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Shaping tourism places: agency and interconnections in festival settings

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Introduction

In the contemporary era local places seem exposed to more and faster change than ever before. The difference between places seems to be diminishing and debates as to whether ‘cultural homogenisation’ or ‘reconstituted difference’ best describes the changes affecting place feature prominently in recent social science and humanities literatures. Local places are linked to regional, national and supra-national spheres through multiple connections. Tourism is one important globalising force, linking places into the wider world and influencing the changing meanings of place.

This chapter is broadly concerned with examining how tourism is implicated in changing the meanings of place. The type of tourism places selected for enquiry is arts festivals turned tourist attractions. The arguments draw on doctoral research conducted into the Wexford Festival Opera and the Galway Arts Festival. It construes tourism places as phenomena forged through local – extra-local interactions, explores the complicated roles played by both place-based actors and tourists, and analyses the tourism places ultimately reproduced.

Conceptualising local and extra-local inputs in the shaping of tourism places

In much of the tourism literature there is an implicit assumption that tourism exists as an all-powerful, virtually ‘placeless’ phenomenon that by definition affects change, causes impacts and creates effects on ‘defenceless’ local places. Chang et al. (1996) have remarked that the relationship between the global and the local is often portrayed in the tourism literature as unequal, with global forces exerting considerable influence over local conditions in creating and shaping tourism products. This view dominates the political economy literature where, as Chang et al. (1996) have paraphrased, the prevailing argument sees metropolitan corporations and market conditions determining the pace and form of tourism development around the world, with local actors playing only peripheral roles. Meanwhile in the very sizeable body of literature devoted to analysing the impacts of tourism, there seems to be an assumption that extra-local

tourism forces and externally-derived tourists represent the dynamic elements in the process with destinations, host economies and resident populations existing merely as passive receptors of change. The literature's very preoccupation with analysing the 'impacts of tourism' on people, places, cultures, societies and economies within tourism research suggests this.

This privileging of the global, and the presumption that structure prevails over agency, reflects a failure to appreciate the ability of human agents to initiate development, mediate and harness external tourism forces and capitalise on place-specific characteristics and resources to influence the shape of local tourism places. Undoubtedly, the globalisation of the tourism industry has advanced relentlessly since the 1950s. However, individual entrepreneurs, family businesses and small companies remain to the fore in shaping tourism developments in 'local' tourism resorts and regions across the world. Furthermore, since at least the mid 1980s, local people in countless locations have become extensively involved in 'community-based' tourism planning and development initiatives. Thus, the opportunity for individuals, small firms and community groups to mould, or at least to influence the shape of tourism landscapes is very significant. Murphy and Blank (1983) both implicitly pointed to the role of agency with the reminder that the 'destination' is actually the 'host community'. More specifically, Barnes and Hayter (1992) emphasised the role of individual agency in shaping a tourist destination in a Canadian context. Elsewhere, Morris and Dickinson (1987) pointed to the ability of a few local developers to manipulate community organisations in the pursuit of their economic agenda. While Reed (1997: 567) has commented on the 'pivotal role that the actions of individuals can have at the local level' in tourism development. Yet, with few exceptions, the literature is remarkably silent on the role of agency.

However, neither arguing the force of the global nor defending the power of the local in isolation is adequate. Tourism is a classic example of a phenomenon that pivots on a local-global dynamic. Local-global interactions underpin the transformation of places existing as 'local' places into 'international' destinations; of dwellers into tourists; and they create the links between the producers of tourism products and services consumed in

situ, and globally active multinational corporations. Historically, conceptualising these interactions has not been a priority for tourism researchers, and yet enquiries here could produce truly meaningful insights into how tourism places are shaped.

In recognition of this, some recent tourism literature has begun to re-think place. Chang et al (1996) and Milne (1998), for instance, argue that tourism must be viewed as a 'transaction process incorporating the exogenous forces of global markets and multinational corporations as well as the endogenous powers of local residents and entrepreneurs'. This line of argument draws attention to the interplay between formative forces, and invites interest in exploring the hitherto neglected role of agency in mediating global forces. Hence, as Oakes (1994) has argued, the roles played by human agents in shaping local places is being accorded increasingly more significance in the tourism literature.

Exploring agency – insights from festival settings

Tourism researchers have long understood that resident and community groups in tourism places cannot be regarded as homogeneous (Ryan and Montgomery 1994). However, few attempts have been made to analyse this heterogeneity or to investigate individuals' / sub-groups' active involvement in tourism. Insights into the role of agency in tourism settings can be gleaned from the humanities and social science literature on festivals. Festivals represent complex cultural phenomena that humans for centuries have engaged in to invest cultural practices with specific meanings, to celebrate their beliefs and to assert their identity. Recent years have seen public festivities being created and revived on an unprecedented scale (Manning 1983), and the accompanying upsurge of research interest has been preoccupied with the relationships between people, space and power.

A commonly asserted tenet is that there is very little that is natural or spontaneous about festival spaces. Studies of the Notting Hill Carnival (Jackson 1988), St Patrick's Day parades (Marston 1989), community festivals (Smith 1996), urban festivals (Guichard-Anguis 1997), and the Rio carnival (Lewis and Pile 1996) among others repeatedly show them to be authored landscapes where dominant individuals and groups lay out dictates

transforming and stimulating the contestation of space. In sharp contrast to this literature, tourism research on festivals has appeared largely disinterested both in the contentiousness of relationships in festival settings and in the possibility that festival landscapes bear strong signs of authorship. Too frequently, it fails to look beneath the 'stage-managed' veneer of festivals and in so doing seems to undermine the significance of festivals as cultural acts which people engage in to make statements about who they are and about how and where they live.

This chapter presents case study research that draws on both literatures. The research methodology employed a combination of approaches to collect primary data within a framework that was predominantly qualitative in design. The findings reported here draw mainly on an analysis of archival material held by the Arts Council of Ireland; semi-structured interviews with 'key informants' involved in the festival organisations and in the arts scene in the two places; and two questionnaire surveys, containing both closed and open-ended questions, which were administered to resident populations in Wexford (N=166) and Galway (N=138) during the 1996 festivals.

Festivals as tourist attractions

Wexford (current population 15,000) is a medium-sized county town located some 100 miles south of Dublin on the south-east coast. In 1951, when the newly independent Irish state was engrossed in the weighty task of modernising itself, the town ambitiously launched an opera festival dedicated to a repertoire of what it described as 'rare and unjustly neglected opera'. The individuals behind the venture came from among the town's middle classes and specifically comprised a group of local opera devotees accustomed to gathering in each others' drawing rooms to enjoy opera, and to travelling to the UK and further afield for the opera seasons. While its focus on 'rare opera' was novel, it was in essence a very conventional undertaking in that its preoccupation with the 'high' arts was unequivocal. Partly because of this, it was immediately understood and attractive to powerful sections of society and to institutions both at local and national level, including the Arts Council, the government, the national media and Bord Fáilte. In the intervening years the festival has become established as the premier international

event on the Irish arts calendar. In the late 1990s, it annually attracted approximately 20,000 people during a three week period in October / November.

The Galway Arts Festival, founded in the Western region's capital city (current population 57,095) in 1978 was launched by a group of students led by Ollie Jennings. Dedicated to celebrating the work of artists from within the Western region, the festival founders enthusiastically epitomised the unorthodox in Irish arts at the time. Operating on a very informal basis and developing innovative artistic policies, the Galway Arts Festival represented a form of agency that was historically little understood, and in consequence, relatively ignored by national institutions. In line with contemporaneous cultural thinking throughout Europe, it sought to further socio-political goals through the arts with programmes that confused the boundaries between 'high' and 'low' arts (literary theatre on the stage alongside visual theatre on the streets) and contested conventional notions of what constitutes appropriate arts spaces (unorthodox venues used include a tent, warehouses, garages, shopping centres and public spaces). Its peripheral geographical location, non-elite social origins and particular ideological underpinnings, promoted its autonomy. If Wexford hosts the most internationally renowned event on the Irish artistic calendar, it is Galway that hosts the most nationally renowned one. In the late 1990s the festival annually attracted fee-paying audiences in excess of 60,000 as well as an estimated 90,000 people to free events over a 15 day period in July.

Creating a semblance of 'community'

The Wexford and Galway festivals were both founded by outstanding individuals of vision, determination and charisma who had a strong interest in the arts. Both were equipped with strong leadership qualities and left very different but enduring marks on the festival landscapes. In Wexford, the intention was to establish the festival as an internationally recognised centre of opera production and early tasks revolved around recruiting singers and artistic personnel. The emphasis was on recruiting singers, artistic personnel and of course, repertoire, from the UK and continental Europe. However, an equally important task was to expand the initiative away from its narrow social origins and make it a meaningful proposition for the local residents as a whole. The festival

founders were acutely aware of the need to ally their ambitions with those of other interest groups in the town and recruitment to the Festival Council reflected this need. The inaugural Council of 1951 included a local TD, the Honorary Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, the town's mayor, and leading clerics from the town's religious communities. All of these figures represented means through which the festival could garner financial, political and community support.

It was essential to the very survival of the festival that the support of the local population at large be forthcoming. Opera is extremely costly to produce. Corporate sponsorship of the arts was not yet common and the prospects of receiving adequate funding from the state in the early 1950s were poor. Initial appeals for local people to act as beneficiaries met with very positive responses. Financially, local residents and businesses were generous. In 1957, for instance, a deficit of 3,500 was cleared by means of a silver circle to which local people had contributed approximately 50%. In other capacities, hundreds of locals enthusiastically lent their support. Volunteers emerged to sing in the opera chorus and to contribute in numerous ways to production (including wardrobe, make-up, lighting, set painting and construction, stage and technical management). By the festival's third year, 1953, the townspeople were very actively engaged in producing the festival, as the following *Irish Press* (26/10/53) commentary suggests:

‘the 1953 festival is above all, a product of voluntary effort on the part of the Wexford man in the street, his wife and family, and his fellow workers and friends. Shop-keepers large and small, and the householders in the fashionable and humbler quarters alike.....have come out in a spontaneous drive to give these famous narrow streets a look of gaiety and colour they never had before’.

These ‘behind-the-scenes’ spaces became over time a crucial part of the Wexford festival landscape. They constituted the domain in which local people's creative energies could flourish in uncontested fashion, where they could demonstrate their support for the festival and express their stake-holder status. In return for their voluntary efforts and for investing something of themselves in making the festival happen each year, they earned the opportunity to purchase tickets for the opera dress rehearsal performances. They also

earned the satisfaction of witnessing ‘their’ festival achieve national and sometimes international critical acclaim. The voluntary support that continues to sustain the festival today stands as one of its most symbolic features.

Officially, in its programming, practices and symbols, Wexford fits comfortably among the ranks of elite arts festivals. However, it simultaneously projects itself as a venture that enjoys the unqualified support of local society in general. From the outset, the festival organisation publicly insisted that ‘everybody connected with the organisation of the festival would feel very badly if the Wexford people did not look upon it as their festival’ (Festival Council member quoted in the *Wexford People*, 25/10/52). Yet a sense of ownership was not to be cultivated through involving locals in artistic or audience domains. Unlike the Galway Arts Festival, Wexford is not acclaimed for having fostered local artistic creativity. Local people have assumed performance roles here only infrequently. Neither has local people’s stakeholding role been truly developed through their participation in an audience capacity. The cultural vision which propels the festival forward does not privilege local people as members of the audience. Prioritising a local audience would have exerted a downward pressure on ticket prices that would have impeded the festival’s pursuit of its over-riding artistic objectives. Thus, ‘front of house’ space has been, and continues to be, reserved largely for visitors. Building a sense of local ownership of the festival was founded, instead, on involving people in behind-the-scenes capacities.

The basis of the relationship between the Galway Arts Festival organisation and the people who live in Galway has been quite different and much simpler to that which evolved in Wexford. Most obviously, the Galway festival has been staged unambiguously for local people. Prior to the 1990s no effort was made to attract non-Galway audiences. In spite of this, townspeople were not asked to develop their stake-holding in the initiative by providing financial or in-kind support of any nature. The decision to establish a festival was only taken once state funding had been received from the Arts Council. The balance of financial requirements was then generated through the box office. The costs of production were minimised by employing ingenious ways of

acquiring vacant city spaces and transforming them into venues. For many years, the festival did not seek support from the city's business community. It was not until 1987, when the organisation was 10 years old, that a serious sponsorship drive was launched. Furthermore, the founding members of the organisation themselves assumed total responsibility for the administrative and managerial undertakings involved in staging the event. Just as no serious overtures had been made to the business community for financial support, no attempt was made to generate voluntary support for the festival among the residential community at large. In effect, the organisers of the Galway festival functioned as if they were professional arts administrators, except that they were not being paid. It was not until 1990, when the expanding festival was 13 years old and in the early stages of professionalising, that a formal strategy to attract voluntary support for the festival was launched.

In general, the festival organisers made just one overt demand on Galway residents, that they come to the arts events staged and engage themselves as audiences in the festival process. Making the prospect of audience involvement as appealing as possible for local people was an unparalleled priority. Festival events were housed in familiar settings: poetry readings took place in schools, art exhibitions in parochial halls and visual theatre on the streets of the city; admission prices were kept to a minimum and many events were admission free; a broad range of art forms to cater for diverse artistic preferences was staged. Specifically, the engagement of locally based artists and musicians was actively sought in the production of the event. A prominent aim of the Galway Arts Festival was to create a platform where local creativity would find a place to express itself. To this end, the festival organisation used its knowledge of the local arts scene, cultivated contacts with individuals based both in the city and in the Western region more widely, and engaged locally and regionally based artists on a commercial basis to produce the festival programme.

This notwithstanding, the Galway festival organisation's view of the local people and local art was not as inclusive or as 'community based' as this analysis might suggest. Undoubtedly, much effort was made to draw local people into the cultural arena being

constructed but part of the process involved marginalising certain groups and certain artistic ideologies. From the mid 1980s onwards, for instance, the national theatre for the Irish language based in Galway, An Taibhdhearc, was conspicuous by its absence from the arts festival programmes. From the festival's perspective, the work of Siamsa, the company based in An Taibhdhearc has been 'incompatible' with the artistic direction taken by the festival. The Festival Manager's explanation for this is that Galway is a product-driven festival: 'if it's there we'll have it' (McGrath 1997). However, the history of the Galway Festival demonstrates that very rarely did it rely on a 'product' presenting itself for inclusion in a programme, one of its acknowledged achievements is that it has created 'products'. A similar and more commented upon situation exists in relation to the lack of space created for classical music and its audiences in the festival programme. Thus the semblance of inclusiveness which attaches to the Galway Arts Festival can be easily unraveled to reveal a more complex agenda.

Constructing a role for tourists

If the boundaries of local involvement were carefully carved out in the Wexford case, the role envisaged for tourists was as deliberately construed. From the very earliest years, tourism was consciously construed as an instrument for advancing the artistic aims of the festival. Tourism was never an explicit goal. Indeed, Walsh was quoted as saying that 'I think the confusion of tourism and the arts is a bad thing' (*Irish Times*, 23/10/63). However, it was viewed as a means to an end and was determinedly and effectively promoted. By 1959, 60% of audiences came from outside of Wexford, with 20% from Dublin, 13% – 15% from the rest of Ireland and 25% - 27% from overseas (*Irish Independent* 24/10/1962). By 1989, 85% of audiences originated outside of Wexford, with more than one third coming from abroad in the 1990s (O'Hagan et al. 1989). Very importantly, these tourist flows sustained the venture financially in a way that serving a local market could not. Furthermore, the policy of attracting outsiders served an extensive range of interests ranging from the local level (the business community, politicians, opera devotees) to the national level (the Arts Council, Bórd Fáilte). The festival's status as a successful tourism attraction was an important factor consolidating support from these institutions.

Tourism played a role in the Galway Arts Festival in the sense that it influenced the early decision to alter the timing of the festival from Spring to Summer. However, this was as much to capitalise on Galway people's increased leisure time as it was to capture a visiting audience. In telling fashion, historical data pertaining to audiences at the Galway Arts Festival in the pre 1990 period is non-existent. However, relative to Wexford, efforts to market the event were much more concentrated on attracting local audiences and it is reasonable to suggest that the audience profile was much less spatially diverse. In fact, the disinterest in attracting audiences beyond Galway city and county is a defining trait of the early festival. Since 1991, however, this has changed. The festival's growing reputation as the leading arts festival in the country has inevitably stimulated visitor flows and the festival organisation is now actively marketing itself to visiting audiences. In 1994, it was estimated that 40% of audiences came from outside of Galway city and county, with 15% coming from overseas (Envision Marketing Consultants 1994). Nevertheless, the festival remains committed to privileging local audiences. In an address delivered at the 1997 festival, the international marketing manager of Bórd Fáilte emphasised the festival's great tourism potential. Adverse local reaction to this address elicited a swift response from the festival organisation ensuring local people that while tourist audiences were welcome, the festival would continue to prioritise local needs.

Networking and mediating: forging tourism connections

The argument thus far is that there is nothing natural or inevitable about the way the two case study festivals evolved. They both show clear signs of having been purposefully constructed according to well-defined agendas intended to further specific interests. In Wexford, the festival architects can be seen to be constructing an artistic endeavour that was to be produced by local people but to be performed and enjoyed largely by others. In Galway, the entire concern was to serve a range of local needs, although not all interest groups were equally privileged. These findings support those of Farber (1983: 40), who, in a study of a community-based festival in Canada, demonstrated how the festival was designed and structured by leading members of the community as a 'symbolic representation of the asserted, believed and controlled community identity'. However, the authorship of key individuals in manipulating the festival production process and in

successfully harnessing local approval for its vision has not proceeded unproblematically in the two case study sites. Beneath the semblance of community that attaches to both festivals lies a series of tensions dividing various interest groups and shaping local people's engagement with the festivals. These tensions have come into perspective ever more clearly as the two festivals have intensified their interactions with agents and structures emanating in extra-local spheres. Critically implicated in the divisions that characterise the relationships between people in these festival sites has been the arrival of visitor flows. The key questions to be answered in this context are how has tourism emerged as a force of influence in these festival places? and how is tourism affecting the meanings being produced there?

Developing an understanding of the relationships which the festivals subsequently developed with external places must take as its starting point an analysis of Wexford and Galway themselves. The characteristics of the two places are critical in explaining both the networking tendencies exhibited by the organisations and the effectiveness of local agents in negotiating external forces. Both festivals were 'products' of their place and could not have emerged in their constituent form anywhere else. Their respective geographical locations were enormously formative factors. Wexford's historical links with the Anglo world, promoted by its location on the south east coast, can be forwarded in partial explanation of the festival's willing embrace of the conventions and values of the European 'high brow' musical world and of British models of festival development. Pragmatically, the ease of access to Britain by air (via Dublin, some 80 miles north of Wexford) and particularly by sea (via Rosslare, 10 miles east of Wexford) facilitated the development of contacts between the festival organisers and opera professionals in places like Glyndebourne and Covent Garden. As the festival developed, this factor was crucial in fostering the growth of British audiences and in establishing Wexford as part of the British opera circuit around which British casting directors, opera critics and other influential gatekeepers journeyed.

The Galway festival landscape equally manifests evidence of the city's long standing identity as a place with strong cultural associations yet one which has stood on the

margins of the more modern, eastern part of the country dominated by Dublin. The concern to promote locally sourced arts for the benefit of local audiences was an attempt to stimulate what it considered to be a dormant artistic creativity and to challenge the capital city's dominance of the Irish arts landscape. Its preoccupation with the West did not mean that its vision was myopic or parochial. Over time its programming became increasingly internationalised, yet its inspiration continued to be simultaneously drawn from its locale.

Contained within the very founding ambitions of the Wexford festival was a desire to shake off its status as a 'local' festival and to operate within an international sphere. Ironically, the critical factor propelling it into a series of relationships with external forces was its place-specific, historically-rooted middle-class origins. The key festival architects had emerged from the town's social elite, an elite that can trace its origins back to the town's particular heritage as a prosperous and cosmopolitan trading port (Furlong 1991). These social origins bestowed on the actors both the inclination to advance their initiative through networking, and a series of critical advantages in doing so. They had close connections to those in powerful positions and opportunities for mobilising public support at the local level. Equally, they had deep levels of appreciation of the 'high' art form being promoted, connections with leading figures active in the national music and opera scene, and familiarity with how the international opera world operated. The fact that an overwhelming proportion of the Wexford festival's audience comes from outside of Wexford is testimony to the organisation's long standing efforts to market the festival, particularly in the UK. As early as the 1950s, the Festival Council was co-ordinating schedules with the cross-channel ferry companies and holding press conferences in London. By 1961, festival publicity material was being distributed through the international offices of Aer Lingus , British Rail, Coast Lines and Bórd Fáilte. Currently, Wexford Festival Opera holiday packages are distributed through an international network of tour operators.

The lack of interest displayed by the Galway Arts Festival in expanding the spatial reach of its activities stands in marked contrast. Its particular dedication to cultivating local and

regional creative imaginations produced an orientation that was much more spatially contained. The networking strategies that took it into extra-local spheres were primarily concerned with artists and artforms. It was not until the 1990s that marketing efforts were extended beyond the local and regional levels. Then the festival altered its ticket distribution systems to develop extra-local audiences. It began to advertise in the national press and on national radio, and efforts to win sponsorship from major companies intensified. Gradually, a visitor audience materialised, although it did so in a way that can only be understood in the context of general tourism growth in the city during the 1990s. The festival's engagement with tourism evolved in a way that was neither deliberately stimulated nor controlled by the festival organisation.

Tourism's role in reproducing cultural meanings

The Wexford festival represents a model tourism event. Audience capacity is regularly achieved, sizeable flows of high spending tourists are generated, and the difficulties associated with the low season are eliminated during the several weeks encompassing the festival. The volume of tourist flows is very manageable because of the festival's modest audience capacity (the Theatre Royal seats just 550), and the type of tourists attracted. Overall, tourism effectively compliments the aims and vision of the festival. Without it, Walsh's original dedication to producing rare opera to a high standard of excellence could not have been sustained.

While tourism has served the dominant vision shaping the Wexford festival landscape, the arrival of visitor flows thwarted the ambitions which many local people had for involving themselves in the festival. As early as 1952 a local newspaper reported that 'such was the demand for seats that hundreds (of local people) were unable to gain admission' (*Wexford People* 8/11/1952). The following year the same newspaper wrote of the need to extend the season 'so that local people can still share in a thing that many travel to see from foreign parts' (*Wexford People* 17/10/1961). Gradually, the failure of the festival to accommodate local people in its audiences contributed to a waning interest in the venture. The most tangible sign of this was that between 1958 and 1964 the number of festival subscribers fell dramatically from 800 to 250. The focal point of local

interest in the festival began to shift from the opera performances to what has subsequently become known as 'The Fringe'. By 1961, the *Wexford People* was reporting that 'for many, the Festival Forum is the best part of festival week. It is open to the public and is known as a fringe event' (*Wexford People* 30/9/1961). A survey of local respondents (N=166) during the 1996 festival found that while almost 60% attended a fringe event, just less than 17% attended an event on the main opera programme. Meanwhile, just 7.2% had attended an opera. Other survey data record that involvement in voluntary and performance capacities has declined over time, while contemporary attendance has greatly declined relative to audience capacity since the festival's early period.

That the Wexford festival is not designed with the local population in mind was well recognised by the local population surveyed in 1996. Respondents repeatedly demonstrated an understanding of the festival as a phenomenon that includes and excludes people on the basis of social standing reinforced by place of residence. For a minority, exclusion was accepted without question. However, for the majority, exclusion was an issue and opinions on the festival ranged from stoicism to extreme anger: 'the opera is only for 'big' people, it has always been that way. I'd like to go but that's the way it is'. Many resented exclusion: 'local involvement has gone...it's out of our hands', 'too much hoity toity, should be open to everyone', 'Why doesn't Wexford get bigger? It's not accessible enough, there's a need to bring the arts to the public rather than vice versa'. A minority could not contain their anger: 'it's catering for a tone deaf elite', 'it's not a people's event, just to keep people happy they throw in a few fringe events'.

The sense of exclusion from the festival landscape expressed by local survey respondents was palpable and was heightened by a strong self-awareness of their own historical store of musical talent. Yet the contentiousness which this divided landscape inevitably produced has never inspired a radical resistance to the cultural meanings and the social ordering reproduced by the festival. Instead, it has been a question of local people slowly, over time, withdrawing support from the back and side stages of the festival production zone, and steadily resigning themselves to the realisation that their very sizeable interest

in the 'high' arts has to find expression outside of the festival arena. This quiet yielding of space to the visiting festival audiences, and the acquiescence to the meanings produced by the festival have been promoted by the festival's 'compensatory system' (including the fringe festival and the opera dress rehearsals) which effectively renders local compliance and support. Tourism has also played a critical role in this respect. The economic rewards generated by tourism are very significant. Furthermore, the sizeable inward flow of middle and upper-class visitors is part of the process which 'puts Wexford on the map' as one respondent put it, and partially explains the overwhelming sense of pride that local residents feel in the festival.

The implications that the arrival of tourists has had on the cultural meanings produced in Galway are more ambiguous than in Wexford. For its first decade, tourism had no role to play in the festival. Thus the festival landscape that evolved was one in which local people, in the main, could freely engage, and feel completely at home. The decision to target tourists in the 1990s, while it offered a means of expanding audiences and thus generating more income, immediately problematised the festival's objectives. The historical privileging of Galway residents and the place of Galway was now altered and the control which local residents traditionally felt over the festival has become threatened. Recent transformations have not gone unnoticed. One of the festival founders has been reported as saying: 'the festival has to make up its mind what it is, whether a big established arts festival where the level of credit card booking is a measure of its success, or whether it redefines itself in terms of the community' (Breathnach 1999). Meanwhile, among the local population, there is a sense that the festival's acknowledged close relationship with the people of Galway has been weakened. While almost 53% of the locals surveyed during the 1996 festival (N=138) attended at least one festival event and satisfaction levels were generally high, voices cautioned against the type of development path being taken by the festival. 'The festival must be kept as it used to be: meeting the needs of ordinary Galwegians'. It must 'maintain identity ...it needs to be careful about this...shouldn't go too alternative'. There was a concern that the festival is becoming too 'elitist. This is the image they want to put across for people outside of Galway'. Many local people sense that they are being distanced from the artistic core of the festival, and

are conscious of the various mechanisms (credit card booking, the ending of the season ticket scheme, productions that are considered too ‘arty’) through which this process is advancing. These findings could be interpreted in the light of social exchange theory, as advocated by Getz (1994) and others, as a means of understanding residents’ attitudes to tourism. It holds that ‘residents who view the results of tourism as personally valuable and believe that the costs do not exceed the benefits, will favour the exchange and support tourism development’ (Jurowski, Uysal and Williams 1997: 3).

It is significant that the tourism profile associated with the festival does little to promote local acquiescence to local people’s changing status. To begin with, the festival’s timing coincides with the height of the tourist season and takes place in Ireland’s third largest tourism centre. The city welcomes one million tourists annually and the timing of the festival serves to compound any social and environmental problems already existing in the city (Galway Chamber of Commerce 1996). It also limits the economic benefits that the festival can generate for the city’s hospitality sector because this is when capacity sales are at or near saturation. Furthermore, the festival has not proven itself capable of generating sizeable flows of tourists who come to the city with the singular intention of experiencing the festival, unlike in Wexford. Nor is it likely that the relatively youthful visiting audiences are particularly high spenders (Envision Marketing Consultants 1994). Thus, it appears that in materialising into a tourist attraction, the Galway Arts Festival is becoming involved in an activity over which it cannot possibly exert control. This relates in part to the extensive scale of tourism activity in the city and to the timing of the festival. However, it also relates to shortcomings in the city’s approach to integrated tourism management.

Reproducing ‘festival places’

The two festivals under discussion constitute examples of ‘authored landscapes’ where particular aspects of place are cultivated to construct a setting in which cultural production can then appear to unfold as if in a natural way (Cosgrove and Domosh 1993). It is obvious that place has always mattered for both festivals. However, the way in which

the leading architects chose to manipulate aspects of place through the festival assumed very different dimensions.

In Wexford, Walsh and his co-founders were acutely aware that place matters and determined to invent Wexford as a festival town. They adopted the popular approach of developing a festival through an association with a composer and opened the inaugural festival with an opera by Michael Balfe, the Irish composer who had once lived in Wexford. The link with Balfe was not seriously developed in subsequent years, however, and instead, the festival organisation began to expound the extra-musical appeals of the recently invented 'festival town'. Key signifiers of this creation are the charming intimacy of the Theatre Royal, the quaint narrowness of the town's medieval streets and the warm hospitality of its people. All of these are promoted, at every opportunity, by the organisation's publicity machine. Promoting extra-musical appeals is not unique to Wexford and invites particular parallels with the Glyndebourne Opera Company in the UK (with whom Wexford has a series of historical connections). Glyndebourne's identity is intimately bound up with place and it has demonstrated that the absence of strong music-place associations do not render hosting an opera festival an impossibility. Over time, the essence of the Wexford festival has come to be encapsulated as much by the atmosphere and sociability of the town as by the quality of its operatic productions. As early as the 1960s, opera critics' accounts in British newspapers depicted local people as welcoming and friendly as well as 'benignly amused by being the centre of musical attention' (*The Observer* 30/10/1988). The definition of Wexford in terms of its quaintness, informality, and friendliness is so pervasive that it informs the 'official' interpretation of the Wexford Festival Opera published in the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (1992) and the *Oxford Dictionary of Opera* (1992). The former describes Wexford as an international festival that has managed to retain its convivial atmosphere, while the latter comments on the adventurous nature of the repertory and the conviviality of the town's welcome.

The Galway festival is no less an authored landscape, although 're-inventing' Galway as a festival town was not an issue initially. Unlike Wexford, the Galway festival was not

trying to position itself in a wider market of arts festivals and so had no motive for cultivating a sense of difference about its place. More fundamentally, the inspiration underpinning the festival genuinely stemmed from the artistic possibilities of the place itself and there was therefore no need for any invention. Building a programme around a core of locally based artists was the most obvious way in which the festival proclaimed its Galwegian status. However, in the 1990s, as the programme itself became more international, and as it sought to attract spatially dispersed audiences, the organisation seems to have placed a new emphasis on re-inventing Galway as a festival place. Its publicity material now cultivates an image of self as ‘a major international arts festival with a distinctly West of Ireland atmosphere’(Galway Arts Festival 1991).

Thus, it can be said that the essence of both festivals is rooted at least as much in their place, as it is in the arts that are produced there. Undoubtedly place still matters, but the type of place in question must be qualified. Best coined the ‘festival place’, this is but a selected and packaged representation of the place as a whole from which it derives. It is an artificial creation, constructed on the basis of criteria designed to promote its appeal and marketability and to attract a series of inter-dependent external flows of audiences, revenue, media attention, critical acclaim and sponsorship. The components of the ‘festival place’ genuinely belong to the ‘real’ place, but what sets the former apart is the manner in which these components are constructed without any reference to the reality of the everyday lives lived out in these places. For example, considerable discussion has focused on the complex and conflicting roles and meanings that the festival holds for the heterogeneous population surveyed in Wexford. Yet, in the ‘festival town’ this heterogeneity is disguised in imagery that depicts a welcoming, smiling townspeople.

Conclusions

In seeking to conceptualise how tourism is implicated in influencing the meanings of place it is important to remember that tourism destinations are in fact places where communities of people reside. Tourism activity is ‘grounded’ within these places in numerous ways and very frequently, human agents within these places play a critical role in moulding its emergence and development. This chapter has emphasised the role of

agency in shaping two arts festivals cum tourist attractions. The two festivals under discussion represent excellent examples of what geographers have termed 'authored landscapes'. However, in neither case were the key figures autonomous agents. Within a local context, their actions were contextualised by the historically situated circumstances of their place and the actors themselves were shaped by the social contexts played out in Wexford and Galway. More broadly, the festival leadership acted as critical conduits, linking their place with the wider world. They were both strongly influenced by the paradigmatic cultural thinking of their day and their artistic policies and activities connected with ideals circulating internationally. Furthermore, the meanings that they tried to reproduce through the festival setting sometimes met with opposition in the local sphere, and producing strategies for securing local acquiescence has been a priority. In the case of Galway, this dimension is only recently becoming a defining part of the festival organisation's relationship with local people.

The ways in which agency is constrained by both structures and competing agency is brought sharply into focus by the workings of the tourism process. The Wexford case clearly illustrates how a small group of individuals, working on a very small scale, effectively exploited the organs of the tourism industry, to further their own aims. The local - extra-local dynamic that underpins tourism activity was in this case initiated and controlled by the place-based agents. The power of agency was intensified by a number of historically situated circumstances and success was predicated on the ability to control the festival's evolution as a tourist attraction. The ability to control was in turn promoted by a number of factors. Firstly, tourism was moulded, as a strategy, to further an already existing set of artistic objectives. It was, in effect, construed as a means to an end. Secondly, the scale of tourism that evolved was relatively easy to manage. By definition, the scale and nature of tourist flows attracted by an opera festival is modest and specialist. Furthermore, the relatively modest scale of tourism activity in Wexford in general and the off-season timing of the festival were important factors. Thus, for the Wexford Festival Opera, tourism is a mechanism through which the cultural meanings produced by the festival architects can be effectively promoted because the latter are capable of manipulating the tourism process to their advantage.

If the Wexford case demonstrates how agency has the power to initiate, mediate and control, the fragility of agency, in the face of very powerful tourism forces, is illustrated by recent developments in the Galway Arts Festival. Its evolution into a tourist attraction was much less planned, but it now undoubtedly faces pressure from influential gatekeepers to privilege an expansion of tourist audiences. Bórd Fáilte comments, the state's selection of the festival as one of Ireland's Millennium Festivals, and censure from *Irish Times* reviewers for programming local bands in an international programme, represent examples of how this process manifests itself. While tourism serves identifiable purposes for the Galway festival, it fundamentally problematises the organisation's stated objectives. The local population, whose artistic needs the festival strives to meet, is showing signs of becoming distanced from the work of the festival. There seems to be a danger that tourism, now being employed as 'a means to an end', is running the risk of tarnishing that 'end'. Again control is the crucial factor, except that here it is the limited ability of the festival to control its involvement in tourism that is the issue. A key factor mitigating the situation in Galway is the question of scale. Tourism activity in Galway in July is at its peak. Furthermore, the Arts Festival's contribution to the city's significant tourism resource base is very modest. Accordingly, its ability to exert influence among the city's well established tourism sector is limited.

Thus, the validity of construing tourism as a 'transaction process' formed through the interaction of endogenous and exogenous forces becomes clear. The critical role that individual agents can play in initiating the tourism process and in drawing, however unwittingly, external forces into the local place, has been demonstrated. That networking, effectively used to favourably connect with influential gatekeepers in all geographic spheres can strengthen tourism viability is clear. However, the power of tourism forces to overwhelm local initiatives and to constrain their ability to meet locally felt needs is also evident. It can be very difficult for local agents to withstand mounting pressures from influential gatekeepers to commodify and commercialise.

Furthermore, even when place-based agents appear to be effectively controlling the pace and form of tourism development, it cannot be assumed that the broader interests of the residential community are being advanced. The opposite can happen, as dominant meanings are strengthened by alliances that cross divisions between places. In both Wexford and Galway, the trend has been for local populations to sense themselves being adversely affected by the arrival of tourist flows. This phenomenon is very complicated and sometimes very subtle in its workings, however the outcome is that as powerful groups within the local sphere effectively connect with outside interests, wider local interests can be effectively overlooked. The privileging of visitors can be such that the structuring of the landscape can function to make outsiders feel at home, and to transform locals into the role of onlookers, 'displaced' within their own home. In the Wexford case, the elite group behind the festival found in visitors a very powerful ally. The partnership effectively strengthens the former's ability to produce a series of cultural meanings which to the world at large, appear to pass uncontested, when in fact, survey findings suggest that one third of the local population would like to participate more fully in the festival. One of the most disturbing conclusions is that the marginalisation of local interests can occur even when the local controlling agent opposes this process. This is what is happening with the Galway Arts Festival as increasingly, the organisation is being dictated to by forces outside its control.

As the festivals evolve away from an earlier relative autonomy to an overwhelming dependence on relationships with other places there are further implications for the nature of place itself. While a complex interplay of time, space and social and human differences conspired here to create two very different arts festivals, over time, the general indications are that difference is diminishing. Increasingly, the places being reproduced are carefully packaged, highly mythologised, commodified places where image and marketability assume greatest significance. The move towards commodification is marked, as is the tendency to selectively represent particular dimensions of places in order to promote their commercial status.

Tourism has been an important means of reproducing place in this way. It constitutes one of the local - extra-local connections implicated in changing the meanings and experiences of place, not only for the people who live there, but also for those who visit there. Currently, some of the most interesting questions about tourism places reside in this realm of local – extra-local connectedness. It is hoped that this chapter will encourage other researchers to locate some of their enquiries here.

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