Such businesses may be SMEs where the owner/manager has a ‘technical’ expertise associated with the product or service but lacks knowledge of important business skills and knowledge (Wong et al., 2018; Hayton, 2015; Koryak et al., 2015). In the case of an SME, if the organisation wishes to grow, the owner/manager will most likely need to add employees with sufficient expertise and delegate authority accordingly (Wong et al., 2018; Hwang and Lockwood, 2006). In other cases, the business may have enjoyed many successful years but may have become complacent and failed to adapt to a new environment of greater competition from new entrants that may engage in price competition (see Lego below).

The Hopeless

Unless this business is in a monopolistic position, where barriers to entry are very high, it is highly unlikely to survive. The business may have reached this point due to a myriad of reasons but it is likely that mismanagement may be a key factor. One such scenario could be a family business that has been passed from one generation to the next where the new management may lack the knowledge and/or the drive to successfully manage the business (Westhead, 2003).
The Master - Balance of the Yin and the Yang

Business value/worth, according to Martinez-Hernandez (2003, p. 30), “resides in the satisfaction and fulfilment of customers’ expectations, at the same time, generating wealth for organisations”. However there is a view that, deciding how a business ‘makes money’ (as represented by a business’s ‘business model’), is a separate activity to crafting a business strategy (see Ben Romdhane Ladib and Lakhal, 2015; Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010; Magretta, 2002; Ritter and Lettl, 2018; Štefan and Branislav, 2016). For example, according to Magretta (2002, p.86), “business models describe, as a system, how the pieces of a business fit together. But they don’t factor in one critical dimension of performance: competition. Sooner or later—and it is usually sooner—every enterprise runs into competitors. Dealing with that reality is strategy’s job”. However, identifying what customer-needs the business aims to satisfy (for example see Almquist et al., 2016) and how this can be achieved efficiently, should never, and probably rarely does, take place without an analysis of the competition. To assume that customers do not consider alternatives when examining a business’s value proposition seems highly erroneous. Instead what is required is a more holistic paradigm for crafting strategy that takes into account the symbiotic nature of efficiency and effectiveness. In order to further illustrate this need for a balance between Yin (Effectiveness) and Yang (Efficiency) two well-known international company cases will be used, Lego and Starbucks, along with a case study of a successful Irish business – Lily O’Briens.

Lego

The LEGO Group is a privately held company based in Billund, Denmark. The LEGO Group’s vision is to “inspire children to explore and challenge their own creative potential” (“www.lego.com/en-us/aboutus/lego-group,” n.d.). has stuck with the company since 1932 when Ole Kirk Kristiansen, a Danish carpenter, established the company in the small town of Billund in Denmark, to manufacture wooden toys (“www.lego.com/en-us/aboutus/lego-group,” n.d.). The company is still owned by the Kirk Kristiansen family today (“www.lego.com/en-us/aboutus/lego-group,” n.d.).

The Lego Group, famously ran into financial difficulties at the beginning of this century and much of this could be attributed to organisational inefficiencies (Larsen et al., 2010; Heckmann, 2007; LEGO A/S – Annual Report 2004). Lego has always had a culture that prided itself on high quality products and indeed its company motto was and still is “Only the Best is Good Enough” (www.lego.com/en-us/aboutus/lego-group, n.d.). The ‘Kitchen,’ the company’s product development lab, was a source of corporate pride however the developers failed to factor in the price of materials or the costs of production. Similarly, the supply chain had become extremely bloated (over 11,000 suppliers) while the manufacturing processes were inefficient as a plethora of different pieces for figures meant that production was a ‘stop/start’ affair. Ignoring the ‘pareto principle’ in sales management, the lack of discrimination in Lego’s handling of different-sized customers meant that a disproportionate amount of organisational resources were allocated to dealing with smaller customers. Finally, while previously Lego may have overcome such inefficiencies through price premiums, the company now faced both increased direct and indirect competition (Larsen et al., 2010; Heckmann, 2007).
Under the stewardship of then CEO Jorgen Vig Knudstorp, Lego began to create greater efficiencies throughout the organisation – cutting unnecessary costs such as the production of excess pieces for different play figures. Lego’s transformation is legendary where profits at the company increased dramatically, initially primarily through increased efficiency (reflected in lower costs to sales/production ratios) and later through both increased efficiency and effectiveness (see thelegocasestudy.com, n.d.)

The prevailing corporate culture at Lego was described as one of ‘craftsmanship’ where attempts to cut costs were seen as going against Lego’s motto of quality (Heckmann, 2007). In effect, it is a dichotomous paradigm where a business must either choose between low costs or high quality products/services – the essence of porter’s generic strategy model. While it may seem self-evident, it is worth stating that the purpose of most businesses is to make sustainable and acceptable levels of financial returns (usually reflected as profit) from their activities. There are two variables involved in this equation, namely revenue and costs and the neglect of one these two variables over a sustained period of time leads to fundamental sustainability problems.

**Starbucks**

Originally Starbucks was founded in 1971 but its present day ‘coffeehouse’ format can be traced back to 1984 (Starbucks Company Timeline, n.d.). Initially Starbucks grew at a rapid rate however the company suffered serious financial problems in the late noughties that threatened its solvency - but in an entirely different manner to LEGO. Under pressure from shareholders to achieve financial targets, Starbucks embarked on a process of increasing operational efficiency (see www.wsj.com). However, according to the then CEO Howard Schultz, one of the ‘side effects’ of this process was a deterioration in the customer experience (removed much of the “romance and theatre”) where the store was robbed of its “soul” (see www.wsj.com). In an effort to readdress these ‘Yin’ issues Starbucks refocused on addressing customer needs through investing in what was referred to as the ‘Starbucks Experience’ through increased expenditure on staff training and store redesign (Starbucks Annual Report 2008). Again here we can see an effort to rebalance the Yin/Yang relationship where Starbucks had focussed excessively on addressing the company’s needs for financial success at the cost of the customer’s needs.

**Lily O’Briens**

Lily O’Briens, a premium chocolate and desserts manufacturer, was founded in 1992 by Mary Ann O’Brien in Newbridge, Co. Kildare, Ireland (Lily O’Brien’s Chocolates - Our Story, 2016). The company has approximately 120 employees (staff numbers can rise to 300 during high-volume peak periods) and in 2017 had revenues of approximately €30 million (€32m, 2016) with EBITA of €4 million (€5m, 2016) (Lilly O’Briens Submitted Financial Statements 2016 and 2017). In 2018 the company was bought by Colian Holdings SA, a Polish producer and distributor of food products in the confectionary, culinary products and beverage sectors (Donnelly, 2019).
The current CEO Eoin Donnelly joined the company in 2009 with the goal of growing the business however during this period the company found themselves hit by the ‘tsunami’ of the Irish (and global) financial crisis (Donnelly, 2019). The company faced multiple challenges, firstly there was a drop in consumer demand. Secondly, many UK retailers insisted on 50% discounts on promotions at Christmas time – the industry’s most important period. Finally, the Euro/Sterling exchange rate had dramatically worsened from 0.7 to 0.98 during 2009 and the products had been priced at the 0.7 exchange rate for the year resulting in a significant decline in revenue (Donnelly, 2019).

Faced with this significant drop in revenue, the company management was forced to re-examine its cost base. Labour hours and salaries (including senior management) were cut, redundancies were made, logistical cuts were cut and terms with suppliers were re-negotiated. Significantly, management decided not to cut costs in any area that might affect the quality of the brand:

“A discussion would have taken place in terms of that we could effectively go for cheaper ingredients, raw materials, all the various packaging, and the board effectively felt if you do that, you actually can destroy your brand. So everything that we did (in terms of cost-cutting) was on items that didn't impact the product that arrived into the consumer's hand” (Donnelly, 2019).

Here we can see that the starting point is Yin –the company’s marketplace position and then Yang with improved efforts to deliver that level of quality in the most efficient manner.

As part of this continued focus on improved performance the management teamed up in 2011 with Enterprise Ireland (a state agency in Ireland responsible for supporting Irish businesses) to conduct a strategic assessment of the business’s marketing mix. Consumer research conducted during this period led to a significant re-branding of the product. In particular, packaging was identified as being both overly complex (nine styles) and ineffective in terms of consumer recognition. As a result, product packaging was simplified resulting in both increased product identification in retail outlets and decreased costs of production (Donnelly, 2019).

Internationally, the company is faced with the significant need to adapt to local consumer preferences in places such as western USA and the Far East, nevertheless management are always attempting to identify overlapping needs in order to minimise production costs. Moving forward, with the advent of Brexit, the pressure to maintain a competitive cost base may be a major challenge to the business and the management team are constant looking at improving manufacturing efficiencies (Donnelly, 2019).

While the company is determined to grow in size (with the marketing department particularly keen to introduce new products quickly and regularly to the marketplace), a stage-gate process conducted by cross-functional teams is used to meticulously examine the suitability of new product proposals (Donnelly, 2019):

“Are we going to sell it? And that's where marketing will come in. If we are, what volume is it going to be? Will it be cash sales? What will be the margin and do we need this profit? Are we able to make it on existing equipment or do we buy need to buy new equipment? If we need to buy new equipment, what's the payback on that? Is it
replacing an existing product? And if so is there obsolete packaging that has to be run down and what is the time frame on that? All these various stages that you have to have to go through to make sure that it actually is the right product

While a lot of products go into the filter, by the time they come out, probably only about somewhere in the region 12 to 15 percent of products annually get through the process but they are the right 12 to 15 percent new products."

A stage-gate process is an outside-inside/Yin-Yang process that firstly involves an analysis of the market including the Voice Of the Customer (VOC) before assessing organisational resources at structured past/fail test stages (Marquis and Deeb, 2018). However even if a new product is introduced, management at Lily O’Briens try to cut some incumbent products so as to minimise SKU costs (such as storage) and avoid product cannibalism (Donnelly, 2019).

To-date Lily O’Briens has been a very successful business - built on a blend of creativity and financial prudence. The company’s vision is “to be the affordable premium chocolate luxury of choice” (Donnelly, 2019) – a strategic position at odds with generic strategic recipes (for example the notion of ‘stuck in the middle’) but instead based on customer needs (Yin) and organisational capabilities (Yang).

**Leveraging Activities to Achieve Yin/Yang Balance**

Broadly speaking, organisation activities (and departments) tend to fall under the categories of either Yin or Yang in their orientation. Famously, manufacturing and marketing departments can clash on the basis of very different paradigms where manufacturing performance is often measured on the production targets on a timely basis with the minimum of resource usage. In contrast the marketing department may be measured by sales volumes, market share, customer satisfaction and brand recognition. While organisations may tend to appear to Yin or Yang only, this is not the case. For example, Ryanair may appear to be wholly ‘Yang’ on the basis that it operates a very efficient airline but this ignores its recent attempts to address what was perceived as an Yin/Yang imbalance where customer needs were not being met – better baggage allowance, ‘friendlier’ staff etc. In order to address these issues Ryanair initiated a strategic shift through its ‘Always Getting Better’ programme aimed at improving its brand image. As Michael O’Leary, the CEO of Ryanair said “If I’d only learned in college that being nice was good for business, I’d have done it years ago,” (Farrell, 2015).
Conclusion

It has been argued that a more ‘grounded’ approach to strategy formulation is required that draws on the (changing) needs of customers and that such insight may be clouded by the use (conscious or otherwise) of generic strategy models as a paradigm for understanding a business’s relationship with its customers and competitive position. There is more to business strategy than deciding whether the business should be low cost-based or produce high-quality products/services and while proponents of Porter’s model might argue that this is a simplification of the model, it is argued that this is the paradigm that the model promotes to students and practitioners.

Businesses need to identify how they can offer value to customers in the marketplace while ensuring that such activities are carried out in the most efficient manner possible in order to earn acceptable returns, in short, identify the ‘right things’ first and then work out the ‘right way’ afterwards. Lily O’Brien’s stage-gated approach to product development perhaps best reflects the ‘Yin/Yang Master’ approach to strategic management. While it is market-driven, its prudent appreciation of organisational competencies and resources ensure that the organisation is not overstretched and remains financially stable. Of course market conditions change therefore the process of maintaining a Yin/Yang balance is a continuous one that needs to be constantly reviewed. In order to do this effectively the CEO/business owner should draw on expertise from different functional areas to get a holistic view of the organisation and ensure it is operating as a ‘Master’ (see Figure 1).
References


Contributors

**Dr Aisling ConwayLenihan** is an Economics lecturer and researcher with the Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence at Cork Institute of Technology. Her research interests include pharmaceutical expenditure, pharmaceutical prescribing and economics of entrepreneurship. Dr ConwayLenihan has presented at a number of international conferences and published her work in international journals.

**Donagh Davern** is a lecturer in Hospitality Management in the Department of Tourism & Hospitality at CIT. His practical experience has seen him manage a number of 5 Star hotels in Ireland and he is also a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). He is studying for a PhD in Hospitality Management at the University of Surrey, with a focus on the retention of staff in the Irish Hotel Industry – particularly those of the millennial generation.

**Professor Margaret Deery** retired from the University of Surrey in 2019 where she had been a Professor in the School of Hospitality & Tourism Management. Professor Deery is currently a Visiting Professor at both the University of Technology Sydney and the University of Surrey. In 2019 she was inducted into the Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB) Hall of Fame.

**Dr Edward Dennehy** is a Lecturer of Business Management at Institute of Technology Carlow. He has previously published on matters related to international cross-cultural management/education issues, employee cynicism and corporate governance.

**Dr Anna Dynan** has worked in a third level educational organisation for the past 24 years and in that timeframe, she has worked in many roles. Anna currently works as a lecturer in the Department of Accounting & Information Systems, bringing to the role her vast experience in the selection, design and implementation of IT projects in eLearning, Web and MIS. In her lecturing role, she has sought, where possible, to integrate technology to enrich learning experiences.

**Professor Leo Jago OAM** is the former Head of Department of Hospitality at the University of Surrey, where he worked from 2014 to his recent retirement. Leo was the inaugural Chief Economist and General Manager of Tourism Research Australia and was deputy CEO and Director of Research for Australia’s national Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism. In 2016 he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for his services to the tourism industry and education and in 2019 was inducted into the Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB) Hall of Fame.
Mary McGuckin is a Lecturer in Tourism and Strategy in the Institute of Technology, Sligo. Her research interests include Literary, Cultural and Creative Tourism. She is currently a member of the Boards of Sligo Tourism Ltd and the Abbey Vocational School. She previously worked at the Letterkenny Institute of Technology, Capita Management Consultants Ltd., Belfast, Desmond & Sons, Derry and the Mayfair Regent Hotel, NY.

Dr Helen McGuirk is Head of the Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence at Cork Institute of Technology. Her research focuses on four related areas: the economics of innovation, entrepreneurship, human capital, and public policy. Helen's research has been published and presented internationally, and has received Irish Research Council funding.

Dr Barry Ryan is a lecturer in the Technological University Dublin, where his teaching focuses on introductory organic chemistry, advanced biochemistry and pedagogical practice within the TU Dublin structured PhD programme. His teaching is underpinned by his passion for practical implementation of research informed teaching. Barry is a Senior Fellow of the HEA, a Chartered Science Teacher and his current educational research interest lies in communities of practice for early undergraduate students. Other research areas include the strategic use of technology to enhance learning and embedding research into the undergraduate curriculum. He is the Chair, and Editor, of the Journal of Science Undergraduate Research Experience, which aims to promote and centralise research at all levels within the undergraduate curriculum.
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