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## Learning at Literary Festivals

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# CHAPTER 9

## LEARNING AT LITERARY FESTIVALS

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### Introduction

Travelling and learning have a long association dating back to at least the time of the Grand Tour during the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when travel was synonymous with learning (Dent 1975, Falk Ballantyne, Packer and Benckendorff 2012, Stone and Petrick 2013). Writing about the Grand Tour, Towner (2002, p. 227) argued that travel became ‘the process through which many of the most critical aspects of their thought, education and taste were transmitted’ and society at the time understood that ‘to be travelled was to be educated’ (Towner 2002, p. 227). Over time, travel has assumed more hedonistic connotations, with the development of mass tourism offering Western middle classes the opportunity to travel for leisure, escapism, diversion and relaxation purposes. Yet the strong association between travelling and education persists. Western tourists continue to seek tourism experiences that intellectually engage them through new spaces, ideas and activities (Falk et al., 2012). Indeed in the future it is expected that informal leisure arenas ‘will provide an important medium through which people can acquire information, develop ideas and construct new visions for themselves’ (Packer and Ballantyne 2002, p. 183). It might even be that ‘the information they encounter while at leisure may offer the only opportunity to learn about their bonds to the environment, or to their history and culture’ (Moscardo, 1998, p. 4). In this scenario, ‘tourism and leisure settings have become an important medium through which people can acquire knowledge, develop ideas and construct new visions for themselves and their society’ (Falk et al., 2012, p. 910).

From the above it is clear that tourism and leisure settings undoubtedly offer potential for promulgating learning of all kinds, and yet many gaps in understanding how people learn while practising tourism remain (Falk et al 2012). This chapter aims to address this deficit by investigating learning at literary festivals. It begins by presenting literary festivals in the context of literary tourism before going on to consider a number of theoretical approaches that

could be employed in the attempt to further understandings of how learning forms part of the experience of attending literary festivals. Bourdieu's (2002) ideas about cultural capital have been used in festival contexts although not comprehensively so, and the remainder of the chapter focuses on examining individual cultural capital acquisition among literary festival attendees. Key among the questions posed are whether people enhance their cultural knowledge and skills by participating in literary festivals and whether literary festivals are rewarding and fulfilling experiences that lead to personal self-improvement. Empirically, findings of an exploratory study focusing on tourist audiences attending two book festivals in Dublin, Ireland, are then reported. The Dublin Book Festival (DBF), founded in 2005, is an annual festival held in the city centre for 4 days each November. It is privately run and drew 4,000 attendees in 2016. The Mountains to Sea dlr Book Festival (MTS), meanwhile, is held annually in the coastal town of Dun Laoghaire in South County Dublin. Organised by the local authority, it was established in 2009 and runs annually for 5 days in March. In 2017 it attracted just over 6,500 attendees.

### **Literary Festivals as Forms of Literary Tourism**

Literary festivals are an increasingly significant component of literary tourism. According to Squire (1996), literary tourism involves travel to places that have strong associations with literary authors or books (Squire, 1996). They can take at least four forms: literary events, such as literary festivals and fairs (Intel, 2011); 'real-life places' associated with the lives of writers; 'imagined places' (Hoppen, Brown, and Fyall, 2014, p. 41) associated with written works as settings for stories (Herbert, 2001; Squire, 1996); and bookshop tourism, linked to book towns such as Hay-on-Wye in Wales (Hoppen, Brown, and Fyall, 2014).

Defining literary festivals is complicated (Robertson and Yeoman, 2014). Usually, they are understood to be a subset of cultural festivals (Driscoll, 2014, 2015), with Giorgi (2011a, p. 12) suggesting that they 'are about the celebration of the written word in readings, discussions or debates'. Often, they are regular, perhaps annual, meetings of writers and readers. According to Ommundsen (2000) their emphasis tends to be on living writers and authors, and they typically feature a variety of debates, book presentations, and readings by authors, although they can also offer other types of events like theatre, music concerts or walking tours, delivered over a period of days, from a weekend to one or two weeks. Usually, their primary goals include: promoting books, offering exposure for emerging authors, building a sense of community, and fostering a love of reading.

The oldest surviving literary festival in Europe is said to be the Times Cheltenham Literature Festival in England, founded in 1949 (Driscoll, 2014; Giorgi, 2011a, 2011b). For several years it remained the only one of its kind. However, since the 1980s, and particularly since the mid-1990s (Sapiro, 2016), literary festivals have proliferated internationally, and currently there are more than 300 literary festivals worldwide (Driscoll, 2014). The growth of literary festivals can be understood in the context of changing patterns of cultural production and consumption, and increasingly diverse patterns of leisure and tourism (Waterman, 1998). In this scenario, arts festivals of all kinds have multiplied, especially in urban areas, as city governments use them to restructure their economies, attract tourists and reposition themselves in a highly competitive global market (Sapiro, 2016). In Ireland, the first literary festivals were Listowel Writers' Week (1970), Cúirt International Festival of Literature in Galway (1985), and the International Literature Festival Dublin (1998).

The proliferation of literary festivals has been accompanied by an expansion of festival programmes to include fringe events such as music concerts, art and theatre performances and walking tours (Intel, 2011; Stewart, 2013). The expansion of festival programming, in the interests of broadening its public appeal including among tourist audiences, has been criticised by some scholars who associate it with the commercialisation of aesthetic culture and the broader 'festivalisation of culture' (Négrier, 2015). Négrier (2015) has claimed that festivals are now experiencing a change from 'cultural permanence', an approach that focused on cultural policies and public support for cultural activities, to 'ephemeral presentism' that focuses more on the liveliness of the festivity. An important part of Négrier's (2015) argument is that it signals a shift away from audience 'commitment to learning and the development of their cultural capital', and from cultural 'asceticism' to social 'hedonism', in which the appreciation of culture is replaced with mere social entertainment and leisure. This argument, which appears quite dualistic in nature, is interrogated in the empirical discussions that follow.

### **Theoretical Approaches of Learning in Travel and Festival Settings**

In addressing the study's research questions as to whether attendance at literary festivals generates rewarding and fulfilling experiences that lead to personal self-actualization; and whether tourists enhance their cultural knowledge and skills in the process, a number of different theoretical approaches might be adopted. Some scholars, for instance, have analysed festivals as communities of practice where learning occurs through social and interactive

participation (Comunian, 2015; Karlsen, 2007, 2009), following the situated learning theory of Lave and Wenger (1991). Other theoretical frameworks have focused on individual learning and the personal internalisation of cultural resources. For instance, Falk et al. (2012) employed Aristotele's study on wisdom and three types of competences (*Episteme*, *Techne*, and *Phronesis*) as a framework for understanding the role of travel in supporting tourists' learning. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory is also helpful. It proposes that knowledge is created through experience, or more specifically through the 'combination of grasping and transforming experience' (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Later, Pine and Gilmore (1999) identified education as one of the four realms of experience, while more recently, Falk et al. (2012, p. 913) asserted that 'education is seen as a critical element in providing active and absorbing experiences'. According to Robertson and Yeoman (2014), literary festivals are examples of serious leisure activities that can be pursued to accumulate experience and develop knowledge. Importantly, they are further construed as activities where education and entertainment are not viewed antithetically, but rather as activities where learning might be both fun and educational simultaneously. Packer (2006) has called this 'learning for fun': tourists may engage in museum visiting, for example, not deliberately to acquire learning outcomes nor for pure hedonism, but because they value and enjoy the process of learning itself. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argued that several educational leisure experiences could be seen as rewarding and fulfilling, not least because of the multiple benefits they can generate.

One theoretical idea that has yet to be widely or uniformly used in the festival arena is Bourdieu's (1984 [1979]) concept of cultural capital. Individual cultural capital refers to a person's level of education, knowledge and skills and to the cultural goods they possess. All of these predispose a person to interpret certain forms of culture above others and influence his/her tastes and behaviours (Ganzeboom, 1982). Individual cultural capital can be thought to exist in three states. The *embodied state* is made of 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body' (Bourdieu, 2002 [1986], p. 84), in other words, the personal assimilation and inculcation of knowledge and skills, also called self-improvement, that becomes an integral part of the person. The *objectified state* includes all cultural goods possessed, while the *institutionalized state* refers to all of the academic and educational qualifications that a person obtains. According to Bourdieu (2002 [1986]), middle classes are inculcated with cultural capital during primary socialisation. These cultural resources are then developed in the field of education and occupation, and activated in the social world as cultural tastes.

While Bourdieu's theoretical writings remain of seminal importance in studying questions related to learning, in the context of the current study it is important to note that for Bourdieu, adult leisure activities, with the exception of museums, did not constitute an important realm for acquiring cultural capital. It is equally important to note that more recent theoretical influences in tourism studies, especially ideas about performativity and co-creation, have the potential to open up new perspectives into the process of how individual cultural capital can come to be embodied through practice. Thus, some scholars seek to understand the acquisition of cultural resources as a co-created activity between the producers (creators/artists/writers) and the consumers (audience/attendees/participants) who actively participate, perform and embody the stage. They 'apply their skills, knowledge and expertise to create the service' (Agarwal and Shaw, 2018, p. 30). For the people involved, this makes the personal, value laden and contextual experience (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) very meaningful. In tourism studies, not surprisingly, co-creation is linked to Pine and Gilmore's (1999) idea of the experience economy (Richards 2014), where the focus is on the production of an experience and where tourists seek expression, fulfilment and self-actualization.

### **Acquiring Cultural Capital Through Literary Festivals**

Festival researchers have employed Bourdieu's ideas, but not to any great extent. A number of studies have addressed individual cultural capital accumulation through festival participation (Getz and Page, 2016; McClinchey, 2013; Wilks, 2009; Wilks and Quinn, 2016), but much scope for further research remains, especially in the context of literary festivals where studies are few in number. Several other researchers have linked arts festivals and literary festivals with learning in ways that implicitly denote them as sites where cultural capital can be acquired, and in particular, embodied.

To begin with, it has been acknowledged that motives to attend arts and music festivals include educational reasons (Crompton, 1979), the desire for cultural exploration (Crompton and McKay, 1997), and the need to learn, to stimulate or challenge oneself (Jeannotte and Planning, 2000). Motives for attending literary festivals include the desire to have stimulating and creative conversations, to listen to other ideas, to be informed about different topics, and to learn about local culture (Cassell, Lema, and Agrusa, 2010). They may also include an interest in acquiring cultural skills, such as writing skills in a non-academic site (Driscoll, 2014), or taking notes, like in a conference (Johanson and Freeman, 2012, p. 311). Sometimes attendees can even build cultural capital that they were not expected to build, learning notions

they were not expected to learn. This is because, as Lampel (2011, p. 342) argued, fairs and festivals are environments of ‘predictable unpredictability’.

While Cohen (1979) classified tourist experiences into five different categories, namely recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental and existential, studies on the experiences of literary festival attendees argue that they comprise social, aesthetic, affective, and intellectual dimensions (Ommundsen, 2009; Weber, 2015). Some scholars argue that they provide intellectual stimulation with serious discussions (Driscoll, 2014) and confer ‘cultural capital on attendees’ (Johanson and Freeman, 2012, p. 312). Elsewhere, literary festivals have been described as cultural producers (Sapiro, 2016), ‘alternative education providers’ and sites for self-education which promote reading (Driscoll, 2014, p. 153) and provoke reflexivity ‘by giving authors and the public a chance to speak’ (Sapiro, 2016, p. 13), to think and to participate in conversations (Johanson and Freeman, 2012). Sharing ideas creates opportunities to open dialogues and learn about, for example, other people and cultures (Merfeld-Langston, 2010). Johanson and Freeman (2012) argued that festivals provide audiences with time to reflect, debate, and have communal dialogue. Similarly, Robertson and Yeoman (2014) argued that the recent trend of *aspirational-experiential* consumption of literary festivals is underpinned by the attendees’ willingness to improve knowledge, skills, wellbeing, and enhance social status and individual cultural capital. Sapiro et al. (2015) went further, arguing that participation might develop attendees’ *literary capital*, which is the literary ability, usually learnt at school, understood as the condition of access to the literary field. This builds on what Wilks (2009) termed the ‘circularity of festival attendance’, whereby cultural capital provides the competence to attend the festivals, at which further cultural capital is developed’, both embodied and objectified.

All of the above research suggests that festivals are valuable settings for education, intellectual stimulation, fulfilment and cultural capital development. However, some scholars contest this, arguing that some festivals nowadays do not satisfy audience needs for intellectual stimulus since they do not encourage audiences ‘to think really very hard’ (Ommundsen, 2009, p. 32), but instead choose to promote themselves primarily as entertainment sites (Driscoll, 2014). While arguments such as these find fault with festival producers, other researchers critique the consumption arena, suggesting that literary festival-goers are more drawn by the entertainment, the social dimension, the desire of intimate communication and the physical proximity with authors as opposed to the literary debates and intellectual dimensions (Meehan, 2005). In addition, other theorists claim that mere attendance and exposure to cultural activities is not enough to significantly impact how individuals interact with culture (Finkelkraut, 1987;

Fumaroli, 1991). According to them, the ability of people to achieve an understanding and appreciation of traditional art forms does not merely require cultural participation as this can only be achieved through education and serious study (Merfeld-Langston, 2010).

In summary, all of the above discussion points to the contested nature of understandings about how learning is promulgated and acquired in contemporary literary festivals settings. Researchers are divided as to the relative importance of entertainment and education in festival-goer experiences and it is not surprising that Szabó's (2015) has called for closer investigation into how audience's cultural capital can be developed.

### **Methodology and Methods**

Responding to Szabó's (2015) call, this chapter reports the findings of investigations conducted in two book festival settings: the Dublin Book Festival (DBF); and the Mountains to Sea dlr Book Festival (MTS). The study employed a multi-method qualitative design, conducting participant observations and 42 on-site short semi-structured interviews during the festivals. Even if 'there is growing demand for the measurement of the socio-cultural impacts of these festivals and events' (Small, Edwards, and Sheridan, 2005, p. 66), Holloway, Brown, and Shipway (2010) have highlighted the importance of meaning not measurement. They have suggested the use of ethnography to bring a deeper understanding to the participants' experience of festivals. Thus, this is an ethnographic collective case study (Yin, 2003) where the aim is not to measure or to create the basis for a replication but to foster the understanding of a process. The participant observations, undertaken during the festivals, in and around the public venues, both inside and outside, were done with the agreement and consent of the festival organisers. They lasted for the full duration of the two festivals so as to maximise data-collection (Holloway, Brown, and Shipway, 2010), and were partially structured with field notes following Spradley's (1980) template. The 42 on-site short semi-structured interviews were conducted with adult female and male festival attendees (19 during the DBF and 23 during the MTS). Interviewees were randomly selected during different time periods throughout the festivals, immediately before or after programme events. Before starting the interviews, which lasted 10 - 15 minutes, information and consent forms were given to all respondents. The opening question served as a filter, asking attendees were they residents or tourists. Only the data relating to tourists (including excursionists) are reported here. The interview procedure followed a semi-structured guide that allowed interviewees to respond to the questions in their own terms, allowing 'individual perspectives and experiences to emerge' (Patton, 1987, p.

111). Open-ended questions were employed in order to allow informants to express their opinion without influence from the researcher (Veal, 2011). The interviews were recorded and then transcribed and the data were gathered between November 2016 and March 2017.

### **Profiling the Literary Festival-Goers Encountered**

The literature on literary festivals suggests that female attendees predominate and this was supported here. In total, 15 men and 27 women were interviewed. The literature further suggests that the majority of audiences are middle aged and this too was supported here. Close to half of interviewees at the MTS were aged in their 60s. Fourteen of the 24 were retired, either from a career related to literature, such as a writer or librarian, or from a professional occupation like a doctor or a university lecturer. Most of the remaining interviewees currently work in careers related to literature, as e.g. a student, journalist or book dealer. A small number of interviewees had a lower ranking occupation but were either passionate readers or were attending along with someone else. Similarly, at the DBF 11 interviewees were aged over 50, while only 3 were in their 20s. Almost all the informants have a career related to literature, such as writers, publishers or editors (8 interviewees); researcher or teacher (3); students (2); while 1 interviewee was retired and passionate reader. This audience profile information is to be expected, given that previous researchers have argued that literary festival attendees are middle class, highbrow (Driscoll, 2014) and they seem to be all readers, with the majority also writers, even if aspiring or emerging (Ommundsen, 2009).

First-time attendance among DBF interviewees was particularly high (63%), while multiple attendance was low (16%). In contrast, at the MTS, repeat (52%) and first-time (44%) attendance rates were quite similar. Thus, the majority of attendees interviewed were attending the study festivals for the first time and were doing so alone. Previous research suggests that literary tourists seem to have high cultural and economic capital (Driscoll, 2014). Accordingly, among the MTS interviewees a majority had high levels of previous cultural capital, expressed in level of education (35% postgraduate, 22% bachelor, 17% doctoral, 13% secondary, 4% diploma) and numbers of books owned (43% hundreds, 22% thousands in contrast of 13% not many), as cultural goods. As regards cultural participation levels, in this study, more than half of the interviewees at both festivals had attended other literary festivals in the previous 12 months (53% at the DBF and 52% at the MTS).

Interviewees expressed several reasons for attending, in line with the literature. As can be seen from Figure 1, educational/ learning motives did not dominate, rather job-related motivation emerged as important at the DBF with interest in the topic or author(s) being most important at the MTS.

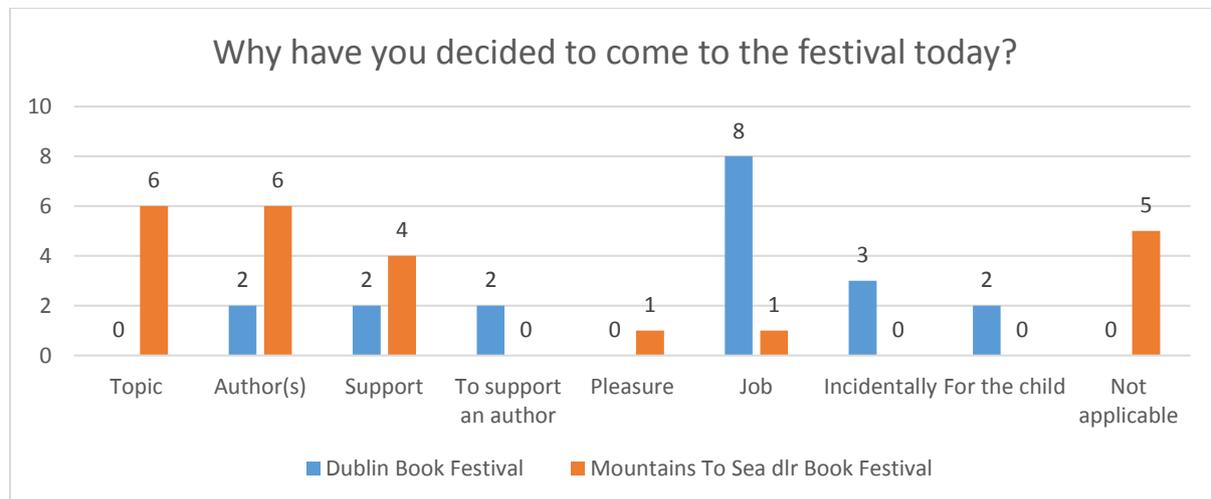


Figure 9.1: Motivations for attending the DBF and the MTS festivals (n: person)

### Becoming Embodied

Interviewing attendees in situ, while the festivals were ongoing, yielded insights into the ways in which individual cultural capital becomes embodied through people’s attendance at literary festivals. Festival attendees could be seen to be actively using their attendance at the festivals to co-create and shape their experiences in particular ways. In the process, they could be seen to be engaged in a variety of activities aimed at fulfilling their interests and needs. The following section tries to make sense of these findings beginning with a consideration of what attendees learned at the festival.

The findings from the observations reveal how tourists perform particular types of roles as they experience the festivals, thereby reproducing festival space in the process (Edensor 2001). Before the programme events started, they entered the festival venues, all of which were indoors, and occupied seats. They could be seen and heard to be chatting about the topic of the event or having private conversations. They drank coffee, tea or wine, read newspapers, used the mobile phones, read a flyer, took pictures, laughed, and perused the books they had just bought. As such, they were behaving in a way that was ‘appropriate’ to the festival setting

where they awaited the start of the next staged performance. During the events, whether readings, panel discussions, or other performances, they listened attentively and remained seated. They continued to drink their refreshments, some of them occasionally taking short videos, or pictures without flash in order not to disturb the scene. Some of them took notes, read the flyer and closed their eyes during poetry performances. During most of the events, people could be heard laughing at least once, with most of them smiling or nodding at various points. At times, they were actively engaged in expressing empathy with the performers, forming an intangible connection that crossed any notional stage – audience divide. For example, they laughed at jokes or became serious and sad while listening to the speech of a writer who told how she faced the death of her mother from Alzheimer’s disease. They also interacted with the performers during the events in various ways. For instance, everyone clapped together at certain moments. Some raised their hands to ask questions during the Q&A sessions, and waited for their turn to talk. Everyone was very polite, in a manner appropriate to the situation.

Schechner (2004) wrote that the ways in which people ‘cool off’ after performances are less explored but very important. After the events, attendees left the venues chatting. Some of them directly left the festival environs some went to other events. Others stayed near the venues chatting, laughing, drinking, reading the flyer or texting or calling people on their mobile devices. Still others went to buy books or queued to have a book signed. Between events, they related to the festival venues differently. They did not have to listen in silence. Instead, they could talk, even loudly, buy books at the book stall, walk around, make calls, read the flyer or books, drink and eat. Their way of being at the festival now altered, as the programmed performance had ended and they now knew to adopt a different style of interacting in the setting. The spatial context within which the festival events were staged could be seen to influence how attendees interacted and otherwise practiced being there. At the MTS festival, events were staged in two different buildings which meant that attendees were more dispersed and on the move between locations. At the DBF in contrast, an indoor space called the ‘Winter Garden’, housing the book stall, the coffee shop and the children’s corner, created a welcoming, convivial atmosphere that encouraged attendees to pause, stay, read and relax in social encounters.

### *What did people learn and how did they learn it?*

The interview data meanwhile, showed how and where learning featured in all of the above. When asked if they thought they had learned anything by being at the festival, some were adamant that they had: ‘of course I’ve learned something. I’m getting the book and I’m intent on reading it’ (Helen, MTS). Most people thought they had learned something, although sometimes they couldn’t actually name what it was they had learned. The learning reported varied widely, with interviewees speaking of the festival in terms of: being informative, filling ‘gaps in my knowledge’ (Helen, MTS), developing views and perspectives, countering previously held ideas, understanding why people write, understanding themselves and other people, and learning about particular books and authors. However, some study participants either did not equate the festival with learning or seemed not at all sure that learning featured in their festival experience. One man, when asked whether he was expecting to learn anything, initially said that ‘learn’ was the ‘wrong word’. He went on: ‘I’m expecting to enjoy it and I’m expecting to maybe meet some people and talk to some people and .... Yeah maybe learn is ok, maybe I gain some knowledge of how the publishing world works...’ (John, DBF). Another similarly explained ‘Hmm... I don’t ... learn about (an author), yeah, probably yeah, I wouldn’t say I have learnt anything life changing’ (Aoife, MTS). There was, however, an element of ‘discovering new things’ (Sarah, MTS) of finding inspiration and being invigorated. There was a sense that attendees sometimes picked up something that they had not anticipated learning about, and that this was part of the festival experience: ‘yeah, just because you’re out there, you know, you just hear about things while if you’re just sitting at home, you don’t know’ (Julia, MTS); ‘And that’s the best part, isn’t it? Yeah, yeah... the unpredictable (Robert, DBF).

Echoing the ‘quasi-scholastic’ atmosphere that Bourdieu associated with museums, the data found evidence of some attendees actively trying to ensure that they did learn. The sample included some people who had attended the festival full of purpose. Some came with children and for them the festival was a way of encouraging their children to read more (Michelle, DBF). Others took notes for reference after the event. One female visitor (Lisa) to the DBF explained: ‘Yeah, I always take notes when I come to these kinds of talks.... Otherwise I remember nothing’. Another said that when she got home she ‘might write down a few’ (Julia, MTS). However, others did not: ‘if something hits me, it stays in me, it comes back from an emotional point of view, I don’t need to write this’ (Deirdre, MTS). While the written word was central to both festivals, for some attendees, the attraction lay in listening. One man, a repeat attendee, spoke of the difficulties he has in both reading and writing, and explained that he learns by

listening: ‘This is one of the reasons why I come to these events. Rather than by reading I learn by listening’ (Kevin, MTS).

Clearly, attendees valued the interaction with writers and poets, from whom they learned all manner of things. However, attendees also valued interactions with other attendees. Those with professional connections to the literary field appreciated the ability for people ‘all over the industry getting together and exchanging information and networking with other people and getting together in a way you wouldn’t generally get to do the rest of the year’ (Jessica, DBF). Through these interactions they gleaned information that was both of interest and of use to them.

### *Entertainment or education?*

In general, there was a strong sense in the data that the people who participated in the study seemed very much at ease in the festival setting. In large part, this was because they were well practiced in both the habit of reading and familiar with literature more generally. As already discussed, interviewees tended to possess lots of books and were interested in reading. Many were also well practiced in the art of attending and being at literary festivals, being repeat tourists to either the particular literary festival under study or to other literary festivals. The meanings that festival attendance generated for interviewees can be understood in this context, with one attendee describing the festival as: a fulfillment of what my ... literary... my connection to literature. It fulfills an element of my enjoyment of literature’ (David, MTS)

Equally, there is no doubt that the festival had educational connotations for the majority of interviewees. As one attendee articulated: ‘I mean I like intelligent conversations, so it’s meaningful for me to attend an event that engages in meaning for conversations’ (David, MTS). Yet a key finding of the study is that what attendees understood by the concept ‘learning’ and how that learning was experienced differed from person to person. The responses of several participants suggested that to think of entertainment and education in dichotomous terms is meaningless: ‘these two are not set against one another’ (Mary, MTS). Repeatedly, attendees explained: ‘They both have to work together, don’t they? Yeah, you learn when you are enjoying yourself and you enjoy yourself when you are learning’ (Jane, MTS); ‘When I’m gaining knowledge I also enjoy it, because the knowledge I’ve gained has been interesting’ (Ruth, MTS); ‘It was serious in part and funny in part’ (Shane, MTS); ‘I think if you enjoy something you learn more’ (Ian, MTS); ‘It’s for entertainment, but part of that idea of entertainment is learn something’ (Elizabeth, MTS).

It was clear that people were absorbing and feeling the import of their encounters in the festival site and in having experiences that were simultaneously educational, entertaining and interesting, attendance at the festival proved to be meaningful. As one woman explained: ‘If you watch television... for instance, soap opera, you enjoy it but maybe you enjoy it for the moment. ... If you go to something that stimulates you... you learn something, you find afterwards you dwell, you analyse, you process it and you have a longer value’ (Elizabeth, MTS).

### *Plans for acting on it afterwards?*

In line with Kolb’s (1984) argument that learning unfolds in cyclical fashion, there was quite a lot of evidence that the festival created an ‘after-effect’. While the data showed people actively experiencing the festival events and in effect embodying cultural capital in the process through listening, taking notes, having books signed, shaking hands, asking questions, etc., it was clear that the practice did not end there. Rather, it was going to carry through into routine daily life afterwards in a variety of ways. As several attendees explained: ‘I’m sure I’ll always be quoting something I’ve heard’ (Raquel, DBF); ‘when I go back home I might write down a few (notes) and I have to think about the questions people were asking’ (Julia, MTS); ‘I like to look back on them (notes), read them... and for people who didn’t attend I like to share what I have’ (Lisa, DBF). One woman talked about buying a book, reading it and then passing it on to her daughter-in-law. Another explained how she would share the experience widely: ‘among friends and that kind of thing? Oh yeah, definitely. I have already done it today... I was telling my hairdresser about coming here (laughing) so yeah, you pass it on. You know books inspire, authors inspire, they want people to enjoy ... to have that experience’ (Jane, MTS).

Another obvious way in which the experience of the festival spilled over into everyday life was through the purchasing of books. The data showed a tendency for attendees to purchase books as part of their festival experience: more than half of those interviewed at MTS had bought books, while 21% of interviewees at the DBF had done so. They had acquired these books because they wanted to fill knowledge gaps or to learn from particular authors, as in the case of Damien (MTS) who explained ‘she (the author) can make things that I don’t know how to do but I’d like to do’. Simply liking to read was another reason offered: ‘I mean I like to read... so it’s important that I always have books around to read’ (Shane, MTS).

## Discussion

In line with the literature (Driscoll, 2014), these findings suggest that literary festival tourists are mainly female, middle aged, regional or domestic in terms of place of origin, passionate readers, with a current or previous career related to literature, and with high levels of previously acquired cultural capital, expressed in their level of education, books owned and cultural participation.

As regards objectified cultural capital, the study found a tendency to accumulate cultural resources in the form of books during the festivals. Thus, akin to the ‘quasi-scholastic atmosphere’ (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979], p. 75) of museum visiting, literary festivals might be understood as places of cultural goods accumulation, usually for self-educational purposes, but also to support the artists concerned or for professional reasons. However, much more complex is the question of how festivals play a role in the embodiment of cultural capital. While Robertson and Yeoman, 2014, p. 312 suggest that attending literary festivals may be a valuable experience that ‘confers cultural capital on attendees’, a key argument here is that they offer people opportunities to both actively acquire cultural capital and to practise expressing and personifying cultural capital in a variety of ways. There is a subtle but important difference. As could be seen from the data, people choose how to go about learning in different ways during literary festivals. Knowledge and skills can be acquired through listening, emotional learning, situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) that involves learning with and from other people, and also through the act of recording, such as taking notes. The festival also has an ‘after-effect’ which sees attendees remembering, reflecting on, and continuing to engage with the tangible and intangible cultural resources they acquired.

The reasons why these festival attendees were interested in learning varied from specific job purposes, to personal self-education aims. Similarly to Cassell et al.’s research (2010), this study shows that usually, literary festival tourists are willing to learn and to be informed in what Robertson and Yeoman (2014) defined as *aspirational-experiential* acts of consumption. Developing knowledge and skills can sometimes be a motivation for attendance when there is an expectation to learn. As Driscoll (2014) claimed, people may decide to attend literary festivals for the purpose of acquiring cultural skills, such as writing skills in a non-academic environment. Echoes of this behaviour were evident in this study’s findings. However, it must be noted that the act of learning may also be unexpected, since festivals can be environments of ‘predictable unpredictability’ (Lampel, 2011, p. 342), as the data here reinforces.

The nature of the learning can be diverse. It can be strictly linked to the field of literature, to what Sapiro et al. (2015) called *literary capital*, or it may be much broader. For a number of both foreign international tourists and non-native domestic attendees studied here, for example, festivals were arenas for learning about Irish culture, history or even for improving their English proficiency. Tourists may learn about books and authors, views and perspectives, local history and culture, developing new knowledge and tastes. Thus, as Chwe (1998) claimed, literary festivals may be vehicles for ‘common knowledge generation’ (p. 47).

Overall, while some researchers have expressed doubts about whether it is possible to develop embodied cultural capital through literary festival attendance (Driscoll, 2014; Finkelkraut, 1987; Fumaroli, 1991; Meehan, 2005; Merfeld-Langston, 2010; Ommundsen, 2009), this study’s findings suggest that it is possible. The data presented here show how in attending literary festivals, people live out their engagement with literature, practise their habit of reading and writing, and acquire all kinds of information and knowledge that pertain to the literary field and more widely. The enhanced cultural knowledge and skills developed during attendance stay with them after the festival ends, embodied as cultural capital. Thus, the argument advanced here is that literary festivals can be rewarding and fulfilling experiences that lead to personal self-improvement. They meet the needs of tourists, and indeed attendees more generally, who seek expression, fulfilment and self-actualization. During attendance, they employ their cultural resources, especially knowledge and skills to create valuable experiences and in the process further develop their cultural capital (Agarwal and Shaw, 2018). The findings here clearly show that individual attendees play an active role in this, co-creating their own experience as they interact, engage and relate to the performers and also to other actors including other attendees. Literary festivals, therefore, can be defined as cultural producers (Sapiro, 2016), ‘alternative education providers’ and sites for self-education which promote reading (Driscoll, 2014, p. 153). Even when educational motives did not dominate, the majority of the interviewees said that the experience was interesting, stimulating, and intellectual, reflecting what Weber (2015) defined as ‘the intellectual dimension’ of the attendance. Thus, tourists might improve their knowledge and skills, considering the time spent on the festival as ‘quality time’.

These findings challenge Négrier’s (2015) argument that audiences’ commitment to learning is weakening in favour of the search for social hedonism, at least in the literary festival setting. Instead, the findings clearly show that the acquisition of embodied cultural capital occurs in

tandem with entertainment as ‘two sides of one coin’ (Kevin, MTS). In finding that tourists engage in literary festivals because they find it both enjoyable and educational simultaneously, the study supports Packer (2006) who argued that tourists usually enjoy the process of learning itself.

## **Conclusions**

Travel and learning have always been interwoven and yet much scope remains for furthering understanding of the relationship between the two domains. This chapter has explored literary festivals in relation to literary tourism, aiming to understand the learning dimensions of tourists’ literary festival experiences, using Bourdieu’s (1984 [1979], 2002 [1986]) cultural capital concept as a theoretical framework. The qualitative data were collected at two long-established Irish literary festivals, the Dublin Book Festival and the Mountains to Sea dlr Book Festival. The study concludes that literary festivals can be fulfilling and rewarding experiences that lead to personal self-improvement. Tourists actively co-create their own experiences, in ways that for them are stimulating, beneficial and compelling, embodying cultural capital in the process. Thus, literary festivals can be understood as learning environments, and as arenas for individual embodied and objectified cultural capital acquisition where tourists can enhance their cultural knowledge, tastes and skills through participation. The paper further concludes that while the festival experience can be seen to involve strong elements of self-directed learning, this learning always occurs in tandem with entertainment and enjoyment. Theoretically, the study contributes by exploring Bourdieu’s cultural capital ideas in an informal, adult dominated, learning environment. Informal learning environments are increasingly important as Moscardo (1998) and Packer and Ballantyne (2002) have pointed out, as life-long learning increasingly characterises contemporary living.

While this research offers valuable insights into the learning dimensions of literary festival experiences, it has limitations. The topic being investigated is under-researched in the literature and the study presented here is exploratory in nature. Clearly, there is much potential to extend research into the learning dimensions of the literary festival experience, using Bourdieu’s cultural capital ideas. An obvious line of future enquiry would be to investigate whether the experience of literary festivals differs from that of cultural or other festivals more generally. It is hoped that this study might prompt further research into this important topic.

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