

Rhythms and Identity in Boyne Valley Landscapes in T. Mels (ed.) 2004. *Reanimating Places: Geography of Rhythms*. Chapter 5, pages 87-108. London: Ashgate.

Rhythms and Identity in Boyne Valley landscapes

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“My central themes are journey and identity, storytelling and interpretation, individual experience and societal context, contingent events and broader historical movements.” Buttimer, 1993, 3

Rhythms, identity and landscapes are explored traveling through the Boyne Valley, Ireland, while 150 student voices comment on experiences there. Students interpret sustainability in terms of perceived cultural continuity, nature and seasonality, and millennia of human activity mirrored in landscapes. The Valley is home to thriving agricultural communities, people employed in tourism, mining, industry and daily commuters. Contemporary dwellings nestle, and daily rhythms interact, amongst Neolithic chambers, Celtic earthworks and monastic settlements (5th–15th centuries), estate parklands (18th–19th centuries) and symbolic battle locations. *Pentimento*ⁱ – reappearances from the past protrude on the landscapes. Historical events documented in stone and manuscripts, enhance legends and myths passed on to the cultural rhythms of each generation. Just as power brokers in the past shaped the landscape, the state is putting its imprint buying symbolic areas in the creation of Irish heritage. Student's sense of place, historical landscape continuity and identity come to the fore with a certain topophilia. At the end of the journey, questionnaire/interviews given by geography students reflect their experiences there.

Context and definition

Each Autumn I take first year third level geography students on fieldtrips to the Boyne, County Meath, with the aim of reintroducing them to this holistic discipline emphasizing human/environmental relationships and sustainable development. The majority has studied history to 15 years old, and a minority continues with it to Leaving Certificate level. About 90% of students are bilingual in English and Irish, and come from areas outside Dublin (Figure 1).

What geographical knowledge constructions are passed on from generation to generation?

In orienting the voyagers, maps and time-slice landscape representations are juxtaposed with archaeological/historical sites, *bocage* farm-scape, Valley contours and seasonal rhythms of the flood plains. Different knowledges are used: empirical data from physical geography, archaeology, history, political economy and other systematic data, but also anthropology and tourist interpretations. Without these voices including poetry, music or painting, much of this landscape could become static museum-scape (Buttimer, 1980, 1982; Tuan, 1974; Ley, 1980).

Combinations of Boyne sites are used, but narratives of human-environmental rhythms and power relations can be traced in the landscape. Besides empirical data, students have inherited images of the region through tale and legend. Boyne River rhythms and seasonal migrations of eel and salmon call to mind the *Salmon of Knowledge* legend retold to each generation. Romances of Gaelic *fleadhs* and *feiseanna* (celebrations / competitions) from Ireland's Celtic Golden Age come alive at Royal Tara (Beresford Ellis, 1994). Like Tara, the Bend of the Boyne (*Brú na Bóinne*) and Slane are associated with St. Patrick. Then come school-hood memories of 'invasions - us and them' – Vikings, Normans and English, and defeat at the Battle of the Boyne (1690) resulting in 'foreign' landlords, famine, revolution and eventually national independence with renaissance in wealthy '*Meath of the pastures*'.

Voyagers find echoes of Swift's *Gulliver* and the Duke of Wellington in Trim, James Bond (007) alias Pierce Brosnan from Navan and Mel Gibson, *Academy Braveheart* (1995) hero who put Trim Castle on Hollywood maps playing the 13th century Scottish nationalist, William Wallace, disembowelled by English forces and shot on film in a Norman castle on the Boyne.

Students commented: "Statements in the landscape are awesome and create a sense of power and strength. One wishes to protect this landscape in order to carry on Irish culture and heritage. There is a great sense of wonder at the scale of these statements in the landscape" (Aileen). "I was overawed by what I experienced, especially Newgrange. They must have felt that there was an afterlife, much more important than this one on earth as illustrated by the light box at Newgrange with victory of light over darkness, life over death" (Sorcha). "Each part could not exist without the river, local natural resources and rhythms. There was a feeling of harmony with nature" (Eileen).

Trying to make sense of rhythms

"In contrast to the flux and muddle of life, art is clarity and enduring presence. In the stream of life, few things are perceived clearly because few things stay put. Every mood or emotion is mixed or diluted by contrary and extraneous elements. The clarity of art—the precise evocation of mood in the novel, or of summer twilight in a painting—is like waking to a bright landscape after a long fitful slumber, or the fragrance of chicken soup after a week of head cold" (Tuan, 1993).

Words try to catch essence, enhanced by transformational grammars of space and place echoing over millennia while the eye catches snapshots of Boyne tableaux, affected by flooding and weathering, EU agricultural schemes; house, road, heritage/interpretative centre construction, ever-increasing tourist numbers and archaeologists scraping; interpretations are sought (Bourdieu, 1995; Price and Lewis, 1993; Duncan and Duncan, 1988; Cosgrove, 1985, 1989; Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Duncan and Ley, 1993; Barnes and Duncan, 1992).

Students commented: *“The landscape had a type of power over me because of its beauty and the many stories it holds. Mellifont and Newgrange have many tales with evidence of our ancestors”* (Helen). *“When I arrived at Newgrange I realized that I had never been there before - I saw culture in reality and not just a text. I realized my sense of place in society”* (Paula).

While scrutinising landscape, *pentimento* appears - this art term refers to reappearance in an oil painting of elements of drawing or painting that the artist tried to obliterate by over-painting. If pigment becomes transparent over time, ghostly remains show through. *Pentimento* indicates evidence in a composition such as landscape that original work has been changed. The pigment with which the artist covered unwanted beginnings or perceived mistakes, with time or cleaning can become transparent, revealing original intentions through the finished composition. Use of X-ray photography can uncover evidence of the creator’s original intentions, as with Caravaggio’s *Lute Player* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2002); while in Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel *Last Judgement* panels, clothes put on his nude figures posthumously are still well in place. While the artist may be working for him/herself, he/she may also be forced/sponsored to re-create. Original canvas may be planned, and fully or partly painted by one artist; different artists can change it at varying periods due to shortage of money, recycling material, or the painter’s wish to give a different view. At Mellifont Abbey, in the 19-20th centuries, *pentimento* of medieval biblical scenes with human forms came through the whitewashed walls of the chapter house, which had been over-painted by 17th century Puritan powers.

Author Lillian Hellman uses the term *pentimento* as metaphor in describing places and associated people she met on her life-path, now part of her mindscapes in *Pentimento* (1973). Her metaphor snapshots are organic making specific places and associated people alive in the mind of the author/reader going beyond mosaic or patchwork metaphors. As a student stated: *“I saw something greater – landscape and society. I experienced the extension of innovations of ancestral creation, and rhythms that have shaped contemporary society and our spirituality. Something awesome happened that helped shape who I am today. I like to think I awoke and arrived at each picture with an open mind and gained a wealth of insight”* (Joan). The Valley offers a gallery of *pentimento* views. Going from the whole view to component sections, *pentimento* becomes obvious. Definition is important avoiding over-simplified deconstructions.

“The landscape was like a talking painting” (Shauna). *“For me it told a thousand tales if you looked deep enough. It was shaped by earlier generations and was given to us, full of wisdom, life and cultural rhythms. The landscape gives us a sense of where we come from, and how we treat it shows us what kind of people we are”* (Eimear). *“There is a uniqueness and spirit about the Irish landscape as I have seen in the Valley”* (Joe). *“There is much sentiment and great cultural influence from many periods. It shows many depths and should be given the respect it deserves”* (Marie). *“Landscape is who we are and where we come from”* (Maura). *“As we traveled through the Brú na Bóinne, Newgrange, Navan, Trim, Tara I was overwhelmed by the sense of historical rhythms - generation to generation all these places hold... how people coped in the past... .. how people had to adapt to nature and environment. The tombs were built so that*

they are still standing. These places show the strong sense of community and spirituality, and was passed down” (Niamh).

Geographical discourses and generational rhythms Geography is described as a holistic science - human-environmental relationships in areal/spatial patterns; differentiations and continuities in contemporary landscapes being re-created in time-space contexts and paradigms. The Valley offers a perfect location for regional and thematic studies (Sauer, 1925; Vidal, 1926; Hartshorne, 1939; Gregory, 1989; Soja, 1989, Hagerstrand, 1982; Pred, 1977).

Lifeways and values are expressed through all forms of activities in Boyne landscapes (Vidal, 1926; Jackson, 1984; Buttimer, 2001a). Historical geography presents evidence in place-names and documentary sources; rhythms, actors, processes and events that created Boyne landscapes come to life: Neolithic necropolis, Celtic *raths*, monastic settlements at Monasterboice, Donaghmore and Kells; Norman vestiges at Dowth, Dunmoe and Trim; 18th century estates; ‘planted’ villages; geostrategic battle sites and so forth. Juxtaposed are the daily urban routines of Drogheda, Navan, Trim and Kells, and rural and tourist-related economies in complex combinations. Linear national narratives emphasise dates - Viking raids (8th century) - but cultural processes that have shaped the landscape are too often subsumed. Transitions related to sedentarisation, or Neolithic *pentimento*, may overshadow other innovative processes. Boyne landscapes are being (re)created with EU policies and tourist industries in the name of sustainable development.

Maps and histories in Irish, Latin or English help bring to life the power of commissioners and artists of Boyne tableaux especially at Mellifont and Trim; yet there is always the desire to fill in unexcavated gaps: Neolithic mounds or absent memorials. *“I wonder how much more of the cultural beauty of the Valley is still underground”* (Ruth). Constructed rational paradigms must leave space for phenomenological and humanistic interpretations (Buttimer, 1982; Tuan, 1974; Ley, 1980; Johnston, 1978). *“No matter what changes ostensibly come in the future, we will always have our past in this landscape”* (John). *“It bears the marks of many civilizations which came to Ireland and have left their stamp. The landscape shows evidence of innovations that each brought. Irish landscape bears evidence of the value of different civilizations and multi-cultural society”*(Helen).

Rhythms of sustainable landscape and lifestyles

Sustainability is premised on the healthy functioning of ecology and environment in nature’s rhythms and appreciation of this passed from generation to generation through culture and identity. *“Sustainable development in the Valley refers to preserving its natural, physical features while simultaneously fulfilling social and economic needs, as future generations will depend on these as much as we do”* (Nano). *“It is where there is a balance of resources: cultural and economic in society which leads to long-term development instead of a short term quick fix. We must have something strong to hand on to the next generations. In order to achieve sustainability, bottom-up organizations like the Irish Country Women’s Association must inform people and collaborate with GOs like the Heritage Service to avoid extremes”* (Clare). *“It is the change of environment through different periods - Neolithic to modern, as a result of people’s influence and interference”* (Paula). *“With sustainability the Valley is alive, it is frightening to think that this landscape is in our generation’s hands”* (Paul). *“Sustainability must be about more than physical survival and species diversity; cultural diversity and identities are all important”* (Jane). *“Our heritage is of great importance to our culture and to preserve it we*

must sustain our landscape” (Dermot). “Throughout the entire trip, each part of the landscape combined together to express feelings of life, pride, spirituality, awe, interest and patriotism in me – sustainability is about place, roots, rhythms, staying alive” (Nora). “A sense of spirituality remains in these places where the artifacts are preserved encouraging us to go on” (Therese). “If you don’t sustain the Valley, then it dies out” (Aibheann). As the past helps define the present cultural landscape, 7,000 years of human impact on the Valley necessitates planning processes, which will mould legislation to achieve future lasting development.

As positive development aims at getting a balance between ecological, economic and socio-cultural needs where none of these domains suffer irreparable damage - from pollution, resource destruction, or over-rapid cultural change creating social vulnerability - modulating processes via technology, and consensual institutions facilitating top-down / bottom-up synergies is all important (O’Reilly, 2001; Buttimer, 2001a). Students commented, “Our heritage is of great importance to our culture and to preserve it we must preserve nature and our landscape in a sustainable planned manner catering for interconnected natural and social rhythms” (Eoin). “The landscape expresses Ireland’s deep roots; it enables us to look back and forward” (Bernadette).

*Within Boyne landscapes exist millennia of interconnected arenas (re)created via territorialities struggling for resources, defence and identities. Besides advantageous carrying capacity and geostrategic location – the Valley is pregnant with symbolism; a medium between humans and nature trying to sustain themselves and give live a meaning with echoes of Saint-Exupéry’s “donner un sens a la vie” constructing the metaphorical *Citadelle* (1948). Cultural interpretations of nature, seasonality, mortality, eternity, identity and legitimacy have sustained continuous habitation of the Valley as evidenced at Newgrange necropolis.*

“Newgrange is an expression of human belief and endeavor. The genius of the creations and purpose amazes me, even by today’s standards” (Anne). “The Boyne has its own beauty... we shouldn’t destroy the evidence we have of previous ways of life just to contribute to future economic development. Too much tourist development would make the Valley lose its spirit.” (Fiona). “While some areas/sites have been preserved by government, when it established heritage centers, it is important that other sites don’t need to be, or can’t be rebuilt e.g., Mellifont, and which period could be used 12th or 15th century? ... Hill of Tara, should it be preserved and turned into a major tourist site or should it be left as it is? I don’t know how this question should be answered but I believe that each generation of Irish people have the right to see it as it is” (Una).

“Even though thousands of years old, it’s amazing how these features still impose. ... innovation captured people’s minds. They tried to make a better life, no matter the difficulties faced. An aura of nostalgia can be felt and I realize the extent of my inheritance” (Paula). “I felt awe and wonder at the magnificent skills, work and craft portrayed in the landscape. The buildings show how dedicated people were to their beliefs” (Helen). “It is clear that our ancestors were concerned with spiritual values” (Cathal). “To really see the landscape gave me a feeling of poetry and magic. Settlement upon settlement ... shows that the land was of great value to generations and generates a feeling of power and strength to me. To think powerful rituals - ceremonies took place here, kings of great power and wisdom ruled these lands ... this leaves a feeling of insignificance in relation to the Ireland of today. The culture and wisdom held in the palm of the Valley is a sacred asset ... giving us a sense of strength through our history” (Jennifer).

The physical canvas

Legendary goddess *Boinn* gave her name to the River - only her husband Nechtain and his cupbearers could look upon Sidh's well; one day *Boinn* gazed in, water came out blinding one eye. She fled but the water followed her to the Irish Sea at Drogheda (Green, 1995, 1996) (See Figure 1).

The Valley's terracing and gorges attest to glacial history 12,000 years ago (Meehan and Warren, 1999). The Boyne (113km) has a catchment area of 2,670km² and gentle gradient (1.24m/km) with fifteen tributaries, twelve being rich in salmon, eel and trout. With high banks, an uneven riverbed and canalized stretches, there is fast runoff during annual floods. Limestone with shales and sandstones are salient features. The Boyne system drains 67% of Meath (567,127 acres) with rich pasturelands and level plain, nowhere rising above 260m. The catchment includes parts of five other counties. Activities supported by the Boyne include provision of drinking water, fisheries and recreation. The river now comes bottom of the national list in relation to unpolluted waters with 45% of the channel surveyed falling into this classification; only 31.8% is considered unpolluted. Abstractions from surface waters for drinking impact on quality by reducing flow and diminish the river's capacity to assimilate discharges.

Concerning municipal water discharge, 31 agglomerations (population 111,930) discharge effluent; with 8 generating 80% of this load and Drogheda (population 56,000) accounts for 50% of total discharge. Industrial wastewater comes from food processing and intensive agriculture based industries (e.g. piggeries, poultry), while tourism, mining, cement manufacturing and textiles also impact. Industries are concentrated towards the northeastern catchment area, the majority of which discharge effluent to watercourses rather than into municipal sewerage systems. Four effluent discharges are regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency, and 13 have Local Authority licences (Three rivers project, 2002).

Boyne Valley cultural landscapes and rhythms

On the landscape, power *pentimento* strikes the observer, especially at Newgrange (Nolan, 1988; Aalen et al 1997; Andrews 1967; Johnston, 1994; Brady and Byrnes, 2002; Divine-Wright and Lyons, 1997; Mitchell and Ryan, 1997; Moody and Vaughan, 1986-96; Smyth and Whelan 1988; Foster, 1989).

This prehistoric necropolis projects views in the Bend of the Boyne UNESCO World Heritage Site with imposing megalithic monuments (3900-3500 BC). Natural heritage areas also exist there, including Crewbane marsh and woods, and associated migratory swans giving genesis to gods, legends and tourists to Newgrange - 60,000 visitors in 1980 rising to 230,000 in 2000 (Stout, 2002). Symbolically, at the winter solstice, the *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister), dignitaries and satellite television crews welcomed in the new Millennium as the rising sun made its annual penetration of the main burial chamber. On the same date in 2001 and 2002, people from the Valley protesting at plans for the construction of a waste incinerator at nearby Duleek congregated here (Figure 2).

Massive stone-kerbed mounds on the Bend's long ridge, and 40 satellite burial chambers, dominate Newgrange, Dowth and Knowth landscapes. At Newgrange, the corbelled roof stands on the main passage grave; a roof box allows sunlight penetrate during the solstice giving *chiaroscuro* - obscure bright impressions. Here place, time, seasonality, rhythms of communal/environmental farming activities, life and death are intertwined. Outside, standing stones and shadow play with time; intense ritual activities were once practiced here sustaining and giving life a meaning (Figure 3).

Near Newgrange, Neolithic/Early Bronze Age ceremonial enclosures exist along with ringforts and souterrains from the Early Christian period. In the 12th century *Senchus na Relec* survey of royal cemeteries, individual monuments are listed; the 1837 Ordnance Survey identified these as a royal cemetery (Stout, 2002). During the Neolithic period, *Brú na Bóinne* was a ritual pilgrimage center for native, Romano-British and continental visitors located on the Royal Tara - Ulster route. Newgrange became part of Mellifont Abbey farmlands (1384) and the Bend was an epicenter of the Battle of the Boyne (1690); afterwards Newgrange lands were transformed into an estate with enclosed field-scape. Newgrange House has been demolished; farmlands are owner-occupied, while the main prehistoric sites are state managed (Stout, 2002).

Knowth mound (3500 BC) with decorated stones aligned on a lunar standstill has graves in rhythm with the equinox. One kerbstone can be read as a 365-day solar calendar; others indicate recurring measurements of time. Dowth graves are aligned with midwinter sunset and quarter days. With the demise of Dowth's usage as a necropolis, communal rituals continued in earthen henge monuments, which were replicated at Newgrange, Knowth and Monknewtown. In the Christian era, a monastic site developed, due to Viking attacks (9th century) protective souterrains interconnecting burial chambers were constructed (Figure 4).

Like Knowth, Dowth became a center for Celtic kings, and in the 12th century both were incorporated into the ditch-protected Pale region of Anglo-Norman Ireland. A Norman church (1202) lies near the main megalithic chamber, on the site of an earlier monastery and a manorial village developed around the fortified mound. In the 18th century Dowth House and parklands, incorporating a towerhouse manor (14th century), prehistoric tombs and henge was built. In the 19th century, further tenant land subdivision continued, as did quarrying of stones from the mounds. The state has acquired the lands in the immediate area (Stout, 2002).

"I always wanted to see Newgrange – it's spectacular. It's large, breathtaking" (Tracy). *"Knowth expressed the eternity of the world to me, and people's insignificance in the face of this. We are merely passing through, the landscape is transient, yet defies the test of time. I feel that power is associated with the landscape"* (Tara). *"There is a type of spirit in the tombs as history tells us that there are many people buried there. You can see the pride people had in their area in the way they worked hard to build these structures. Respect: people had a love for their deceased relatives, building magnificent tombs to hold them. Power and determination: of a people to build these tombs and castles. Devotion: to gods so that they could spend their lives undisturbed"* (Catherine). *"Knowth showed the people were fearful of the gods and celebrated the seasons, which we still do"* (Aisling).

"It is much easier to imagine our past and future when we come face to face with tombs and ruins. These features gave me a sense of value, that people are a sum of the whole past. ... What a wealth of knowledge our ancestors passed down through the generations. They paved the way for us to follow. I feel that I am part of the whole bigger picture that is my heritage. America and other countries don't have these features from the past. ...I have a sense of belonging" (Elizabeth). *"To comprehend Newgrange is surreal; and how the builders knew how to live and build in correspondence with nature (Solstice)."* *"I almost felt the spirits in the tombs"* (Jacinta). *"I feel gratitude to have this landscape."* *"The inhabitants of the Valley were highly organized, an intelligent society with a great respect of nature, life and the sun".* *"I got a great feeling of freedom and wide-open space; a sense of historical and cultural rhythms"*(Marian). *"The landscape expresses feelings of anxiety when I see how easily it can be destroyed, moving nature to construct buildings"*(Deirdre). *"I felt fear of the dead"* (Linda).

At the Bend and on the Blackwater tributary at Loughcrew, prehistoric *pentimento* illustrates agricultural innovation and human continuity. Political and religious elites have tried to legitimate their being by leaving their imprint on the landscape, in life and death. *“Graves evoke emotions within you and make a realization between yourself and your ancestors. The necropolis site itself is expressive and spiritual. The wealth of the tomb is installed in you or perhaps you are reminded of it, as it is part of all of us. All the monuments were at one with nature”* (Pauric).

Celtic pentimento Tara, upstream from Newgrange was the most venerated religious-political site of legendary Celtic times (3rd –11th centuries) hosting High Kings. Only earthworks remain, yet megalithic monuments on the Hill, and events give this place a special symbolism. The Mound of the Hostages (passage grave, 2000BC) is prominent near the earthwork Banqueting Hall (230x27m); Neolithic in date it may have been the ceremonial entrance to the Hill. Nearby is a three-banked ringfort, the Rath of the Synods; in 1899 British Israelites searching for the Biblical Ark of the Covenant excavated it (Bhreathnach, 1995; Bhreathnach and Newman 1996). The Royal Enclosure (245m x 290m) with two ringforts hosts the Royal Seat (*Forradh*) and Cormac’s House on which stands a stone marking a mass grave (1798 Rebellion). In its centre lies the *Lia Fáil* (Stone of Destiny), a phallic symbol, associated with the coronation of Celtic kings. Legend places the British coronation Stone of Scone with it; housed in Westminster Abbey until recently before being reclaimed by Scotland. Nearby are King Laoghaire Fort, and Gráinne's Fort named for Cormac's daughter, heroine of the tragic love tale of *Diarmuid and Gráinne* studied by most Irish students (Green, 1995, 1996).

“Tara worked more feeling for me than any other place. Maybe it was the rain as a contributing factor, or the feeling of quietness. There was a spiritual mystical atmosphere. The way it is at the moment is the way I would like it to remain because if they build a heritage center, it will surely take away from its spirit. This is where we have to be careful in how to sustain such sites” (Aoife). *“I felt a sense of gratitude for the landscape that we have. Tourists shouldn’t erode Tara. I feel extremely fortunate to be able to experience what we have and sometimes this landscape is exploited by us”* (Orla).

Relating to Tara, St. Patrick is said to have confronted King Laoghaire (432 AD) with the Christian Gospel, kindled the forbidden paschal fire on Slane Hill, confounded Druids, explained the Trinity mystery using a shamrock leaf, worked miracles and converted Ireland to Christianity. *“The lands of Meath expresses a feeling of a time when this was an area of great importance as with the royalty at Tara. There is a spiritual vibe from the area, both pagan and Christian with churches and Neolithic burial chambers”* (Colm). *“On the Hill, massive raths exist; they are almost overwhelming in their nature. The sheer impact the landscape had on us is difficult to explain”* (Georgina). *“I felt spiritual as I walked through Tara as I felt the area where St. Patrick once walked”* (Kathy).

When entering Tara, with its pasture and sheep, the typical 19th century Anglican / Church of Ireland church and high spire located within the graveyard is what strikes most. Evidence of Celtic, Norman, Reformation and colonial ascendancy imprint on this church/grave space - in ruins, tombs and commemorative plaques to landlord families; their association with religious elites and Empire wars are encrusted on walls inside the church.

Due to declining Protestant congregation numbers, the church is now used only on Ireland’s National - St. Patrick’s Day, March 17th, for religious services. Otherwise it serves as an interpretative centre imaging Celtic Tara on a mobile screen over the altar. State agencies are

responsible for upkeep of this symbolic space. Recently a white statue of Saint Patrick on a pedestal has been erected outside the churchyard gate.

"I feel the landscape is sacred and gives us an idea of how our ancestors live ... developments through time. Tara is imbued with a magical mystical atmosphere, feelings of history, gods, immortals, St. Patrick and Christian ceremonies, fires, passage of souls transcending space to new places" (Noreen). *"I felt Ireland's roots at Tara"* (Paoric).

During bicentennial celebrations of the 1798 Rebellion, controversy surrounded plans for taking soil from Tara where rebels fell and bringing it in cortege to the 1798 Memorial - Heritage Centre, Wexford. This project was abandoned, especially in the context of the Peace Process (1998). *"I realized how symbolic the land was to our ancestors and in the struggle for independence. Standing on Tara, I got to see what it was like being Daniel O'Connell addressing his crowd. I saw the ditches surrounding the Hill and felt impressed by the ability of our ancestors.... they held a high value for religion whether pagan or otherwise"* (Sorcha).

Dan O'Connell (1775-1848) the 'Liberator' chose Tara for one of his 40 'monster' attracting 100,000 people during his Catholic Emancipation Campaign with discourses on *le peuple*, nation and democracy. He used similar methods attempting repeal of the Act of Union of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (1801); protests were overtaken by Famine (1845-48) and Rebellion (1848). Tara's landscape became part of nationalist revival traditions from the 1880s on; during De Valera's intensive nation-state building campaigns (1928-66), his son carried out archaeological work, which yielded little treasure. Attempting to revive the Irish language in the Anglicised Pale, De Valera created 'Gaeltacht' - Gaelic-speaking areas - in the Valley distributing estate lands to Irish speakers from the West.

The demise of landlordism followed the Famine (1845-48); Tara Estate landscapes including Celtic sites, was broken up into owner-occupied farms, while the demesnes now serves as a golf club. Neighbouring Dowdstown Estate's demesnes became the domain of the Colomnan Fathers, Missionaries to China, wishing to rekindle the spirit of the early Celtic missionary church, but now becoming part of Britain's imperial venture. By association, the word Tara became a popular first name for girls and houses, especially in Irish Diaspora or 'scattering' lands as fictionalised in Margaret Mitchell's *'Gone with the Wind'* (1939) and Scarlett O'Hara's struggle to save the family plantation of Tara during the American Civil War (1861-65).

Christian images Monasterboice hosts St. Boetus' monastic settlement (6th century) plundered by Vikings (968) and destroyed in 1097. The churchyard encloses ruins of Celtic and Norman churches, round tower (33.5m high) and three Celtic crosses, two adorned with sculptured panels of biblical stories - Adam and Eve, Crucifixion and Last Judgement - and Celtic motifs. Local families continue to bury relatives here and the multiplicity of gravestones makes this cemetery a living site. *"Monasterboice evokes feelings of loneliness, solitude, spirituality, independent living, and sensitivity"* (Susan).

At Mellifont abbey, the eye is struck by the lavabo and cloister with many (re)constructions (12th-15th centuries). Mellifont, on the Mattock tributary, was founded by Saints Bernard and Malachy, and reforming Cistercians from Clairvaux (1142) predating the Norman invasion (1169) (Figure 5). They introduced innovations in monastic lifestyles, architecture, land/agricultural management and fishing technology diffusing their know-how upstream to Bective Abbey (1145). Within 50 years twenty-three houses had been founded from Mellifont despite internal power struggles between pro-Norman factions supported by the English king and opponents. Power-games surrounding Mellifont, and Cistercian bases in France and England,

hold echoes of Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose* (1980). Royal patronage tied Mellifont to the English monarch who dissolved the abbey in 1539. Cistercians returned from France in 1831, and purchased the Oriel Temple demesnes that contained 1,000 acres of old Mellifont lands, and established New Mellifont Abbey.

"The spiritual magic of Mellifont is evident as soon as you begin to explore the ruins. The area is busy, yet quiet and pervasive as if it is not just rubble or stone, but a permanent reminder of the daily rhythm of work and prayer. You can imagine the original structure standing tall in all its glory and spirituality. Every piece of rock, or raised ground in the Valley inspires you to believe that there is a continuing story behind it all" (Deirdre). *"Mellifont is like a scrap book showing different stages in development over a 300 year period; but associated with the nearby ruins of an early Celtic settlement"* (Michelle).

Bective on the Boyne was rebuilt as a manor house (1600) blending Romanesque and Tudor styles. Like Mellifont, this space passed to elites who had supported Reformation monarchs drawing the Valley into the estate system, capitalism and Empire markets. Besides Bective's *pentimento* and agricultural activities, the Big House (18th century) lies in the background. Writer, Mary Lavin in *Tales from Bective Bridge*, captured the area's scenic tranquillity, while dramatic events are portrayed in the abbey's cloister in scenes from *Braveheart* (1995).

Norman influences Upstream from Bective, Trim (*Ath Truim*, Ford of the Elder-trees) is a market town whose skyline offers rich images: King John's Castle (12th–13th century) Keep (21m), towers and barbican gate reinforced by symbolic religious ruins. These, with their actors' stories in Latin, Gaelic, Norman French and English link Trim to the Norman empire and Crusades (Duffy, 2000; Foster, 1989).

Despite traffic-jams and weekly marketing, in Trim town centre's medieval streets can be seen solid 18th-19th century buildings interspersed with multicoloured houses and shops. Talbot's Castle (1415) built with stones from St. Mary's Abbey (1368) became the property of Esther Johnson ('Stella') (1717), friend/partner of local man Jonathan Swift (1667-1745). Observing Ireland's dual society his political tracts brought governmental threat that he circumvented with metaphorical *Gulliver's Travels* (1699-1726).

During Talbot's Castle period as a school, Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852), received his education there, before becoming Duke of Wellington, victor over Napoleon at Waterloo (1815) and UK prime minister (1828-30) at the period of Catholic Emancipation (1829). Wellington's imperial statue towers on Trim's skyline, but lower than the Catholic Church steeple overshadowing the nearby dour limestone Workhouse built for Famine victims (1845-48). Though recycled as a maternity hospital and senior citizen's nursing home, unmarked graves remain vivid. Trim Heritage Centre's multi-media exhibition, *the Power and the Glory* projects images of Celts and Normans, with no mention of Swift or Wellington, but emphasises human continuity with rhythms of the Boyne and market town life. The filming of *Braveheart* (1995) and tourist boom of the 1990s drew local and state funded restoration of the castle (Figure 6).

"Trim invokes conflict, exchange and battle" (Susan). *"Trim Castle shows a sense of order and superior planning brought by the Normans in contrast to Viking towns like Wexford"* (Anne). *"Trim Castle ... once the capital, brought feelings of conquerors of ancestors and that is what they would have been, to then become part of my ancestry"* (Joan). *"These cultural feelings express values and sentiments of nostalgia and a sense of the meaning of the words being Irish"* (Paul). *"Our heritage sites are being used in films. Our landscape today shows that we citizens of Ireland are a team. Communities work to preserve what we have and build centers to show our*

culture to others” (Orla). “These cultural features emphasize the power and wealth of many families throughout history. (Sinead). “It is still a living landscape; it expresses the need for defense and fortification with the castle at Trim showing how important defense was for our ancestors, and the use of high ground for defense at Tara and Newgrange also”. “As we moved from one area to another, the importance of land was obviously necessary for power, wealth and growth” (Tracy). “I particularly enjoyed viewing the castles, the large defense batteries instilled a sense of power that excited me, the large forbidding walls a testament to past defensive design. I found it interesting that these defenses are still standing; they gave me the impression that they are still waiting for an attack” (Paul).

Battles for territories, power and souls

Protestant and Counter Reformation theological discourses often became subsumed into elite power-territorial agenda; when juxtaposed with nation-state building strategies they had major politico-cultural consequences throughout Europe, including Britain and Ireland. Due to coincidence of Reformation and colonisation in Ireland, Irish cultural perceptions see both events/processes as synonymous.

In the 17th-18th century conquest and Plantation, due to the Boyne’s geostrategic location - defensive barrier north of Dublin - decisive battles took place here but are not marked by monuments. However Boyne battle *pentimento* still bursts through on Belfast and Derry street murals struggling to legitimate contested identities and spaces.

Historian and documentary maker (*History of Britain*), Professor Simon Schama, recently sparked controversy by referring to Cromwell's massacre of 3,000 unarmed soldiers at Drogheda (1649) as a “war crime ... atrocity so hideous that it has contaminated Anglo-Irish history ever since”. “Cromwell’s army were intent on crushing Royalist forces” as well as ridding Ireland of “papal barbarism.” He is held to have massacred 4,000 people at Drogheda; revisionists question such events. When Cromwell's death mask was displayed in Drogheda’s museum in 2000 it caused tensions; protesters arrived with tomato ketchup. The director of the *History of Britain* series stated, “It is incredibly important to challenge myths.... History should not be the happy chronicle of the unfurling story of a great nation. It should have a very strong streak of scepticism and rigour... Cromwell was an imperialist bigot but not the genocidal lunatic that Irish folk memory has turned him into. We want to separate the true from the false” (Burke, 2001).

Near Drogheda, the Battle of the Boyne (1690) area coincides with the *Brú na Bóinne*.ⁱⁱ Areas used by the armies, especially at Oldbridge, on the southern bank of the river occupied by James’ forces are highly symbolic. William’s victory transferred the lands of Ireland to his supporters, engendering the landlord estate system, planned demesnes, parklands and ornamental gardens, planted villages including Collon and Slane along with intense capitalist production. These villages now with advertising on shop fronts, still display 18th century geometrical logic in their morphology and buildings; imposing iconographic location of churches, village green in Collon and *pentimento* of Georgian architecture. Slane Castle built in Georgian style came into the ownership of the Coyninghams after 1690; their stewardship is marked by annual rock concerts hosting 80,000-120,000 fans that view celebrities including Queen and Bruce Springstein.

While there are no monuments on the battle site, Unionist parades and songs - *On the Green Grassy Slopes of the Boyne* - celebrate William’s victory in Northern Ireland every July 12th; Orange parading at the Boyne site was discontinued in the 1970s. Perceived as triumphalism by nationalists who resent partition of Ireland (1921), such anniversaries lead to violence,

debilitating the Northern Ireland Peace Process (1998). In the Republic, no independence day is formally celebrated as such.

In 2000, the Oldbridge Demesnes (500 acres) on the Battle site was purchased by the state that plans to create a Visitor Centre. A mansion, parks and riverine canal was constructed on the site in the 18th century and the ‘*Protestants of Great Britain and Ireland*’ erected a memorial obelisk; this was blown up in 1923. Landscape architecture and management on the estate reflected 18th century classical formalism, before being impacted on by wilder Romantic 19th century fashions. Eventually, tenants became owner-occupiers; the demesnes remained largely intact, before being bought by the state.

“I felt awe when I saw places where events in Ireland and beyond took place. I saw exactly where the Battle of the Boyne was. It showed the path that Ireland followed” (Therese). *“A person without heritage is like someone with amnesia, who doesn’t know his/her own name. We can’t move forward if we don’t know where we are coming from* (Deirdre). *“The cultural features gave me a great sense of identity and belonging to the Irish nation. This sense of Irishness is drawn out of the landscape... a type of historical mosaic. This filled me with a sense of identity, belonging, knowing that I am Irish and therefore directly part of this country’s evolving landscape”* (Emma).

On the southern banks, a local NGO has organised a tourist heritage trail, and the state is undertaking restoration of Oldbridge House for which little information is available. Different identities and traditions must receive parity of esteem in Northern Ireland according to the British-Irish Belfast Agreement (1998). Like paradigms surrounding organisation of bicentennial celebrations for the 1798 Rebellion, discourses manufacturing consent have yet to be heard on Boyne battle sites (Chomsky, 1987; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Hooson, 1994).

“I feel a certain degree of discontent towards the landlords who lived in their vast walled estates living off the sweat of peasant people. This social gap existed and still exists today”. *“Driving through the countryside, viewing old Manors gave me a sense of sadness as I saw how tightly the land was controlled and in what grandness the owners lived. However I did enjoy the architecture of the “Big Houses” – they are a cultural monument to Ireland’s past and a reminder as to where we have been”*. *“The domineering buildings in the planned Slane village show the sense of ‘segregation’ that existed with 10% of the population reigning over the rest. All these things shape us.”* *“Seeing the shabby houses and huge mansions of the past I feel lucky to be living in the wealthy era of the Celtic Tiger”*(Eamon).

One hundred and fifty student voices speak on Boyne Valley landscapes

In challenging parameters, postmodernist discourses try to promote ‘other voices’; here neophyte geographers have their say. Students were requested to circle a keyword or add one that best described the Valley’s landscape. The results were: symbolic (43%), followed by spiritual (18%), national (16%), iconographic (9%), power (9%) and religion (5%). The ‘others’ included: heritage, historical, beauty, spectacular, ancestors and identity. The most common collocations relating to nature/environment experienced were: beauty, unique, tranquil, water, unspoiled, unchanged, green, spectacular, fertile, sacred, symbiosis. Student descriptions of landscape features related to the following sites in rank order: (1) Newgrange/Dowth/Knowth (100%), (2) Trim (33%), (3) Tara (31%), (4) Mellifont (22%), (5) Slane/Collon (2%), (6) Monasterboice (1.5%) and (7) field systems/farms (0.5%).

Concerning sustainable lifestyles, viewpoints include: *“Development is a way of keeping our Irish heritage alive with tourism and economics”* (Janine). *“It relates to the preservation of*

important features such as Tara, Slane Castle... without too much restoration or change... to accommodate tourism..." (Helena). *"It refers to the worthwhile development of the Valley which when done correctly can benefit it: tourism equals money, money equals more sustainable development"* (Eimear).

Students wrote about values / feelings the landscape may express to them; identity, pride and positive feelings are the sentiments most expressed (95%). *"There is a history of recurring activity and rhythms in the landscape going back to the Neolithic ... my heritage. Newgrange and Knowth have a mystical spiritual quality ... accentuated by nature and sites/locations in relation to the sun, moon, and solstice. Tara generates a magical mythical atmosphere with the host of historical stories attached to everything: religion, warriors, kings, and annual pagan festivals - Bealtine and Lunasa. I felt that water was very important in the whole life of the Valley as the river means more than just water, but seasonality; rhythms of continuity, and ... linkages to the sea and foreign lands."* *"I felt a sense of mystery at all the Celtic signs and symbols."* *"It was good to ... see the real side of Ireland. Respect is impressed upon me for what we have available to us in the landscape... a crucial reminder we owe it to the landscape and future generations to look after it. I feel inspired by those who left it to us. I hope that in years to come the uneven spread of economic growth does not destroy it."*

Landscape and feelings: *"This landscape expresses sacredness, a feeling of awe and wonder."* *"The area has a spirit and personality"* (Anne). *"It generates spiritual and cultural meaning as it gives me an insight into past generations"*. *"I experienced pride and a sense of place"*. *"It expressed a strong religious and community spirit. There were solid structures. The landscape mirrors how traditions are passed down"*. *"The local community obviously had/has great respect for the area"*. *"Family values and ancestors shone through. The value of religion is the main thing expressed by this landscape."* *"I think that it is important to preserve these sites in their original form; it is close to sacrilege to destroy them, as they are symbols of our growth as a nation and ... our way of life throughout the ages. This is clearly seen at Knowth where the mound was first used as a burial site, later a residential site and today as a tourist attraction."* *"A patriotic feeling came to mind, and pride in ancestors. I had a great feeling of ... the gods"*.

Identity and place: *"The landscape is our background."* *"The Valley is something awesome that helped shape the who, of who I am today"* (Maura). *"The landscape is part of who I am ... where I live, what I do, what I believe."* *"It gave me a sense of nationality and heritage, because it reminds me that before the time of Christ ... our ancestors, had a very advanced know-how of nature's rhythms and architecture"*. *"The landscape makes me feel proud of where I am from and appreciate the history of our small island. It's unique to us as Irish people and we should maintain it, so generations to come can experience it as we have"*. *"I felt our ancestors."*

Heritage: *"It is wonderful to see how the Irish worked together as a community to build something unique which distinguishes us from other nations. I think these feelings still exist today; everyone is proud of their heritage and therefore wishes to sustain it."* *"Many feelings were evoked through the power of historical settlements. Each portrayed its own sense of character and left a feeling of mystery as to what it was like thousands of years ago. It shows the power that our small country held"*. *"It allowed me to focus on the people who lived and worked the land before me. Connection between the present and past evokes a sense of power and community in me"*. *"I could feel a sense of history seeping from the ground"*.

Landscape as a mirror of the nation: *“Heritage is not just about artifacts but also a feeling of belonging to a particular people and culture”*. *“I got a sense of awe, amazement that our ancestors were capable of such wondrous achievements.... I feel respect that our nation has not abused these sites e.g., burial chambers, burials in the fetus position”*(Donna).

“The landscape gives us a feeling of being Irish, it is what makes us Irish and different from any other country.” *“People still have respect for the somewhat strange cultures of our ancestors. I felt pride as this area belongs solely to the culture of Ireland”*. *“I felt a sense of ownership, not personal ownership, but more something that is unique to Ireland. How do we sustain it, who decides?”* *“It helped me connect with the geography in the past and present... ”* (Donna). *“I discovered Ireland, the Emerald isle, from the top of a megalith”*.

“It expresses feelings of allegiance to my country ... my ancestors worked to build a community together” (Enya). *“I felt proud that the people who constructed these places are Irish”*. *“It gave me a sense of belonging. I am a part of Irish culture just like the people of the Valley were”*. *“The landscape made me appreciate where Ireland and I come from.”*

Some conclusions

Geography being holistic attracts students with a wide range of interests. Fieldtrips through the Valley aimed at appreciating the discipline, reading landscapes and rhythms that calls on a variety of approaches. However what students experienced - *pentimento* and metaphor – is principally what they wrote about and may impact on their future career paths, in this case mostly in education.

Students scored high on tests based on physical geography and definitions of various branches of geography including development. Questions and discussions about the Valley based on economic geography including agriculture/rural and tourism phenomena interested students in a general way, while sustainable development discussions stimulated more interest, especially with the aid of landscape snapshots. Concerning the latter point, interest was shown in ecological-human facts but students were most interested in sustainable development interpreting it from culture and identity perspectives; humanity’s relationships to the Valley, aesthetics and emotional significance to Irish identity in a contemporary reality in landscape and mindscape (Buttimer, 2001b). This was especially evident in reactions to the Newgrange complex and cosmology, and the Hill of Tara. The latter sites evoked much use of the words “our, nation, gods, awe, mystical” with students wanting to read their autobiographies in the mirror landscapes. Little enthusiasm was evident at the Battle of the Boyne site, nor its associations with Unionism and contested identities; questions asked about future (re)writing of this heritage space were generally met with procrastination – too real perhaps.

Students wished to enjoy and experience Boyne landscapes and in their own words wrote mostly narratives of ancestors, architectural and survival achievements; spirituality, humanity and environment but not formal religion; awe and pride in landscapes and heritages where both terms were used interchangeably; and love of life, place, landscape and country but devoid of traditional nationalist discourses. Self and group identity thoughts evoked by Boyne landscapes linking the prehistoric directly to the modern were most salient in student presentations as they constantly spoke of sustainable heritage and Irishness with its daily and centennial rhythms through the generations.

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Notes

ⁱ This term in art refers to reappearance in an oil painting of original elements of drawing or painting that the artist tried to obliterate by over-painting.

ⁱⁱ England's 'Glorious Revolution' (1688) deposed James II, the last Catholic English King, and enthroned Mary his daughter and her Dutch husband, William III, Protestant Prince of Orange, ruler of the Dutch Republic. To distract William from his French wars, Louis XIV backed James II and his Irish allies. William was most popular in Ulster, while James in his attempt to strengthen his hold on Dublin and southern provinces made the Boyne his defence line - 60,000 men in two multinational armies went to battle at the Bend. Some 150,000 Jacobites and 50,000 Williamites were killed.