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## An Online Museum of Stories: Literary Travel Writing for Cultural Tourism Development

C Mansfield

J Potočnik Topler

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Mansfield, C

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# An Online Museum of Stories: Literary Travel Writing for Cultural Tourism Development

Dr Charlie Mansfield  
University of Plymouth,  
ORCID ID [orcid.org/0000-0003-0791-1985](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0791-1985)

Page | 326

Dr Jasna Potočnik Topler  
University of Maribor  
ORCID ID [orcid.org/0000-0002-1138-3815](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1138-3815)

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## Summary

Cultural heritage tourism continues to increase across Europe so that cultural institutions continue to seek ways to present local heritage to tourists whilst improving sustainability and maintaining cultural diversity and authenticity. This work, within the framework of the Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia project KAŠTELIR was to explore a new method of working with locals and narrative-style writing to communicate tourist value through the exploration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). A key proposal is the design of an ethnobotany or plant checklist for sustainable tourism development.

## Abstract

With rising tourism interest in cultural heritage, destination management organisations, museums and other cultural institutions are seeking methods of unlocking the intangible cultural heritage of local residents and sharing that before it is lost. This is specific knowledge of the uses and practices of disappearing spaces in towns, of plants and their uses as foodstuffs, and in clothing and of work practices that were more in-tune with local, sustainable production. This contribution outlines new

methods for building the ethnographic museum as a museum of stories, and proposes a model that explores narrative through literary travel writing for a new public.

### Abstract scientifico (IT).

A seguito del crescente interesse per il patrimonio culturale a fine turistico, i musei mirano a rivitalizzare e salvaguardare il patrimonio culturale immateriale locale prima che vada perduto. Tale patrimonio si basa sulla conoscenza di usi e pratiche dello spazio urbano a rischio d'estinzione, della flora locale e dei prodotti alimentari. Tale patrimonio include anche l'abbigliamento e pratiche di lavoro più in sintonia con la produzione locale e sostenibile. Con riferimento al post-umanesimo, basato su una lettura di Deleuze dell'etica di Spinoza, questa ricerca mira a fornire nuove metodologie per la costruzione dell'ethnopôle e propone un modello di trasmissione che esplora la narrativa attraverso la scrittura letteraria di viaggio per un pubblico più esteso.

### Keywords

tourism, travel writing, museum, stories, ethnobotany, development, ethnopôle

### Introduction

Many destinations possess rare cases of cultural heritage, but face challenges how to connect cultural heritage and tourism responsibly. On the other hand, established destinations report that further developing and managing heritage tourism destinations has become more challenging as new technologies shift to make users consumers rather than creators of culture and artefacts. However, widespread access to the internet via Wi-Fi and smart phone ownership has created a public that museums can reach with new digital products. The new researched and narrated cultural writing proposed and presented here fits well with these new technologies. The stories can be delivered via weblogs, podcasts and eBooks. They can be viewed online in web sites that present photographs of heritage artefacts and places along with the stories. The stories are not travel journalism nor promotional materials for tourism products but rather are a form of writing that engages readers through character, narrative, and elapsed time. The author progresses through the tourism spaces using routes that visitors can follow themselves. Experiences that visitors can share are recounted thoughtfully.

With the pressure from the technologies only to consume homogenized product, this research engages local citizens, tourism product designers and customers in the process of local place-making and hence to become co-creators to maintain their diverse intangible cultural heritage. Diversity, uniqueness and sustainability are essential components of successful destinations. Eliciting and sharing ethnobotanical knowledge fits well in this scope. Despite the fact that the World Tourism Organization suggests that before Covid-19 more than 40% of all international tourists were "cultural tourists", growth in this sector was marked by fragmentation into a number of subtypes and niches (Richards, 2018), which brings new challenges and opportunities for development of new tourism products, also those related to plants and other natural heritage. The goal of cultural heritage tourism is to maximize benefits for the local environment, for the local culture and heritage, and to minimize negative impacts. Heritage managers around the world are aiming at exploiting tourism revenues to maintain heritage properties. Despite well-developed theoretical concepts of cultural and heritage tourism, there is often lack of on the ground knowledge. Many heritage places have not yet recognized tourism as a tool for heritage management and preservation, while on the other hand many of heritage tourism destinations face many problems, such as a lack of authenticity and tradition, dissatisfaction of the local inhabitants, image problems, negative environmental effects, and lack of investments and image problems. To respond to these challenges, destinations have tried to re-

position themselves by using different tools and approaches. One of them is travel writing, which includes a bricolage of discourse practices and widely diverse texts (Culbert, 2018), in which creators write about their user experiences of travelling in other places (Robinson, 2004). In these travel writers' texts, which can also be valuable historical, ethnological and anthropological sources (Kavrečič, 2011), "views and gazes express a narrative space from which narrator and reader scrutinise, judge and categorise the varied cultures and societies they explore" (Alú and Hill, 2018, 1). This is one of the reasons that travel writing has a significant persuasive power in tourism (McWha et al., 2016) and is worth adopting in place-making, in further developing of sustainable tourism practices and sustainable destinations. By employing travel writing beautiful stories, which are significant in product and destination creation, can be made. Further on in the article, the creation of stories through the method of literary travel writing and through the concept of the ethnopôle will be presented.

### Great stories make great museums

Experiences of tourists are basically stories (McCabe & Foster, 2006) and tourists are constantly in search of new ones, which are expected to be different, unique, special, original and authentic. With rising tourism interest in tangible and intangible cultural heritage, destination management organizations, museums, galleries and cultural associations are seeking methods of unlocking the intangible cultural heritage of local residents and sharing that before it is lost. This is a fragile knowledge of the uses and practices of disappearing urban space, of plants and foodstuffs (Bessièrè 2013), of clothing and of work practices that were more in-tune with local, sustainable production. This project outlines new methodologies in creating intangible heritage for the online museum, and proposes a model for transmission that explores narrative knowing through literary travel writing. Using narrative to transmit knowledge is beginning to find its way into academic journal publication, too, for example the introduction of this article (Wassler & Talarico, 2021), where it is powerfully used to create emotion alongside the communication of a context for the investigation.

Under the EU ERASMUS+ Teaching Mobility, Mansfield developed and taught innovative data collection methods in France and the UK. This methodology draws on ethnographic interviewing and interpretative phenomenological analysis to engage local citizens in sharing and in taking authorship of their own intangible cultural heritage (ICH). These walking and writing workshops equip local people with social, narrative and technology skills for continuing the ethnological and auto-ethnographic building processes. This fulfils identity creation in the cultural exchange of a new tourism environment (Mansfield 2020).

New knowledge-management (KM) systems and narrative methods are combined to build an open archive of cultural heritage using voices, recipes, music, bio-diversity management and stories. With to the design of a mobile-friendly document specification, these cultural artefacts can be shared within the new museums and on the walking trails developed around heritage themes. The case study and exemplar for this article is the development of a re-usable botanicals checklist for local tourism stakeholders to explore their region's own ethnobotany to improve the tourism offer with local food products and other plant-based interest. Application of this to a place inquiry using literary travel writing for tourism in Newquay, Cornwall, UK, is given in this article as an example for re-use.

### The Heritage Visitor Centre: Ethnobotany and Ethnopôle

Ethnobotany at its most visible for the tourist can be seen in local botanical gardens and ethnography museums; consider for example, the Ljubljana Botanical Garden, Slovenia, established in 1810 and containing more than 4500 species, or the onion museum in Roscoff, France, whilst the seaweed

collection company in Roscoff provides an example of entrepreneurship that combines knowledge management, research and locally available well-being products from marine vegetation to create a new and growing business. The literary museum called Prežihov Voranc Cottage, dedicated to the writer Lovro Kuhar Prežihov Voranc in Kotlje, Slovenia (Picture 1), for example, has a small garden near the old traditional cottage (Picture 2).



Picture 1: Prežih's old house, today the memorial museum called the Prežihov Voranc Cottage (Prežihova bajta), 19 July 2019

Such collections, gardens and museums vary a lot in their designs, features and purpose, and may – when recognized as flagship attractions – attract substantial numbers of tourists, e. g. Kew Gardens in the UK or Monet's Garden in France (Ballantyne et al., 2008). The council and land management authorities, though, are best-placed to provide the macro-environment to protect plant diversity.





Picture 2: A small garden next to the Prežihov Voranc Cottage, 19 July 2019






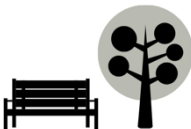
Plants for artisanal food production at a local level is the first, most attractive integration of ethnobotany into the tourism value chain. Locally-occurring plants, or ones easily adapted to the climate, soil, knowledge and labour availability are of prime importance to local stakeholders in, for example, a seaside town. Food from plant material offers local makers a safer choice than from animal sources because of lower risk of food poisoning, and no viral transmission as experienced in the H1N1 virus from pork and chicken Ebola virus from meat and more recently SARS and Coronavirus COVID-19 after zoonotic events in a wholesale food market of animal products.

The heritage visitor centre or ethnopôle often presents tourists with a view of food production before the innovations in chemical control and oil-harvested monocultures. In the UK, a prime example of a monoculture is the planting of Italian ryegrass as a fodder crop for meat and wool production across the whole of the country. This grass provides the tourist destination image (TDI) of Britain as a green and pleasant land. However, this is not a native species. It is harvested in a way to prevent tree growth and to suppress wild flower meadow plants that would maintain health in a range of species, including farmed animals, humans, and wildlife.

Finally, nectar-bearing plants for pollinators, for example, bees, offer no direct food source for humans and are thus neglected in commercial planting regimes. For sustainability, tourist development must find a way of making these plants attractive culturally to be consumed in a different way. An example of this is Lily of the Valley, or Teardrops (“solzice” or “šmarnice” in Slovene), from the literature (a short story and a collection of short stories titled *Solzice*) of Lovro Kuhar, penname Prežihov Voranc in Slovenia, which has symbolic value from the cultural capital of the region.

## Developing an Ethnobotany Checklist for Sustainable Well-being

The French initiative, Sites of Remarkable Taste, shows other tourism developers and tourism consultants that symbolic cultural capital needs research and committed content marketing in order to be noticed by the travelling public. To make this knowledge transferrable, this article offers an initial checklist, below (Picture 3), as a guide for those who wish to identify plant products to make the local tourism offer more authentic, unique and more environmentally sustainable for their town and region.

THE ETHNOBOTANY CHECKLIST	
	Eat and Drink. Usually a main carbohydrate foodstuff, which can be prepared for both fine dining and as a tourist snack takeaway. Well-being must be incorporated in the meal preparation, eg avoiding added refined sugar and other allergens. Seek to appeal to emerging food-consumption choices in new publics, eg vegetarian, vegan, non-alcohol options.
	Food for pollinators to maintain the plant and botanic life forms. These plants will require education panels, and links to local symbolic cultural capital.
	Recyclable plant products. Raised social awareness of whose labour and knowledge is used and is valued in the collection, processing and re-use of the plant by-products.
	Food taste or scent – a local herb, dating from ancient times, perhaps held in a local place-name or the name of a river. Symbolic – positive with local connection to culture and literature.
	Apparel. Wearable botanics, created and made with local craft skills. Institutions for this knowledge to be preserved enhanced and transmitted as part of local culture in colleges, workshops and through courses offered by regional universities.
	Shelter - building with botanics and using local production knowledge and labour. Visitor attraction, equipment or building made of wood. Eg old wine press, bench, a tree park or arboretum. Wooden buildings using local timber rather than imported timber. Sponsorship and promotion of local timber and forestry businesses brought into the tourism space.

Picture 3: The Ethnobotany Checklist, Mansfield and Potočník Topler 2021.

## The Process of Creating the Resources for an Online Museum

Culture and heritage can stimulate processes of rural and urban regeneration (Zukin, 1995). In the making of places, creativity has become a significant strategy and tourism crucial for the



implementation of various creative strategies (Richards, 2020), including travel writing, its methods and techniques. Later, the process of creating the resources for the heritage visitor centre is presented in detail.

### 1 Identifying Respondents and Rich Locations

In earlier research, the concept of the 'toureme' was proposed as a rich moment and space of tourist value (Mansfield 2018). Now this can be extended by drawing on local knowledge by inviting local workers and professionals in the heritage and tourism industry to contribute their tacit knowledge. This list for creating a semi-structured interview includes the following themes: (i) Identifying their places of work and their routes across the urban space. (ii) Applying these lines of flight to maps from the archive. (iii) Involving locals in a discussion of the topography of the town, entry points, which include, for example the bus station, car parks where visitors arrive, existing tourist attractions and amenities. (iv) Eliciting knowledge of the geomorphology of urban space, with its slopes, geology, river access, and public space to assist the researching travel writer to map out a walking route for discovering the town. Many European towns grew up on the south-facing banks of rivers, where the running water supply providing drinking water, irrigation and the removal of waste downstream. The south-facing slope in Europe provides the sunnier aspect for fruit-growing and connects with the specific theme of this inquiry, ethnobotany.

Planning and building a travel writer's literary *hexis* (please see synthesis below) follows the contour of the European town from its river first up the slope away from the water source to the highest point in the town. This key tourist plateau can be a monument or public building. Then the elliptical route tracks back down to the water's edge. Along the way, 6 points of interest where local respondents can be met are noted and documented by the travel writer for inclusion in the synthesised text.

### 2 Interviewing and Recording

- a. The theory and uses of ethnographic interviewing. Narrative techniques are employed by the researcher-writer to elicit richer data. Designing questions. Using walking and writing workshops.
- b. Technical use of audio recorders indoors and out in the field. Play-back and transcription advice and training is given during workshops.

Workshop concludes with: Recording sessions of interviews with invited respondents. These voice recordings form part of the new archive for the ethnopôle, and present data for synthesis by the researching travel writer.

### 3 Analysis Methods, Synthesis and Delivery of Resources

Using the recordings from interview workshop explain and complete pilot analysis of 4 types:

- i. Emotion and Value Content with word proximity
- ii. Places of Emergence - links to the town's own archive
- iii. Gerund coding and memo-writing
- iv. Critical hermeneutics

### 4 Digital Delivery

Design of the travel writer's output documents for delivery ought to consider ease-of-use on smart-phones. One prototype was designed called the Ramble Strip which avoided the user experience (UX) problems of PDFs on smaller screens:

### The Ramble Strip

Narrative methods, digital photography, reproduction of old postcards and advertising. Using QR codes for smartphone users to download from scanned barcode.

### Audio-book and podcast

Recorded and edited using Audacity free software. Convert to m4v or mp3 for distribution as audio-books on Google Play Store, or as downloads from the museum's own knowledge management system, thus providing a virtual local museum.

### Using Google Sites and Google Docs as a free Knowledge Management System

Often small local museums are not well-funded so a simple start-up knowledge-management system can be designed and made public through free software from Google, called Google Sites and Google Drive.

### Synthesis using Hexis

The literary travel writing stage proposed in this research is innovative. It develops literary travel writing to create a document that is impactful, emotive and has affect for its readers. These readers, rather than just the scientific academic audience, are also the public, the tourism stakeholders and the local city council. The final synthesis, though, requires that the author-researcher has planned the literary writing from the outset in a process drawn from Aristotle's concept of *hexis* (Aristotle, 350 BC, Breton 2019, 78–79), sometimes also called diathesis. The prefix *dia-* denotes a cross, diagonal thinking. The author-researcher conceives a plan of their knowledges of the stopping points or plateaux of inquiry, and the themes under examination in the project, eg ethnobotany in this work. The hexis the researcher creates as their plan can be visualised as an ellipse or hexagon of 6 points. These might be a theme or a point of interest in the town, an address, a plateau on a guided walk. Visualising a spatialised plan, this method proposes, maintains a spatial consideration in the research practice. It forms a disposition of knowledge elements all adjacent to, and available to the author during synthesis, yet in map form these become an elliptical route reaching out into the urban space and returning. This route of hexis, with cross readings, maps onto the town to form a walking route that the reader-visitor can discover from the travel text.

To help visualise this formation of a hexis, consider this section from the literary travel writing of the Slovenian author, Dušan Šarotar on his exploration of Galway (2014 original). A key element of literary travel writing is that the travel writer reveals their own identity (Mansfield 2020) to engage the readers in an emotional and empathic relationship with the quest for recording the places explored:

Kylemore Abbey, sem ponovil v mislih še jaz, da ne bi pozabil, čeprav sem bil prepričan, da sem o tem kraju nekje ob temnem jezeru, skriteh pod gorami, že slišal, ko sem si na hitro ustvaril sliko, domišljijski kroki, pisateljsko metodo, podobno, kot počnejo slikarji, od katerih sem se morebiti tega tudi naučil, kroki torej običajno uporabljam pri komponiranju svojih tekstov, to je edini razlog, sem pomislil, zakaj se zdaj tukaj vozim, a za to potrebujem mir, počivam, ne spim niti nisem buden, ko sestavljam kompozicije iz stavkov, primikam in obračam besede, poskušam oceniti dolžino teksta, nekje globoko zadaj se mi besedilo obarva z različnimi barvami, običajno so črne linije dolge, goste, potem jim sledijo čiste bele ploskve, ki pa so polne pomena, breztežnega pomena, poglavja se prelivajo od rjavih, sivih, zelenih do temnordečih tonov, /.../ (Šarotar 2014, 29)

Source: Šarotar, Dušan. 2014. *Panorama*. Ljubljana: Beletrina

'Kylemore Abbey, I now repeated the name to myself so I wouldn't forget it, although I was sure I had already heard about this place, somewhere beside a dark lake, hidden beneath the mountains, as I made a quick mental picture of it, an imaginary sketch — a method used by writers that's not unlike what painters do, and maybe I learned it from them — I normally use a sketch when I compose my texts; this is the only reason I'm on this road right now, I thought, and I need peace to do it; I'm at rest, neither asleep nor awake, when I assemble my compositions out of sentences; I move words around and invert them, try to estimate the length of the text, and somewhere, deep in the background, the text takes on different colours for me; the black lines are usually long and dense; next come planes of pure white, which are nevertheless full of meaning, weightless meaning; the chapters blend together, from brown, grey and green to shades of dark red' (Šarotar 2016, 39)

The disposition of the *hexis* in the imaginary must be prepared and be available to the writer-researcher during the place inquiry fieldwork, and later during the synthesis from the fieldnotes, recordings, photographs and collected cultural artefacts. The *hexis* is modified by the emotional experience of being in the field in the town under study, too. New dialogic links, cross-readings, will be made in the imaginary between *hexis* elements which are not necessarily adjacent in the original hex plan. Notice how Šarotar seeks out additional adjectives and shapes of colour to give his *hexis* a topological dimension 'the black lines are usually long and dense' (Šarotar 2016, 39) so that it contains more than a flattened map on the surface of the town.

An example of this planning is shown below for the current project work, which is to synthesise a literary travel writing piece from fieldwork in Newquay in Cornwall, UK. This example of literary travel writing is for the tourist information office to communicate to their public via an online museum space. It was collected by field observation and through hour-long, semi-structured interviews with local staff in the heritage and hospitality industries (Mansfield 2019). These skills could be taught as a university Masters programme. Pilot teaching has been successfully carried out online by the authors during a summer school and in face-to-face workshops at the University of Maribor - one of the courses designed is also documented (Potočnik Topler, 2020).

Within the travel story the writer carries with them a copy of an autobiographical work by an author, who lived or worked in the area and whose writing is known by locals. This method of enriching the travel writer's journey is well known by practitioners, for example W G Sebald and Sven Lindqvist, but it was first presented as a method for new literary travel writers and researchers by (Mansfield, Shepherd & Wassler 2021) in their work on the port city of Cherbourg.

### Field notes

Field notes, made by the travel writer whilst researching, provide authentic updates from the tourism spaces. Presenting the notes as a travel story also enables the writer to communicate their emotions directly from these spaces. You will see in the following excerpt how a switch into a narrative form signals to the readers that the writer was actually there. The narrative form uses past

tenses and the I-narrator recounting the trip; look for the moment of change when you reach 'When I stepped out', below:

This is an excerpt from the field notes of the trip from Ljubljana to the Prežihov Voranc Cottage in Podgora:

*To reach Ravne na Koroškem and from there Podgora, you can take the regional roads Ljubljana - Domžale-Trojane (you must stop here for the best traditional Trojane doughnuts) -Vransko (restaurant Grof is a great choice if you need a decent meal or just a quick bite on the way)- Velenje (in the past the city was called Titovo Velenje – Tito's Velenje, here you can stop to visit the Velenje castle, the Museum Of Coal Mining, every September the Pippi Longstocking Festival is organized here, and by the way Velenje is a twin city of British Neath Port Talbot), - Huda luknja (a cave interesting for speleologists and folklorists because of many stories that have evolved around the cave), Mislinja (birth house of the painter Jože Tisnikar)-Slovenj Gradec (beautiful old town with the Church of St. Elisabeth and the regional museum and gallery, you can reach the skiing resort Kope from Slovenj Gradec in 20 minutes)-Ravne na Koroškem (Ravne, in the past Gutenstein, is a town with a steelworks tradition – today Forma Viva reminds us of that, here you can visit a Castle and a park around it, a gallery and a museum, and go swimming (all year round) or skiing in the winter, in the surroundings you have ideal spots for hiking, tasting must, home-made salami, cottage cheese with pumpkin oil and onions and home baked rye bread) or take the highway from Ljubljana to Arja vas (a stop in Trojane is a must also in this case), and continue on the regional road Arja vas – Velenje – Huda luknja - Slovenj Gradec – Kotlje – Ravne na Koroškem - Podgora.*

Page | 335

*Whichever direction you choose, you will be accompanied by breath-taking sights of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps (the highest mountain of this range is 2558m high Grintovec) green woods, churches on hill tops, hayracks and wheat or cornfields along the roads, and further on when you enter the Savinja Valley, large fields of hops. Also you can't avoid winding roads. John Denver's song Take me Home, Country Roads will most definitely come to your mind. And if you like country music, you must google the country music singer Milan Kamnik from Koroška and look for the songs Za mušter/Koroška pesem, Skurne besiede, Grta pa douta, Fr'šolnga, Koroški swing on YouTube. He sings in the Prežih's (Mežica Valley) dialect about the everyday lives of the locals. Since the drive from Ljubljana to Podgora lasts around 1h and 45 min by car despite only 111km, it is advisable to be equipped with good music. During weekdays the roads can be quite busy, but it gets better on weekends. Still, it is good to stop in Trojane, a small village that represents the invisible border between the Ljubljana and the Styria (Štajerska) regions. Most people stop here for big delicious doughnuts – "trojanski krofi", but you can also grab a meal in one of the oldest Slovenian restaurants with huge parking space and a nice terrace with hills view. The place does not look anything special, in fact, there are two ordinary buildings with a narrow road in between, a big parking area, and long lines for doughnuts, but this is a place that you must taste. And smell. When I stepped out of the car that Friday, 19 July 2019 to get some refreshment because it was hot and humid as hell, the first thing that reached me was the smell of doughnuts. If you by any chance decided you will have freshly fried doughnuts later, their tempting smell will turn this later into now – even if you have a strong character. No use fighting the aroma. And the recipe? It was invented by the cook Rajka Konjšek in 1961 and it has remained a well-kept secret. Ladies in white caps and coats work as if it were a matter of life and death.*

The field notes make the story belong to, and become part of the tourism space explored. This writing process, explored by literary theorists, is called deictic reference. It also places the readers in this tourism space.



## Conclusion

Our article emphasizes the importance of theoretically-grounded travel writing methods, especially the process of building the ethnopôle, as a significant basis for place-making and developing sustainable tourism destinations whilst still respecting the growth of the writers' own identities. Since there still remains a lack of understanding on how travel writing works on the ground, in this article methods and processes are elaborated on, along with examples for fieldwork. The most significant contribution of this article is in the presentation and application of an innovative method of literary travel writing to place-making, sustainable tourism development and personal identity growth. To encourage the development of sustainable tourism further, it is significant that, in the future, tourism plays an active role in supporting the local community to engage in the sustainable or at least more sustainable business practices also with employing innovative methods of travel writing along with new technologies and new media to use various ways of promotion and to inform the locals, tourism professionals and tourists as well about preserving the cultural and natural heritage. In the long term, the destinations need to use the resources strategically to attract tourists and at the same time keep the locals satisfied.

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