A portrait of the Arts Centre in rural Ireland: an inter-disciplinary mix-methods approach.

Amanda Jane Graham

Department of Sociology

Maynooth University

MLitt

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to assess the role of the Art Centre as a socially enriching resource in small Irish towns, and a social hub for rural societies. In order to make an assessment I drew on theory and expertise from across the humanities and the social sciences. My study makes some amendment for the lack of research in the area and counters some of the difficulties in 'measuring' the value of the arts in society. The study adds to current knowledge on the arts and culture within rural communities, a topic that rarely receives research or policy attention. It gives an encompassing panorama of the regional Art Centre, the communities that utilise it, and the stakeholders whose operational involvement enables programming and events. Two extensive case studies were conducted in two counties over an eighteen-week period. The field studies took the form of research residencies from the perspective of the visual arts. I created two new bodies of artwork that were part of three exhibitions, two solo and one group show. The artwork addressed difficult social issues. The aim was to investigate the capacity of the arts to engage people and prompt discourse and interactional exchange on difficult personal issues. The engagement with, and responses to the shows were used as an entry point to reflect on the wider role of the Arts Centre in the community. The data gathered included: (a) observation and informal interviewing of Art Centre attendees, (b) semi-structured interviews with the Art Centre and local authority staff, (c) secondary data, e.g. Arts Council of Ireland reviews and publications, national newspapers, Central Statistics Office data, historical and tourist information.

The investigation into the community's engagement revealed that the Art Centre serves an important role as a social hub. Moreover, the study revealed that engagement with the arts in a local town can be socially inclusive in terms of engagement with, and

through, age diversity, people with cognitive disabilities, the online community, and cross-cultural engagement. Finally, my study recommends the inclusion of arts and cultural activities in Social Prescribing programmes and the appointment of a cultural liaison coordinator to work as a linchpin between the Art Centre, the Local Arts Office and the Social Inclusion Office.

Introduction

The sociology of the arts in general is underdeveloped in the Irish context. This is particularly the case regarding rural Ireland. Arts Centres are relatively new additions to towns in the rural hinterland and yet there has been virtually no attention paid by social researchers to their integration into the townscape, or into their social and cultural impacts (Keating 2009; Mackin 2016). This investigation will explore the impact of the Arts Centre on its locality through a comparative analysis of two Arts Centres, and one artist-led gallery and studio space in two rural towns. The fieldwork took the form of three visual art exhibitions/ethnographic residencies ranging from four to six weeks in duration. The visual art exhibitions consisted of autoethnographic artworks that are centred around the societal taboos of serious illness, palliative care, bereavement and domestic violence. The aim was, to analyse if the Arts Centre through the artwork displayed has the potential to create a platform for discussion around difficult social experiences and issues. Bericat (2016: 496) notes that in social experience, 'without exception, emotions are present and play a fundamental role'. He identifies that:

> In collective phenomena in which intense passion occupies a central place (e.g. festivals, sporting competitions, the response to terrorist actions and political revolutions), as well as in more intimate social relations, such as within the family and in friendships, which are charged with lasting though often almost imperceptible feelings.

Bericat refers to Denzin's analysis of emotion as;

> A lived, believed-in, situated, temporally embodied experience that radiates through a person's stream of consciousness, is felt in and runs through his body, and, in the process of being lived, plunges the person and his associates into a wholly new and transformed reality – the reality of a world that is being constituted by the emotional experience (Denzin 2009; 1984: 66; Bericat 2016:496).

The literature review positions this thesis as an artist/ethnographic enquiry that encompasses many source literatures deriving from social and culturally based studies. The intention is to evaluate texts in relatable terms to the arts centre. In order to develop an interdisciplinary analysis of how communities connect and mediate with their local Arts Centre, this section will include synthesis literature on cultural theory and the social meaning of the arts in society. The Arts Council of Ireland (2019: 74) have characterized their approach in Ireland as currently consistent with the approach taken by the Arts Council in the United Kingdom. For this reason, the project will draw on British research on culture and policies. The chapter has three sections concerning:

- The structure of local arts funding
- The facility to control the Art Centres artistic content and activities.
- Community participation and a sense of belonging

The need for comprehensive research in the field of art practice is acknowledged by Belfiore and Bennett (2010) particularly, an inter-disciplinary approach of the humanities and social sciences, to progress the arts impact debate. Despite extensive research, Belfiore accepts there are difficulties regarding the possibility of actually "measuring" any of these aspects (Belfiore and Bennett 2010; Belfiore 2006; Cowling 2004; Reeves 2002). This thesis by taking a bottom-up approach to the role of the Art Centre in small rural, Irish towns, will add to the research on the arts within rural communities. The approach is interdisciplinary, combining Fine Arts and Sociological approaches. The study investigates the Arts Centre and its engagement with the community over extended periods from the joint standpoint of visual artist/ethnographer.

The capacity of the arts to transform the lives of individuals and to enhance society appears to be influenced by some unquestioned conjectures described in a speech given in 2003 by the then British Minister for the Arts, Estelle Morris:

> I know that Arts and Culture make a contribution to health, to education, to crime reduction, to strong communities, to the economy and to the nation's well-being but I don't always know how to evaluate it or describe it. We have to find a language and a way of describing its worth. It's the only way we'll secure the greater support we need. (Morris 2003; Belfiore and Bennett 2010).

Belfiore and Bennett acknowledges a need for further research and accordingly, invites scholarly input from the humanities suggesting that :

> Despite the marginal role that humanistic perspectives have so far had in shaping the arts impact debates, there might be advantages to a humanities-based approach to this area of enquiry, especially where the need to better grasp the role of ideas and beliefs in the policy-making process is concerned (Belfiore and Bennett 2010).

Dean, Furness, Verrier, Lennon, Bennett & Spencer (2018:284) confirm 'that different researchers bring different skills and experiences to their reading and analysis and demonstrates how the combination of such experiences and skills in research teams can bring exponential benefits'. Therefore analysis from the humanities would probably be the most challenging perspective and take the broadest sociological view of the data (Dean et al. 2018). As an arts professional, this project guarantees a humanities-based approach that affords a highly contextualised and embedded perspective, producing an interdisciplinary analysis.

Twenty years ago, formal arts and cultural infrastructure was virtually non-existent in rural Ireland (Keating 2009). However, there has been a significant evolution and expansion in Ireland's cultural policy since the 1990s. In 1995, the Arts Council devised and implemented a series of national plans (Bayliss 2004). Projects were evaluated based on artistic need, population distribution, and levels of local government support.

More than ten of the projects funded under the scheme involved the provision of new purpose-built art venues, mostly in towns in the rural hinterland (Keating 2009; Mackin 2016).

At the same time, rural Ireland has observed profound community transformations. Many banks and post offices- often seen as essential to the viability of a rural town- have closed (Power 2018). There has been a significant increase in migration out of rural towns, countered to some extent by in-migration. Foreign nationals account for 5.8% of the total population residing in 'pure' rural areas with specific rural locations having a significantly higher proportion, mainly due to the establishment of asylum centres (O'Sullivan 2013: i). As a result, racial and ethnic diversity is now a characteristic of many small towns that were once culturally homogenous.

Since the early 1990s, stellar work has been accomplished by art professionals to consolidate the local Arts Centre within the rural hinterland. There is a significant rise in arts audiences and participation in rural Ireland. In 2015 the Arts Council of Ireland (ACI 2015:5) acknowledged these increases, noting that:

> A total of 65% of the adult population indicate that they attended at least one arts-related event in the previous twelve months. This marks an increase of 9% over the figure of 56% recorded in 2013.

Four years on, the new rural residents appear to have added to the arts audiences and navigated to their local Art Centre as a focal point for community engagement. The fact that an Arts Centre is a neutral space (unlike, for instances, places of religious worship), and most events are free implies that it is accessible to a broad audience. My research is motivated by an interest in analyzing the opportunities and challenges that

the new rural demographic has in terms of engaging with arts and culture in and through the local Art Centre.

This thesis sets out to assess the role of the Arts Centre as a socially enriching resource in small Irish towns, and a social hub for rural societies. The approach is interdisciplinary. It brings together expertise from the humanities and the social sciences. It offers an insight to an under-researched topic and goes some way to addressing difficulties in 'measuring' the value of the arts in society (Belfiore and Bennett 2010). Furthermore, the study rectifies the concerns of Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) that arts and culture within rural communities rarely receive research or policy attention.

The research probes the 'beneficial effects of the arts that represent distinct developments of the notion of dramatic catharsis' (Aristotle 384/3–322/1 BC; Belfiore & Bennett 2007:143). It evaluates the role of the arts as a promoter of 'well-being, such as enriched experience, enjoyment, meaning, bonding, and aesthetic appreciation' (Lomas 2016; Tymoszuk, Perkins, Spero, Williamson & Fancourt 2019:2). The data gathered surveyed the public response to artwork concerned with domestic abuse, serious illness and bereavement. The Arts Centre, as a social hub, was comprehensively analyzed through an audit into the community's levels and range of engagement. There was a strong focus on studying social inclusion and well-being through age diversity, cognitive disabilities, the online community, cross-cultural engagement and gender inequalities.

In order to make the assessment, extensive case studies were carried out in three art spaces in two counties over eighteen weeks. The first case study was in County A and took place in two locations, the Kellystown Gallery Space[i] and the Kellystown Arts Centre. The Local Authority is the only stakeholder in this county. In, county B, the case study was in the Brennanstown Arts Centre, this Art Centre receives funding from both the Arts Council of Ireland and the Local Authority. The field studies took the form of research residencies from the perspective of the visual arts. The role of artist/ethnographer afforded an informed and interpretive panorama to analyse the Art Centres community. The project involved the creation of two new bodies of artwork that were part of three exhibitions, two solo and one group show. The artwork addressed difficult social issues, inspired by concerns about domestic abuse, serious illness and bereavement. The aim was to investigate the capacity of the arts to engage people and prompt discourse and interactional exchange on difficult personal issues. The engagement with, and responses to the shows were used as an entry point to reflect on the wider role of the Arts Centre in the community.

The research interrogated the Arts Centre's communities. The communities were conceptualized as falling into two broad categories i.e., the community that avails of the Arts Centres programming and utilises its services, and those that are responsible for providing funding, programming and exhibiting artists. The fieldwork employed the ethnographic methods of participant observation in three art spaces, i.e., (a) observation and informal interviewing of Arts Centre attendees, (b) semi-structured interviews with the Arts Centre and local authority staff, (c) secondary data, e.g. Arts Council of Ireland reviews and publications, national newspapers, Central Statistics Office data, historical and tourist information.

The impact that stakeholders such as the Local Authority and the Arts Council of Ireland have on the Arts Centre, the disparity in arts provision nationally, and the positive and negative contribution of elected representatives are scrutinized to clearly depict the Arts Centre's daily reality. Alongside this analysis, the well-being of personnel working in the art sector and the adverse effects on individuals from years of under-resourcing are outlined. High levels of resilience are required of staff in this sector. Additionally, the research project investigates the ramifications of the low funding priority accorded the arts by the central government and assesses how the fallout is affecting stakeholders. There is evidence of the funding shortfalls inadvertently compromising the well-being of Arts Centre management.

I have recommended that Social Prescribing protocols in Ireland include referral of clients to arts and cultural activities. I have also identified the potential for a cultural liaison coordinator working as a linchpin between the Arts Centre, the Local Arts Office and the Social Inclusion Office (SIO). The role would bring expertise from the social sciences and the contemporary arts to build a comprehensive social inclusion programme through arts and culture. This would have the beneficial effect of expanding the definite scope of participation in the arts to new community members.

The thesis advances our knowledge about rural arts audiences and levels of community engagement with the Arts Centre in small Irish towns. It pinpoints the regional contribution Arts Centres make to their locality and the challenges they face. It advocates for greater social solidarity through the establishment of interactive communication to assertively support regional Arts Centres. The study generates recommendations regarding how the profile of the arts can be raised at local and central

government levels and how we might make better efforts to achieve equality in arts provision nationally.

Chapter 1: Situating the Arts Centre in the literature

(1) Introduction

In 1948 the United Nations inaugurated the Declaration of Human Rights, with Article 27 asserting 'that everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community and enjoy the arts' (United Nations 1948). For decades the central government has been aware of the arts as a catalyst for well-being and diversity. Regardless of this, the arts in Ireland have been a very late edition to Government policy. The Arts Council of Ireland was established in 1951 (Bayliss 2004). The role of Minister for the Arts was only secured in 1973 by now president of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins (SAI). For many decades the arts in Ireland have been hindered by limited funding. The legacy of this includes inadequate artistic education and development, a deficit of skilled arts management staff and generally poor pay throughout the sector (ACI, 1999). Most notably, a permanent infrastructure of cultural venues has until very recently been virtually absent outside of Dublin, Cork and, to a lesser extent, Galway (Quinn 2006; Bayliss 2004:821). There has been significant evolution and expansion in Irelands cultural policy since the 1990s, in 1995, the Arts Council devised and implemented a series of national plans (Bayliss 2004). The arts also benefited from increased funding, with €304 million allocated to the art plan for 2002-06 (Bayliss 2004).

Arts and culture in Ireland are currently at a juncture because since the 1990s there has been significant work accomplished in establishing arts provision on a nationwide basis. The then Minister for Arts spearheaded the Cultural Development Incentive

Scheme (CDIS) a European Union financed initiative. The scheme sought proposals from across the country for infrastructural funds to support the arts. Projects were evaluated based on artistic need, population distribution, and levels of local government support. More than ten of the projects funded under the scheme involved the provision of new purpose-built art venues, mostly in towns in the rural hinterland (Keating 2009; Mackin 2016). However, in over twenty years, the research on these art centres and their communities is virtually nonexistent. The actual value of the public art space to its community and locality is unknown. The lack of analysis is an issue internationally, Anwar McHenry (2009) confirms the notable silences in the literature that considers the contribution of the arts to social well-being in rural areas. Despite several commentators suggesting that the arts may play a crucial role in promoting social well-being in this regard (Kingma 2002; Matarasso 1997; Mills & Brown 2004; Williams 1994; Anwar McHenry 2009). It is a gap which this research attempts to rectify. The aim is to assess if the art centre is meeting its social inclusion mandate by describing the contribution it makes to cohesion and the well-being of the community.

(1.1) The Structure of Local Arts Funding

Rural Ireland is witnessing a steady increase in new Irish citizenship. Cities are expanding, and they have been encompassing and fusing with the dormitory towns of the commuter belts. As of 2016, there were just over half a million (535,475) non-Irish nationals residing in Ireland, representing over 200 nationalities, (CSO, 2017). The first case study was in county A it has one of the highest non-Irish populations in the country; 26% of the population are migrants making their home in the county. The second county B has a non-Irish population of 11.6% (CSO 2016). The study will evaluate if migrant communities are navigating to the arts centre as a community focal

point and if they are active participants in the art centres community, and adding to rural audiences.

Figure 1.1 Percentage of non-Irish nationals by county, 2011-2016

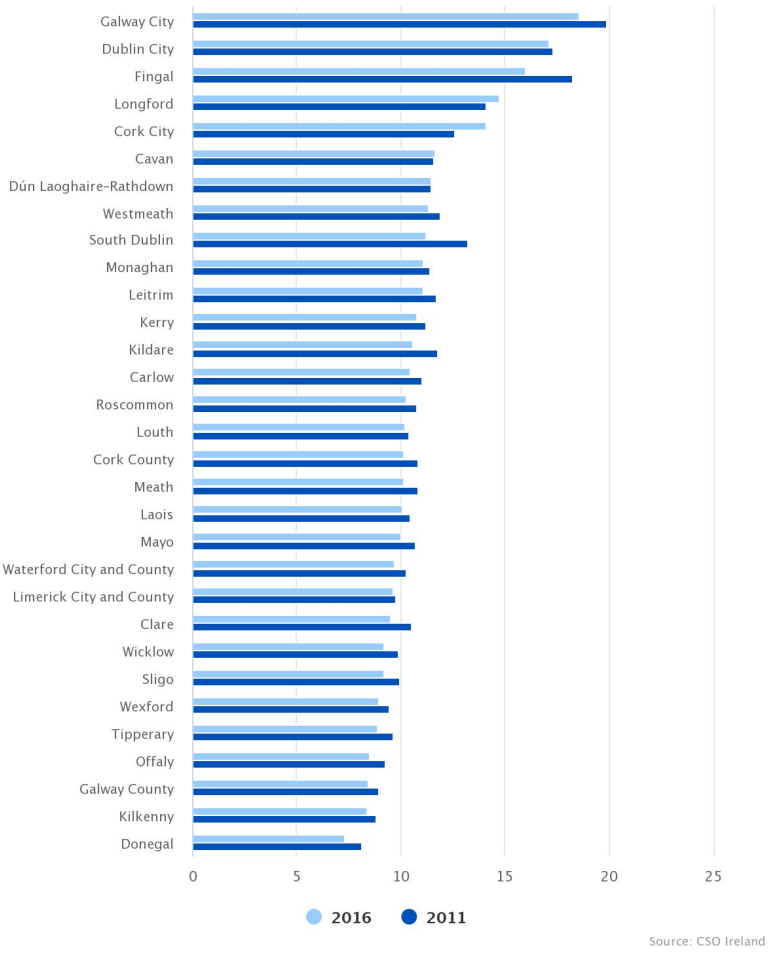

Figure 1 The percentage of non-Irish nationals by county.

Considering, the concern expressed by arts officers in the National Economic and Social Forum in 2007 that they did not feel equipped to carry out social inclusion work because 'it is difficult to obtain sustained funding, and additional staff, specifically to encourage greater inclusion in the arts'(NESF 2007). There have been increases in rural populations that appear to be contributing to the rise in arts audiences and

participation in rural Ireland. In 2014 the Arts Council of Ireland acknowledged these increases: 'Arts attendance has not just increased over time but is, more generally, also higher amongst the Irish adult population than for other countries.' Arts attendance in the Republic of Ireland is 9% higher than in Northern Ireland and 13% higher than in Great Britain for comparable events by % of the population over 15 (ACI 2015:7).

The reputation of the arts in Ireland has expanded both nationally and internationally. Notably with the success of the 2016 centenary celebrations, which produced very high levels of engagement by communities throughout the country. The year was so successful that the Arts Council published a formal' thank you' to art practitioners on their website;

> As 2016 ends we would like to thank all those artists who participated in our programme, for offering their vision and insight into who we are as a people and a state, and who and what we can become. We gave artists artistic freedom without any curatorial frame and trusted them to come up with their own responses to 1916. The resulting projects were playful, intellectual, irreverent and proud (ACI 2016).

Nonetheless, the government which came into office in May 2016 still saw fit to demote the arts by changing the name of the Department of the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to the Department of Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht. This downgrading caused widespread consternation, triggering several high-profile figures in the Irish art world to denounce and criticize the action publicly. Oscar-winner Lenny Abrahamson posted on Twitter; ' Despite all the lip service it is clear from lack of action that the Irish political class neither understands nor values the arts' (RTÉ 2016). The government reinstated the original title after an online petition called for a reversal of the decision secured over 10,000 signatures (Duffy, 2016; Gleeson 2016).

Simultaneously, the National Campaign for the Arts (NCFA) called for the government to spend a minimum amount on the arts. It was in response to government policy not fully endorsing the arts sector, and funding has always been inadequate. The highest share of expenditure in the European Union on 'recreation, culture and religion' is in Hungary, the lowest is in Ireland, (see Fig 2) (Eurostat 2015). There had been a pre-crash allocation of €304 million to the overall arts plan for 2002-06 (Bayliss 2004). By 2016 the budget for the arts had been lacerated, it was slashed further in 2017. The budget was cut by 16 per cent (€188.5m in 2016, reduced to €158.3m for 2017). The then Minister for the Arts, Heather Humphreys said this was 'due to one-off capital funding in 2016 for Easter Rising-related projects such as the General Post Office visitor centre' (VAI 2016).

The budget announced for 2017 caused disbelief in the arts sector: The National Campaign for the Arts stressed the need:

> To work urgently toward restoring the €30 million stripped from the Arts Council funding since 2008 and the devastating cuts to the National Cultural Institutions. This would have provided some much needed stability for artists and arts organisations (Mangan 2016).

Chairperson Jo Mangan expressed the organisation's disappointment with Irish investment in the arts, 'at 0.1% of GDP, Ireland's expenditure on Arts and Culture is at the bottom of the list of EU countries compared with an average of 0.6%, surely something no country can condone' (Mangan 2016). However, the shortfall in funding is not a recent issue. The National Economic and Social Forum report from2007 found 'the recurrent theme in the submissions is a call for funding' (NESF 2007). The report clarifies: 'there are attitudinal barriers and financial and physical barriers for many individuals and groups'(NESF 2007).

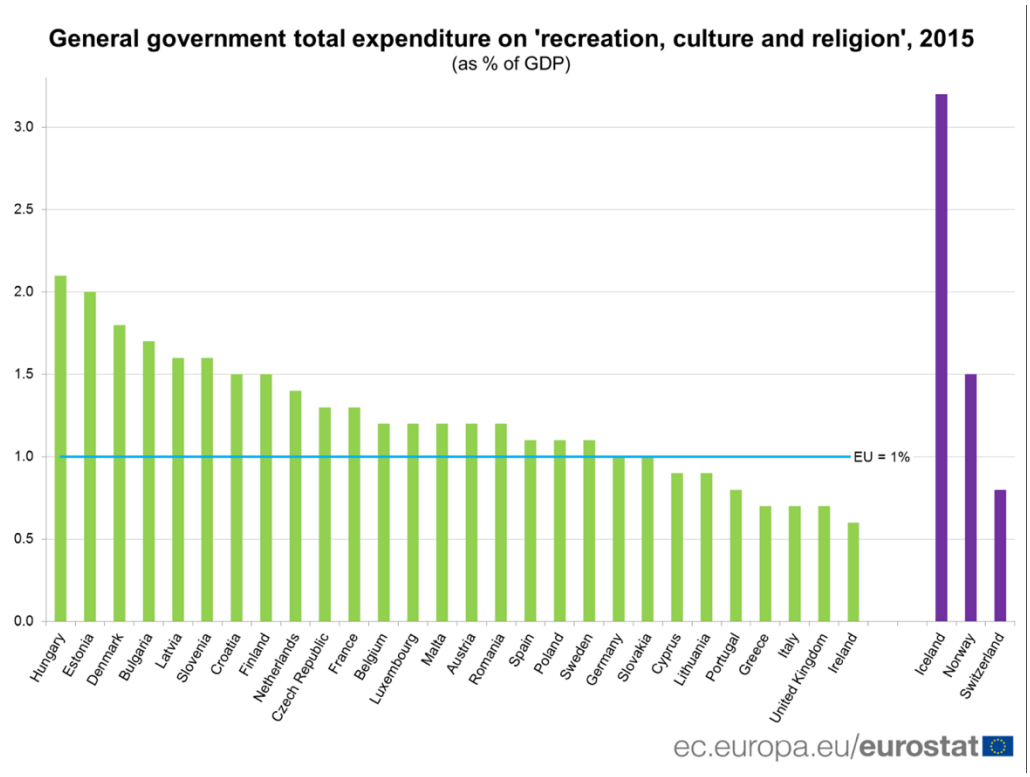

Figure 2. European Union expenditure on recreation, culture and religion 2015

This represents an 8% increase and brings the Council's total budget for 2017 to €65.1, close to 2011 levels, when it received €65.2m. The last ten years of Arts Council funding can be seen below.

2007: €83m
2008: €81.6m
2009: €73.4m
2010: €68.7m
2011: €65.2m
2012: €63.2m
2013: €59.9m
2014: €56.7m
2015: €56.9m
2016: €60.1m (€59.1m + €1m additional funding for 2016 commemorative programme)
2017: €65.1

Figure 3. Arts Council of Ireland funding allocation in budgets 2007-2017 (The Journal of Music)

Four years on and the arts budget remains contentious, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht's budget overall has been increased to €354 million (McGreevy 2019). However, the funding levels for the Arts Council of Ireland has not been reinstated:

> The budget the Arts Council was allocated €82.1 million for 2008, and in a supplementary estimate got €3 million extra for 2007 from Minister for the Arts Séamus Brennan. This brings the total funding for 2007 to €83 million - but this extra €3 million will in fact be spent next year. In effect the Arts Council will have just over €85 million to spend in 2008; it had looked for €100 million (The Irish Times 2007).

The newly appointed Arts Council chairperson Professor Kevin Rafter said: 'Given the very difficult budgetary environment in the context of Brexit, the Arts Council is pleased with the announcement of €80m in funding for 2020' (McGreevy 2019). However, for those who are practitioners of the arts and who are reliant on funding schemes to survive, the outcome of the most recent budget brought disappointment. The National Campaign For The Arts, chairperson Angela Dorgan said the increase in the Arts Council budget from €75m to €80m 'feels like a standstill'. She clarifies:

> The announcements today are devastating to Artists' and Arts workers' incomes and livelihoods. We feel that despite rhetoric to the contrary, this budget is sending a message to Artists that Ireland doesn't value them. A €5 million increase to the Arts Council is a diversion – €3.75 millions of that is a reallocation of funding already accounted for, the real additional funding figure is €1.25 million (Dorgan 2019).

In The Irish Times, Fintan O'Toole expressed outrage at the recently cancelled Parnell Cultural Quarter in Dublin's north inner city that was originally announced in 2005. He takes the view that aside from the lack of money, a key difficulty in

promoting transformative arts and cultural project ‘is the lack of political will’ (O’Toole 2019). An Bord Pleanála had approved a new city library, a 200-seat conference centre, a music centre, education facilities, a multicultural space and a café and exhibition space, spanning the north side of the square that would regenerate a neglected section of the city. The library is to go ahead, but there is no date for the completion of the cultural quarter (O’Toole 2019).

The National Campaign for the Arts state that cuts in government funding and subsequent arts closures are "robbing citizens of their rightful access to the arts, as set out in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Clark 2016). The government's demotion of the arts within the department supports Bayliss's view that the central government has been more consistent in its emphasis on the economic benefits of culture, rather than affirming the value of culture in its own right for citizens.

Bayliss (2004:828) argues that there are only limited attempts by local authorities to provide cultural activities aimed especially at the weaker and disadvantaged members of society. In a survey, conducted with local authorities, Ireland's Creative Development in 2004, of the eighteen participants nine were from rural counties. Bayliss found that despite the commitment of Local Authorities to art and culture within society, their policies represent a failure to appreciate and realize the economic benefits that can be derived from the arts and culture. The argument put forward by Bayliss is broadly supported by others. There is a general understanding that art can provide opportunities for tourism, income generation and employment and, thus, can contribute to the revitalisation of declining economies (Florida 2002; Gibson 2002; Guetzkow 2002; Anwar McHenry 2009). The deficiencies in Local Authorities understanding of

arts and culture is consistent with the difficulties of developing coherent cultural policy from the national government. It appears to be an issue for governments internationally. In Australia, a Western Australian State inquiry into the impact of the arts concluded that there is a tendency for government to underestimate the importance of the arts which is reflected and exacerbated by the lack of empirical data at regional level (Government of Western Australia 2004; Anwar McHenry 2009). Thus, Anwar McHenry (2009) stresses the need for research into the arts and its contribution to the social needs of rural people on a national level.

Clive Gray acknowledges the lack of understanding and support for the arts sector at the local government level in the United Kingdom. He explains:

> In the case of local government, for example, support for the arts and arts projects is often the consequence of the choices and decisions that are made by a relatively small number of officers and councillors rather than the result of a commitment by local authorities as a whole towards such activities (Gray 2002:78).

He also confirmed that in Britain, there was little real development of the role of the arts in the affairs of local government as a whole. However, this should not be taken to mean that individual authorities themselves were not being innovative (Gray 2002). It is very much the case in Ireland where there are vast differences in local authority spending on the arts across different counties. In 2014, the annual spend by local authorities on the arts stood at as little as 0.3% of that year's budget in counties such as Galway and Kerry. However, it rises to more than six times that level in Cavan, Monaghan, Leitrim, and Galway City (Ryan 2014).

The Local Authority is the main stakeholder of the Irish arts, followed by the Arts Council of Ireland. There is enormous discrepancies in arts provision nationally (See Fig 4). Visual art spaces are widespread but not to the same extent as performance spaces. Just over 60% of the venues stated that they have galleries (ACI 2019:10).

According to the All-Island Research Observatory audit of venues in 2016, there are currently 138 year-round art centres, and of that 138 the Arts Council of Ireland funds 49. This signifies an increase in the Arts Council's funding of Arts Centres. A report by the National Economic and Social Forum in 2007: ' In 2001, the Arts Council was supporting 19 theatres and 21 arts centres in the Republic of Ireland'(NESF 2007). Funding for Arts Centres from the Arts Council of Ireland is 'used primarily for programming activities' (ACI 2019:iii). The funding allocation is not without issue:

> The less funding received the more the venue is under pressure to prioritise commercial programming to make ends meet. There is a genuine concern that this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy i.e. funding is based on the existing programme which, if commercially orientated, scores poorly in applications (ACI 2019: 62).

The Arts Council of Ireland is entirely dependent on funding allocation from the National Government. The funding provision changes annually, which renders long term planning for both the Arts Council of Ireland and the Arts Centre impossible. The Arts Council of Ireland is currently negotiating a "multiannual funding arrangement' with the government. However, the funding will remain dependent on resources made available annually by the government and are subject to fiscal policy (ACI 2019: viii).

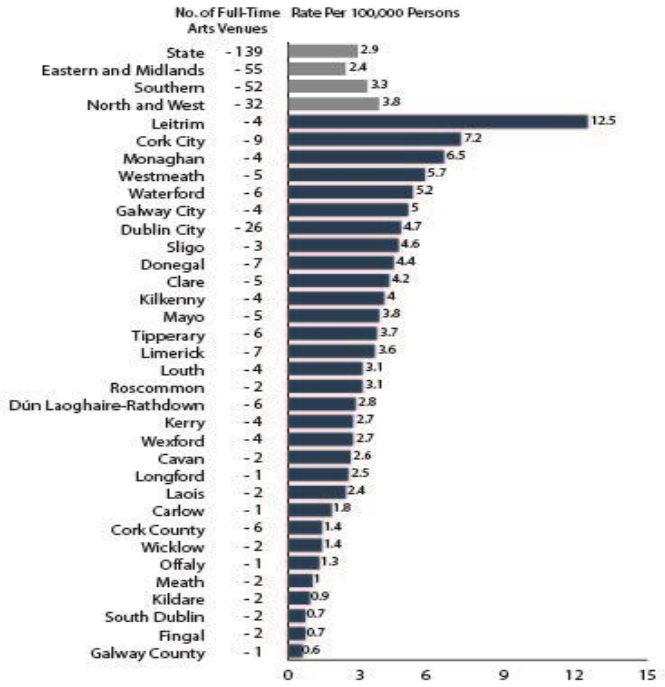

Figure 4. Rate of provision of full-time arts venues per 100,000 persons (ACI 2019:9).

The Local Authority is the main stakeholder for Arts Centres, although it is worth noting that the arts are a relatively new area of provision for Local Authorities. In rural counties, Arts Centres are at the partiality of elected representatives and senior management in the Local Authority in regards to funding allocation. Elected representatives face elections every five years and Local Authority personnel change intermittently. Politicians and officials may not attend art events regularly or show an interest in arts and culture. Local sports are probably higher on their agenda, given the embeddedness of the GAA in rural counties. Nonetheless, they decide on arts provision. The personal funding preferences of county councillors and the strategic objectives of the Local Authority executive may account for some of the disparities in funding distribution to the arts throughout the country. Additionally, if disaccord or disjunction exists amongst Local Authority members, it impacts negatively on the arts sector. Commenting on the issue Respondent A explains:‘ This county is a problematic

case, it is highly dysfunctional. They set the bar very, very low in funding, and they have never seen any reason why they should increase this funding' (Interview June 2019).

Currently, the lack of investment from central government is exposing a 'trickle-down-effect' where the behaviour of the superiors 'indirectly impacts employees who hold positions two hierarchal levels below' (Bardes Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, Marinove 2012:326). As central government funds both the Local Authority and Arts Council of Ireland, Arts Centres and particularly those that receive funding from both stakeholders are potentially vulnerable to a double impact of the trickle-down effect. The arts sector has been starved of funding particularly at the local level. It is arguable that under-investment over the years has produced a state of 'anomie' in the sector. Albert Cohen (1997; 15:52) explains, that anomie is strain which is 'dependent on disjunction, people feel strained'. For this reason, the well-being of Arts Centre personnel is concerning. My research suggests that 'high effort and little reward' (Marmot 2015: 172; Gordon-Nesbitt and Howarth 2019:9) is prevalent within the sector. For instance, a respondent's comment documented in the Review of Art Centres and Venues warrants concern, 'I beg for a living' (2019:62).

(1.2) The Facility To Control

Pierre Bourdieu warns 'beware of the words'(quoted in Wacquant 1989:54; Grenfell 2012:251; Alexander 2018:34). Alexander (2018) argues that neoliberal language utilised by funding bodies is a method of control on organisations seeking funds. The neoliberal language used by the Arts Council of England is echoed by the Arts Council of Ireland. Alexander draws on Bourdieu's prominent approach to autonomy and heteronomy. She argues that Bourdieu's 'understanding of heteronomy in the field of cultural production is derived from penetration by the commercial field and needs to be expanded to include a consideration of penetration from the state' (Alexander 2018:23).

The Arts Council of Ireland's (2019: 74) alignment with the United Kingdom's policy is troubling. The Review of Art Centres and Venues 2019 is directing Arts Centres to Arts Council of England (ACE) policies; 'International comparators provide an example of how a large venue can sell its expertise in community engagement and venue management in order to generate additional income' (ACI 2019: viii). The Arts Council of Ireland is conveying that Arts Centres need to seek other sources of revenue: 'Arts venues are adaptable and creative both in their efforts to reach audiences and in their need to generate sufficient income to remain viable' (ACI 2019:12). The current reduction in funding to Arts Centres in the United Kingdom by the Arts Council of England has led to regional Arts Centres activating their charity status and vigorously seeking voluntary donations (Moraes, Daskalopoulou and Szmigin 2019:2). Sophie Motley, Artistic Director of a touring theatre National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) in Shropshire says that while the Arts Council of England has made some

headway in rebalancing funding away from London, this has usually been focused on regional cities rather than rural areas. The capacity for ‘raising income from philanthropy, sponsorship and trusts is also acknowledged to be harder for rural organisations’. Ralph Lister, Director of the Somerset-based National Portfolio Organisation *Take Art,* believes that England’s rural arts infrastructure could disappear entirely within the next five years unless the Arts Council of England takes steps to address the funding imbalance (Knott 2019).

Alexander (2018:35) postulates that neoliberalism 'is embedded in arts organisations' in the United Kingdom. She has particular concerns around the common term 'value for money', which suggest that the funders' money should be spent wisely (Alexander 2018: 25). Organizations must 'incorporate buzz words' to 'woo funders on the funders' terms' to obtain finance. Stakeholders do not try to influence the content of the art programme. Despite this, their 'neoliberal interests penetrate these organizations through practices, perhaps even more deeply than they would if they focused on trying to influence content’ (Alexander 2018:24). Instead of focusing on artistic concerns, Arts Centres must attend to business affairs such as increasing attendance figures, shrinking production costs, and running coffee shops. Art Centres contribute to the domestic economy and they use tools of business management to achieve their goals (Alexander 2018).

Alexander relates this to the idea of 'coercive isomorphism' (DiMaggio and Powell 1983:150); which 'results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on an organization by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by the cultural expectations in the society within in which the organizations functions' (Alexander 2018:33-4). The pursuit of a funding model which replaces state-funding with

philanthropic donations and requires civil society practitioners to engage in a range of fundraising, promotional and begging strategies is potentially deleterious to the arts, and in particular, those that are already marginalised and located in rural towns and counties.

Furthermore, the Local Authority can influence the Arts Centres content, the Arts Council of Ireland (2019:92) confirm this: 'Lease or licence agreements and financial arrangements also provide vehicles for the owners of the venues to maintain control'. My understanding is that such incidents of direct influence are rare, but they do occur. For instance, in 2012 the Luan Gallery in county Westmeath the first purpose-built, modern visual art gallery located in the midlands' (RIAI 2012) was due to be launched. An elected representative objected to the artwork, 'Fragments sur les Institutions Républicaines IV', which is based on a collection of prisoners' messages smuggled out of the H-Block prison in 1981 (Mac Connell 2013). The artwork was part of the exhibition, 'Borrowed Memories', it consisted of 96 panels carrying tiny pieces of text originally written on cigarette papers and smuggled out of Long Kesh in the 1980s. It was acquired by the State in 2000 and eight of the panels were on loan to the Luan Gallery from the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Cllr Mark Cooney, whose father Patrick was justice minister from 1973-1977, stated that while art can be provocative and controversial, this work should be removed because "it is offensive to so many people". His colleague Cllr Gabrielle McFadden agreed, saying the piece gives "a heroic platform to republican paramilitaries". She said that no publicly funded gallery should display any kind of political art. Albeit, their motion was not successful it caused outrage both locally and nationally. Sinn Féin Cllr Paul Hogan said taking away the right of people to view the work themselves and make

up their own minds was “not just censorship but disempowerment”. Hogan’s comments received rapturous applause from the packed public gallery (O’Brien 2013).

(1.3) Community Participation and a sense of belonging

The Arts Centre is a multipurpose space that supports inclusivity and cohesion within its locality. The Arts Council of Ireland describes Arts Centres as ‘embedded in their communities, engaging with a range of audience types (2019: ix). The influx of new inhabitants to rural towns has brought a new cultural dynamic to small-town societies (Donaghy 2014; Kelleher 2018). They have added to the local economy by renting, or buying homes, establishing new businesses, and art audiences have increased.

Additionally, artists that make their homes in rural locations tend to rely on the Arts Centres residencies and programme of events, where artists get to connect and network. Artists are a vital and energising component of the art centres community with the locality being the beneficiary of this invigoration. The artistic community is heterogeneous, they have the resources to reach out to new community members, and the capacity to embrace, introduce and involve them in a new social circle. The Arts Centre is creating what Weisenfeld calls ‘microbelonging’, that co-exists among “the multiple collective identities” that make up the sub-communities within the larger community and is “redemptive of diversity” (Lukkarinen 2008:5). Such support is intuitive and spontaneous. It is forming what McMillen calls ‘a psychological sense of community’, which is essential to the well-being of many residents as many live in remote geographical locations. McMillan calls this, ‘integration and fulfilment of needs’. Integrating and reinforcing community members for their involvement, is another component of psychological sense of community seen at the sub-community

level (Chipuer, Pretty 1999:644). McMillan and Chavis theorise that: 'when community members share values, they have further reason to believe that they might share needs and goals. This increases the probability that their relationship with each other might allow them to fulfil their needs' (McMillan & Chavis 1986: 13).

Disconcertingly, my research investigations highlighted significant leisure inequalities in the case study locations. The attendees in the galleries were 60% male and 40% female. However, attendance at organised art events such as exhibition launches, musical gigs, and theatre have a more favourable gender balance. The findings support existing research that acknowledges 'a gender gap in time devoted to leisure' (Mc Ginnity and Russell 2008:x). Furthermore, studies have shown that women are less likely than men to spend free time alone or in the sole company of adults (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006; Bittman and Wajcman 2000; Craig and Mullan 2013; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Offer 2016). The demanding requisites of contemporary parenting may potentially pressure mothers to spend as much time as possible with their children engaged in activities believed to foster children's development (Hays 1996; Lareau 2003; Nelson 2010). Parents may also become distressed if the lofty expectations are arduous to attain. It may have implications for quality and contribute to lower life satisfaction (McGinnity and Russell, 2007).

A sense of belonging, even at a psychological level is crucial to the health, well-being, and productivity of the individual. It is a vital aspect of networking and forming working relationships, particularly for those living in rural locations. There is a propensity to utilise the Arts Centre as a point of convergence. The arts may be uniquely positioned to build inclusive communities as they make room for all of these human experiences simultaneously (Thomas, Gray, McGinty and Ebringer 2011). It is what

sociologist Ray Oldenburg has called ‘great good places’, that support connection and engagement with other people (Oldenburg 1999). Nevertheless, Oldenburg expresses concern about the sustainability of third places, neutral places (neither home or workplaces) in which the attendees are neither ‘hosts’ nor ‘guests’ and where people should feel relaxed and at ease. The Irish pub has historically occupied the role of a third-place: a communal place, with a convivial atmosphere, where people got to know and like one another, (Scarbrough 2008). Oldenburg highlights the importance of such informal places for maintaining a civil society and democratic engagement. It is notable that almost 440 fewer pub licences were issued in 2006 than in 2005. The most significant decline was recorded in the Border, Midlands and Western counties (Scarbrough 2008). It is estimated that a fifth of rural pubs around the country closed between 2005 and 2018, according to analysis from the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland (Clifford 2019).

Third places are under threat, Oldenberg argues, from the prevalence of technology, suburban sprawl and commercialisation. Third places are declining and are being replaced by *non-places*: where individuals (rather than social citizens) relate to one another in purely utilitarian terms (as customers, shoppers, clients, patients). Such non-places are more likely to promote *civil dis-affiliation* rather than social integration, (Corcoran 2012). The Arts Centre has the potential, to be the ‘third place’ in many rural towns, and to aid in the creation of a sense of belonging in the face of dis-embedding forces.

The shifting social dynamic is affecting how various communities interact and use public art spaces. Moreover, the art centre is proving an invaluable asset to many members of the locality with diverse cultures and personal issues. It is creating a ‘sense

of community' because everyone knows each other. It is a space that facilitates accidental meetings, casual conversations, and unexpected friendships (Sennett and Oldenburg). McMillan (1996) views this, as a spirit of belonging together, a feeling that there is an authority structure that can be trusted, an awareness that trade and mutual benefit come from being together, and a spirit that comes from shared experiences through art. An example is, the Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre's 'In The Picture' programme. The gallery invites people with dementia, and their professional and family carers to visit the art space, to look and enjoy the artwork with others in a safe and welcoming environment. The sessions are specially designed to include people with dementia, family members and carers into the Arts Centre. There are between 3-5 hosted each year subject to the suitability of the exhibitions (Uillinn: West Cork Art Centre 2015).

Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre is one of six partners of a programme called 'Azure' which aims to make art galleries and museums around Ireland dementia-friendly spaces. It was inspired by the 'Meet Me at MOMA' programme at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Azure* offers guided exhibition tours specifically designed to support people living with dementia and their family, friends or professional carers, to engage with the artwork on show and enjoy a social museum experience (IMMA 2015). Laurel Humble, an assistant educator at MoMA New York notes, 'one of the most significant issues with Alzheimer's disease, is short-term memory loss. Visual art is an ideal topic of conversation for people with dementia and Alzheimer's because memory is not needed to look at art and discuss it. It is all about looking at the artwork in the present moment' (IMMA 2015). Humble construes: 'Looking at and discussing art allows people to reaffirm that their opinions are still valid and that they have the ability to engage with art' (Sheridan 2015). Bairbre-Ann Harkin, head of education at

the Butler Gallery, underwent an internship with MoMA where she assisted in programmes including 'Meet Me'. She believes the Azure programme can help relationships enormously, allowing them to 'go back to normal'. She deduces:

> Azure is about trying to create moments where, at least during the programme, people stop being 'the person with dementia and their carer' and, in some ways, go back to being husband and wife, mother and son, father and daughter, sister and brother. Programmes like this allow for that moment, and that is a real privilege to see. (Sheridan 2015).

Hall discusses the personal gains for people with intellectual disabilities (ID) being included in theatre networks in Edinburgh and Glasgow as very significant because of the:

> …potential respect from non-disabled actors (some of whom work as volunteers in rehearsals), and very importantly, people form friendships and gain support within the 'safe spaces' of the company, which can afford them confidence and a strengthened sense of self-identity to engage with an often difficult and discriminatory mainstream world (Hall 2010:55).

The arts have been proven to hold, a long-standing traditional role of artistic practice in the therapeutic 'treatment' of people with intellectual disabilities (Chesner 1995). There is the scope within art practice, to provide opportunities for expression, performance and connection with the public, which can stimulate interest and debate around Intellectual Disability (Goodley & Moore 2002: Hall 2010). Peter Swan supports this hypothesis by recounting his yearlong research in a community arts space:

> Social inclusion was fostered through the positive and welcoming atmosphere within the building and also through the nature of the activities themselves. There was evidence that interactions between people with and without disabilities helped to challenge negative perceptions held by both groups. Artspace also offered a safe and non-judgemental environment for vulnerable participants whilst avoiding the downsides associated with services aimed solely at people with mental health difficulties or other disabilities (Swan 2013:19).

This further reinforces evidence in the literature that the intimacy of the arts centre has the competency to ensure that the uniqueness of individuals can be accommodated and cherished, (François Matarasso 1996; Walmsley 2012).

To conclude, this thesis strengthens the existing knowledge base on how communities engage with the rural Art Centre, through an interdisciplinary investigation into the functioning of the Arts Centre as an organisation and community asset. In this chapter, I have reviewed literature that examines the value of the Arts Centre to society. i.e. as a social hub where social interaction creates a sense of well-being, and in turn, promotes healthier communities. The deleterious impact of funding shortfall from the central government alongside the potential impact that organisational hierarchies are having on the health and well-being of art centre staff have been documented. Additionally, I have provided a comprehensive review of arts and health theories that substantiate through empirical evidence the socially inclusive capacity of the Arts Centre in rural societies. I will return to the issues raised in the analysis chapters.

Chapter Two: Research Methods

(2.) Research Background

As a full-time visual artist that has exhibited extensively throughout Irelands Arts Centres, I became cognizant of the stellar work accomplished in remote locations. From observation, I sensed the positive energy and friendly ambience in the busy Arts Centres. They presented as positive aspects in their communities. Additionally, it was evident at exhibition launches and performances that it is only the artists that receive the accolades. However, for every exhibition in a gallery, there is a team of people working together to achieve that. That team, the Arts Centre staff receive little recognition. These considerations strengthened when in 2013, I began working as a Visual Art Contributor for an art show for two regional radio stations. By attending exhibition launches in five rural counties over several years and noticing increasing audience numbers during that time, it became evident that Arts Centres in small Irish towns required analysis. This experience prompted me to undertake an inter-disciplinary research project that would allow me to combine my expertise as a visual artist with a sociological investigation of rural Arts Centres.

Working as both exhibiting artist and sociologist in the Arts Centre afforded a unique research perspective and opportunity to attain data that can be challenging for cultural researchers to quantify. The Arts Centres involved fully supported the project because they believe that their work is undervalued (see page 66). Furthermore, Arts Centres embraced the prospect of gaining an immersive insight into the communities that avail of their programming and services. Due to work constraints, the monitoring

of daily activity is an impossible undertaking. While the project was the beneficiary of outstanding support from Fine Arts and Sociology personnel, it was extremely challenging to carry out the project. I do not think it is possible for those working in the individual disciplines to fully comprehend the magnitude of the task that was involved in bringing the disciplines together, in my pursuit of an integrated, interdisciplinary perspective. The project created both financial and time poverty. It involved creating two new bodies of work for three exhibitions. To complete the artwork/research to a stringent exhibition and sociological standard required nineteen hour days, seven days a week for many months. During the residencies, the Art Centres closed on Sundays, which allowed for time off. However, I believe that my immersive investigation of the rural Arts Centre through a sociological lens has produced a portrait of a socially inclusive community arts space and a landscape in which it functions. The analysis probed: Has the Arts Centre the potential to become a social hub in small-town rural Ireland? How should the role of the Arts Centre be documented and evaluated? What lessons can be learned from undertaking a focused study of this kind?

The visual imagery played a significant role because it facilitated the recording of personal and emotive responses that would otherwise be difficult to collate much less analyse. Silvia (2005:352) supports this assessment, he draws on an extensive range of sources to articulate the difficulties that 'many studies have shown that the collative variables have different effects on interest and enjoyment (e.g., Berlyne & Crozier 1971; Crozier 1974; Cupchik & Gebotys 1990) and that interest and enjoyment factors are composed of different markers' (Evans & Day 1971). Silva calls for psychology to update its mechanisms: 'The modern science of emotion has much to offer the study of aesthetics; it provides an expansive set of new ideas, hypotheses, and research directions. If pursued, appraisal theories could form the basis of a new experimental aesthetics'

(2005:355). Through autoethnographic methodologies, this research residency aims to advance current knowledge in the area. Ellis, Adams, & Bochner (2011) describe autoethnography as 'both process and method'.

For this research project, I created autoethnographic story board of life experiences, by systematically analysing personal experience to gain an understanding of cultural experience. This approach challenges working methods, it represents social issues and treats research as socially-just and socially-conscious act. As a researcher I used tenets of autobiography and ethnography to create and write autoethnography (Ellis et.al 2011).

Autoethnographic inquiry, has been advocated primarily as a radically non-traditional, poststructuralist form of research, that complements traditional symbolic interactionist ethnography (Leon 2006). To employ this method, the approach taken was to become embedded within the Arts Centres community in order to thoroughly employ the technique of participant observation. This fact-finding method allowed for an in-depth analysis of the community that utilises the Arts Centre and, how they interact and participate with the artwork and events hosted. The study also focused and recorded how people communicate, connect and network with the Arts Centre, its staff, and each other.

In pursuance of, wholly understanding and collating the real significance of the Arts Centre to the locality and the cultural impact it generates, data was gathered through a number of complementary strategies. The intended approach was to be present during gallery opening hours, interacting with the visitors (and workers) in the centre and creating the opportunity to qualitatively assess the value of the arts centre to its locality. It was achieved through conversations with members of the public and, documenting

comments in visitor books and social media. A series of semi-structured interviews with art professionals and officials were conducted.

This research is a study of the local community, to carefully define the local culture, focus attention on the existence or, lack of cultural resources and supports in order to pinpoint problems to be solved and, strengths to be built upon. As the research progressed I added another objective, to determine the appetite for a specialised cultural coordinator within the social inclusion office, to collaborate with the art office and arts centre, that would establish the arts and culture in parity with education and sport functions within local governance. The research scrutinises the impact of local and national government, and the role of stakeholders on the Arts Centre. The findings will assist in the advancement of knowledge by evaluating the contribution an arts centre makes to the cultural life of its community. Furthermore, this study and the methodologies employed will rectify the critical concerns regarding the need for interdisciplinary research and the requirement for inquiry on arts and culture within rural communities as set out in Chapter 1.

Research Question

A portrait of the Arts Centre in rural Ireland: an inter-disciplinary mix-methods approach.

Sub Questions

- Are public Arts Centres the beneficiaries of the changing economy, the shifting social landscape and new Irish citizenship?
- Are these factors impacting on cultural spaces and institutions?

- Are these multi-functioning, neutral venues located within small, rural towns providing a space for the negotiation of community identity and social relations?
- How does local government policy affect the arts centre?
- Does the Arts Centre receive sufficient community support?

(2.1) The Qualitative Approach

The intended approach is to combine the interdisciplinary practices of the social sciences and humanities, by working in an ethnographer/arts practitioner role in the three target locations in Ireland over two extended periods. This enabled immersive and, an engaged range of ethnographic data gathering techniques, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Presenting an exhibition of personal artwork in the gallery was beneficial to probing the in-house functioning of the Arts Centre that would typically be difficult for cultural researchers to access. My dual role as both a visual artist and a social researcher made possible an innovative, intersectional strategy between two disciplines allowing for a comprehensive and exclusive insight into the running of the Arts Centre.

The fieldwork conducted from the gallery allowed observation of the Arts Centre and the community that utilise it over a lengthy period. Embodying a dual artist/researcher role allowed me to move with ease around the gallery space and to 'belong' from the point of view of the attendees who mainly viewed me as the artist or a gallery invigilator. Being a researcher in residence for the duration of the exhibition afforded the opportunity to socially, spatially and temporally frame how the Arts Centre is made use of by the community. I wanted to get a sense of the local culture and focus attention on the existence and importance of the Arts Centre as a cultural resource

within the community. This was made possible by being on-site, which allowed for the observation and recording of the community that attended cultural events. Invitations were sent to seven arts professionals to part-take as interviewees. They were arts officials, art managers, and a local politician to get their perspective, insight and experience of the role of the arts centre. However, one had relocated, and another did not respond. The remaining five interviews conducted provided a contextualised and comprehensive background knowledge of the history, structure, function, activities and connectedness with the local community.

(2.2) Sources of data

Participant observation in three art spaces, i.e., (a) observation and informal interviewing of Arts Centre attendees, (b) semi-structured interviews with the Arts Centre and local authority staff, (c) secondary data, e.g. Arts Council of Ireland reviews and publications, national newspapers, Central Statistics Office data, historical and tourist information.

(2.2.1) Access

Personal, professional art practice has permitted an extensive exhibition portfolio both nationally and internationally. Thus, acquiring a valuable knowledge of Ireland's network of Arts Centres. Working as a visual art correspondent for a local radio station since 2013 has meant attending almost every exhibition launch that occurred in five rural counties. The audience increases at exhibitions were evident and acknowledged by the Arts Council of Ireland (2014).

The contacts established as both artist and broadcaster have greatly assisted this research project. There were no access issues concerning participant observation in the Arts Centres, being on-site for extended periods allowed for numerous informal discussions with audience members, observing their interaction with the artwork, and recording the observations in a journal shortly afterwards. Besides, Arts Centre staff have been supportive of the research project, and eager for a greater understanding of their work to be realised. Therefore, the respondent sample was easily accessed. The interviewees are all art professionals from various rural counties. The respondents were mainly made up of Arts Centre directors and county arts officers. To ensure that the interviews were balanced and impartial a local politician was included in the respondent sample.

(2.2.2) Research Ethics

Upon sourcing a respondent, an email was sent briefly outlining the research aims. It was followed up by a phone call explaining the conditions under which the semi-structured interview would be carried out, e.g. recording of the interview, access to finished research, withdrawal of permission to use the data (see a copy of the letter in Appendix). Once the respondent agreed to the interview, a meeting at a time and place of their choosing was arranged. Upon meeting respondents, the aims of the research and permission to record the interview were reaffirmed, confidentiality and anonymity were assured. It was made clear that the question would be open-ended and based on opinions and values and that no personal information would be required. All participants were ensured that the data they provided would be kept securely and that it could be reviewed and even withdrawn by them if they deemed it necessary, and that they were entitled to view the complete body of work before submission.

Every effort has been taken to comply with the principals of the Sociological Association of Ireland's ethical guidelines to carry out this research. At all times, professional competence, integrity and equality, and to abide by sociological responsibilities to the respondents and Maynooth University were maintained.

(2.2.3) Research Setting

Both locations are predominantly rural agricultural counties, County B is heavily dependent on tourism as an employer, while County A has many big employers such as multinational companies, a general hospital, a third level institute and Rehab Care. The presence of both Rehab Care and the third level college have secured a youthful population for the town. Rehab Care are a vibrant part of the towns business community where part-time paid work, work experience projects and world of work training programmes are also provided for over sixty people (Rehab Care 2015). Additionally, the organisation has strong ties with the third level institute where over 140 student placements have taken place. In order to support students with working with people with disabilities on their placement, Rehab Care attendees organised information sessions so that students had a better understanding of disability and in turn, were more confident in their work placements (Rehab Care 2016).

County A has twice the population of county B, and both have robust migrant populations. In County A, the county town population is 10,914 with a non-Irish population of 26% (CSO 2016). The population has increased by 48% since the 1991 census (City Populations 2019). In County B, the county town has a population of 4062 with a non-Irish population of 11.6%. The town's population has increased by 45% since 1991. County A is an hour and a half from Dublin and County B is two hours. County A has a motorway running through it but has no rail infrastructure. County B

has a rail line and is on a national route that connects with the motorway. Additionally, they are vibrant towns with communities with loyal art audiences and local authorities with some of the highest art budgets in the country (Ryan 2014).

Kellystown Gallery Space and Kellystown Arts Centre was located in county A that is an hour and a half from Dublin. It is geographically stunning and known for its rolling hills and lakes shaped by the last Ice Age. However, it has had a deep and turbulent history. It was home for Neolithic, Bronze Age, Celtic, Norman and Early Christian peoples. They built homes and communities, and their mark remains visible through numerous megalithic tombs and medieval structures. The county was planted under the Ulster Plantation scheme in 1610, leading to considerable changes in the population make up and urbanity of the county.

The town had strong links with a family from the British aristocracy. In the second decade of the nineteenth century they set about the gentrification of the town. A long wide street (which still bears the family name) was laid out. It was partly lined on one side by tasteful buildings, (some of which still survive), including a hotel, and townhouses. On the other side, there was a park planted with walkways and fountains for the leisured classes (Irish Identity 2019).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the "troubles" in Northern Ireland impacted the town. However, Ireland's entry into the Common Market in 1973 was a positive influence. The town began to attract industries that were subsidiaries of multi-nationals. Some of these factories have closed down and replaced by others (Irish Identity 2019). The town caters for the employment needs for the majority of its 10,914 population and its rural hinterland. The majority of the county (65%) has a daily commute of under half an hour (CSO 2016).

The location for the case study was chosen because I secured a research residency award; supported by the Arts Council of Ireland/Local Authority and developed by the Local Arts Office. It was an international open call intended to cultivate a core idea to develop collaboration with public participation within the public realm. The residency was for a twelve-week period which was extended to facilitate a group exhibition of participating artists. There were five national and international artists selected from the open call. The case study involved two art spaces, neither of which received Arts Council of Ireland funding. The first was a Kellystown Gallery Space with artist studios and commenced in November 2017. With new artworks conceived and constructed, preparation for the event launch began in January 2018. A solo exhibition continued in the Kellystown Gallery Space until the end of February 2018. A group exhibition took place in the Kellystown Arts Centre during March 2018. The Kellystown Gallery Space is owned by the Local Authority and on the periphery of the town centre. It was once a three-bedroom terraced house built during the 1800s by the local aristocratic family for their employees .

The street is residential. It is also a busy thoroughfare that connects the town centre, college and general hospital to the county Gaelic Athletic Association pitch and all national routes. Although it is a residential area, pedestrian traffic is scarce. Several houses on the east side of the street are vacant and have been for some years. In comparison, the buildings on the other side of the road were modern and recently rebuilt; it consists of homes and businesses. Many windows on the street have venetian blinds, but most have irreversible damage. There are a few pubs at the end of the road, but they are more daunting than inviting. There is a forlorn feel to the street. It is not enticing.

Before this residency, the Kellystown Gallery Space was unused for three years. The Local Authority had offered the creative collective, with responsibility for the building, a three-year lease of the much larger Kellystown Arts Centre. During that time, the Kellystown Gallery Space has become a dormant venue that has completely fallen from the public consciousness. The Kellystown Gallery Space is about five hundred yards away from the Kellystown Arts Centre. Accessing it means leaving the urban hustle and bustle, most people drive, but it is easy to access on foot through back streets or a county council car park. The street it is located on is vehicle laden and void of the civic buzz that engulfs the town centre.

The Kellystown Gallery Space's residential design naturally creates an inviting social space — the visitor steps directly through the front door and into the gallery. Adjoining the gallery is a large working kitchen with a generous table and eight chairs around it. The table cover is a homely oilcloth. There are an old-style sugar bowl and milk jug, all of the crockeries has a vintage feel that oozes familiarity and nostalgia. The collective always offered tea, coffee, cakes and biscuits to attendees. This tradition continued for this research residency. The building is freezing and damp, but there are a charm and warmth to the venue that suppresses the chill.

It was proposed in order to analyse public participation and the role of the arts in society, that a solo exhibition in the Kellystown Gallery Space would be created, promoted and invigilated. A social media event page was established. It was a straightforward exhibition to promote because it was a solo show, and it had an arresting and candid title. The hashtag was a powerful asset; it possesses the influence to connect the project globally. Three women made contact online to express their appreciation for tackling the topic of domestic abuse (see Fig.20). The traditional

promotional mediums of radio and the press were supportive of the project. Personal invitations were emailed to facilitators of community groups that could potentially be interested in visiting the exhibition and, might not normally consider attending art events. The exhibition received significant coverage in the local paper. The review was posted online and shared on social media; this created a far-flung response.

(2.2.4) Kellystown Arts Centre

The second venue in the research project was the Arts Centre. It is an iconic landmark and purpose-built theatre and social space, in a significant central location with many schools, shops, carparks and county council offices nearby. There are three creative directors. Each has their speciality in theatre, music and visual arts; this has ensured a vibrant and ambitious programme. It is a great shopping town with numerous chain stores enclosed behind the towns traditional shopfronts. The architecture observes the historical past; the buildings are heavyset. There is a sense of granite behind the plasterwork. Additionally, there is a network of narrow winding backstreets with humble robust architecture converging on the main street. There is a one-way traffic system in place which spurs the public to use the numerous car parks. The Kellystown Arts Centre benefits from the extensive footfall. It is a bustling, friendly town, navigating around small groups chatting on footpaths is commonplace.

Figure 5. The Kellystown Arts Centre 1910

The building has been an essential aspect of the urban landscape since its construction in 1910. An art collective manages the building, the same creative collective that coordinated the Kellystown Gallery Space. They took over the running of the public art space three years ago. It is the first time that this building was devoted to arts practice, beforehand it was only opened sporadically throughout the year. It was mainly used as a bingo hall and, for random community productions and events. Many years ago, the upper levels of the Kellystown Arts Centre were county council offices. Many locals still come to the building seeking to pay for their motor tax. The is a strong sense of community ownership around the Arts Centre.

The Kellystown Arts Centre is inviting. It was designed as a social space. Access from the street is immediate; it does not have a doorstep. There are a kitchen and social space on the left of entering the building. One of the female staff members refers to the kitchen as '*a womb*'. It is a warm and embracing room and is in complete contrast to the white cube of the gallery. The kitchen is dark grey, and the appliances are all adorned in copper paint. There are several recycled bookshelves. A series of brightly coloured chaise longues grace the walls. Two large circular tables make a figure of eight in the centre of the room. These two tables can sit up to thirty people. The atmosphere is

always supportive, nurturing and enriching. Opposite the social space is a small gallery. To combat the size restriction, the directors often opened the ample theatre space to the visual arts. Thus, affording artists more enormous scope for creativity and establishing the Kellystown Arts Centre as a significant regional exhibition space. There are artists' studios in upper levels of the building with a meeting room, an office, and a second kitchen on the top floor.

There is seven staff; the three directors were full-time the others part-time. The staff numbers fluctuated, depending on programming. The Kellystown Arts Centre could quickly recruit volunteers at short notice. It enjoys robust community support. However, the current staff do not receive salaries. They are mostly working through social welfare schemes or volunteering. On many occasions and against the wishes of the three directors, staff on Government schemes have to leave because the scheme has ceased and the Kellystown Arts Centre is not in a position to offer paid employment.

The second exhibition/research project was in the Kellystown Art Centre. It was a curated group show that was promoted by the Local Arts Office and funded by the Arts Council of Ireland. There were five artists, all of whom received residencies. Three of the five were Irish, one was from Hong Kong, and another was Polish. The Arts Centre staff looked after every aspect of installing the show. The participant observation developed through acting in the role of a gallery invigilator for the duration of the exhibition. The attendees of the art space had an informed knowledge of the arts and had an appetite for discussing what they were observing. There is a definite public appetite and appreciation for social interaction in the arts. The vast majority of people stayed for a short time to discuss the artwork on show. The conversations varied from the landscape, to plant structures and domestic abuse. An elderly woman who had spent

time looking at and inquiring about the work disclosed, 'I could never afford to buy art but, I just love coming in here to look at it' (Attendee 2: 15 March 2018).

(2.2.5) Brennanstown Arts Centre

The town is two hours from Dublin. It is the administrative centre of the county, and the Brennanstown Arts Centre is the leading cultural space. The building is striking and distinguished. It was a former courthouse built-in 1824, designed in the classical style, as the centre for administration of justice and local government in the county. The court's service and the local authority vacated the building in 1994 because they were very dissatisfied with the inadequate facilities and decaying condition of the building fabric. Demolition of the building was an option considered. It remained vacant until refurbished as an Arts Centre in 2005. The building and its history are of great interest to all who visit, local people are aware of it, but the many visitors ask about its origins and any gruesome stories associated with the former courthouse.

The town has a population of 4,062. Due to its small size, the town centre has escaped the shopping centres and high street stores of the Celtic Tiger. It has an old-worldly feel, many of the shop fronts are tiled in small colourful squares, and are nearly all family-owned. The town has many schools and leisure facilities that offer enhanced quality of life. There is a strong feeling of community and local pride among the small population. The positive civic spirit is evident from the pristine upkeep of the town. It has access to river cruising, which brings international holidaymakers mainly from the United Kingdom, Europe, but also the United States and Canada. Many holiday homes are weekend retreats for city dwellers. Some would have connections to the area.

However, the majority use the low house prices and proximity to Dublin to escape the city. It is a beautiful location.

The Brennanstown Arts Centre is in the western corner of the town. It is next to local government offices, and the river which wraps itself like a ribbon around the building. There is a county council car park that offers free car parking to visitors, beyond the car park elegant river cruisers stir gently in the marina. A sense of grandeur surrounds the Brennanstown Arts Centre. The buildings cannot hide their rich history.

Figure 6. Entrance to the Brennanstown Arts Centre 2019

The entrance of the Brennanstown Arts Centre has many granite steps. It stands proudly higher than other buildings on the street. Inside is a large foyer with a vaulted ceiling, and there is an impressive staircase that is the centre point of the ground floor. The stairs lead directly to the three galleries. There is a labyrinth of rooms that are not immediately visible located behind and above the galleries. There is a meeting room, music room, and two generous artist studios that can accommodate four artists. The

centre also hosts artists in residence. The office is a large room with six individual booths with a boardroom table at the end of the room. The Brennanstown Arts Centre has seven members of staff, three are full-time, and four part-time, all of whom receive salaries. There are a theatre, dressing room and a coffee shop on the ground floor that is used by various groups for events, rehearsals, and workshops. The groups range from Baby Trad Music Sessions for parents and babies to writing groups.

It benefits from superb infrastructure, with adjacency to national roads and train routes advantageously channels audiences from, neighbouring counties. The foyer is large and broad. It has many alcoves with velvet and leather sofas were people quietly pass the time. It offers a safe, warm space where people can sit without feeling they have to spend money. There is an expectation that if an individual plans to sit for an extended length of time in a coffee shop, restaurant, or bar that they would purchase products while they sat. There are no financial demands on people utilising the Brennanstown Arts Centre. The community is welcome to sit there for lengthened periods, and there was a healthy cross-cultural mix. Families use the centre as a collection point for loved ones. The community used the foyer as if it were a sheltered park with benches.

The Local Authority and the Arts Council of Ireland fund the Brennanstown Arts Centre. It has a stellar reputation within Ireland's art sector for producing shows to a high standard. It closed during the summer of 2018 for renovations. There had been no repairs or upgrades done to the building since it opened as an Arts Centre in 2005. Respondent E clarifies:

> The Brennanstown Arts Centre has had two capital investments from the Dept over the last number of years. Which has upgrade windows, fire safety. However the has been little or no investment in equipment and technical equipment for the galleries and

> theatre. Funding has decreased most years since the crash and has been relatively static (Interview June 2019).

The exhibition and research residency were launched on November 17th, 2018. Even though the building had closed for repairs, the work behind the scenes continued. There was constant contact with the director and visual arts manager. Arrangements were made to deliver the artworks to the gallery. Other works were finished off-site; the staff looked after every aspect of the exhibition's installation, which is unusual amongst the network of Arts Centres. Frequently, the installation of shows does not happen unless the artist is present. In many cases, Arts Centres have staff working on Government schemes and tend to disappear when an exhibition needs construction.

(2.3) Artist/Ethnographer

The artwork is very personal. It revolves around autoethnography. The term autoethnography is described as "highly personalized account that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding" (Sparkes 2000:21). Autoethnography "lets you use yourself to get to culture" (Ellis et.al 2011). Being able to embody my role as an artist and simultaneously situate myself as researcher within the parameters of the study offered a valuable opportunity to gather data that might not otherwise have been accessible. Autoethnography is considered a non-traditional approach because researcher subjective experiences and personal insights are included in the process of producing knowledge. In comparison to more conventional methodological approaches, autoethnography "acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner 2011). My decision to adapt an autoethnography strategy is premised on the dual role of artist/researcher. It

constitutes a means to challenge prevailing norms and knowledge claims by applying simultaneously a subjective lens and a sociological lens on the subject matter. I aim to demonstrate that the acquisition of knowledge can proceed by relying on diverse sources including personal knowledge and experience.

The method of reflexive analysis of personal narrative is used to extract and explore, actual incidents, moments and experiences, and inform the viewer of these life events through dramatically rendered images. The work exhibited addresses societal taboos and challenging social issues. It playfully deals with serious illness and domestic abuse. The installation approaches these subjects, through references to humour in popular culture. It supports the need for the human imagination to escape its bleak realities. It creates a juncture from the perspective of a young child and an adult child. The traditions of Warner Brothers, Looney-Tunes and Hanna-Barbera cartoons saturate the imagery. These recognisable, familiar portrayals are crucial to penetrating the unconscious memory of the observer to create spontaneous reactions and a transition of the narrative from the personal to the public. The artwork creates a space to discuss social issues that are typically repressed. The catalyst for the exhibition was the transfer of private experience to the collective consciousness. The exhibition took a novel approach to complicated issues; it addressed them flexibly and humorously. It was a key factor because it disarmed people, removed communicative difficulties, and encouraged conversations to begin. Many individuals shared their own experience. Others queried 'how do we recognise domestic abuse?' These basic answers remain mostly unavailable to the general public, thus highlighting the lack of accessible information on domestic abuse in rural Ireland.

As a method, autoethnography attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art. The research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical and emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). Leon Anderson argues:

> That autoethnographic inquiry, which has been advocated primarily in recent years as a radically non-traditional, poststructuralist form of research, actually fits well with traditional symbolic interactionist ethnography (2006: 391).

For this reason, it is an appropriate method for this research project. Anderson (2006: 375) describes 'analytic autoethnography':

> As ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena.

Autoethnography affords the process to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging. To produce accounts of personal and interpersonal experience that provide accessible texts that has the capacity to reach a broader and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people (Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1995; Goodall, 2006; Hooks, 1994; Ellis et. al 2011). The goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better (Holman Jones, 2005: 76; Ellis et. al 2011).

Visual methodology sanctions communication through representations of personal realities that possess the capacity to ignite conversations that connect the private to the public experience. Thus, establishing a platform of communal discourse of informal and organic conversations. Using autobiographical artworks proved a successful research method, because it secured uncomplicated access to participants where consent was not an issue because all participants were anonymous. Furthermore,

it gave visibility to challenging social issues, and as a consequence, the imagery took what David Buckingham describes as the 'steering role' (2009:636). It provoked automatic responses, that at times felt like a trilateral conversation between the artwork, the observer, and the artist. Being present with the work was advantageous to gathering data. Gillian Rose (2014:29) considers visual research methods 'to be inherently collaborative'. She argues that visual materials can 'reveal what is hidden in the inner mechanisms of the ordinary and the taken for granted' (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004b: 7; Rose 2014:28). Rose maintains that visual research methods are:

> especially effective in generating evidence that other methods – especially interviews, not to mention surveys – cannot. Almost all visual research methods involve talk between the researcher and the researched, and it is claimed that things are discussed in the talk about visual materials that don't get discussed in talk-only interviews (Rose 2014:28).

However, with the sensitive issues addressed came a responsibility to both the participant and myself as an ethnographer. Buckingham argues that visual methods:

> cannot be seen simply as a means of enabling participants to 'express themselves' or to 'tell their own stories' – or indeed of enabling researchers to gain privileged access to what people 'really' think or feel. However attractive it may at first appear, this argument typically neglects the formative role (and indeed the responsibility) of the researcher (Buckingham 2009:636).

The disclosures recorded were open, tender and at times, candid. In the role of artist/researcher, I was always conscious of my duty and not to allow the conversations to cross the line into counselling, or giving advice. For the duration of the fieldwork, navigating this issue was front and foremost in my mind. Additionally, there was a participant who was offended by an artwork (see Fig. 17). A man entered the Kellystown Arts Centre alone. He walked around the gallery space, and on viewing the artwork became aggressive and animated, and began shouting 'why did you do this? Why would you ruin it?' I attempted to engage with the man, but he stormed out of the

building. I was alone in the gallery at the time and wholly ambushed by his response. As an artist and ethnographer utilising self-authored visual research methods ,there is always the possibility of exposure to adverse reactions to the work.

(2.4) Research Timetable

September 2017- October 2019	**Literature Review**
September 2017- November 2017	**Create new artwork for upcoming exhibition/field work**
November 2017- January 2018	**Field work (Kellystown Gallery Space)**
February 2018- March 2018	**Field work (Kellystown Arts Centre)**
March 2018- August 2018	**Data Analysis**
September 2018- November 2018	**Create new art work for upcoming exhibition/field work**
November 2018 – January 2019	**Field work (Brennanstown Arts Centre)**
January 2019 – May 2019	**Data analysis**
June 2019	**Semi-structured interviews**
May 2019 – October 2019	**Complete and submit thesis**

Table.1.

A comprehensive review of the literature continued between September 2017 and October 2019 as new themes arose such as the arts and social inclusion; measuring the value of the arts; arts access and audience take up in Irish society; inequality in the arts. Artwork for two solo exhibitions and one group show were created. The artwork embodied the sociological imagination, it dealt with serious illness and domestic abuse. The exhibitions afforded a discerning insight into the behind-the-scenes functioning of

the Arts Centre, normally exclusive to exhibiting artists. Additionally, it supported an astute scope into how the Arts Centres are approaching the health and wellbeing of their communities through challenging social issues.

An extensive twelve-week pilot research project concluded in two art spaces in Kellystown in March 2018. One in the Kellystown Arts Centre, the other in the Kellystown Gallery Space. A detailed journal was kept analysing observations, descriptions and experiences throughout the case studies to produce field reports. The second artist/ethnographic immersive research project commenced in November 2018. It was a six-week research residency. It took the form of a personal solo exhibition of socially engaged artwork again dealing with the complicated social issues of abuse and illness. The exhibition/fieldwork was situated in the arts centre as a staff member, observing participants, and how individuals and groups that utilise the art space interact with the artwork and events hosted. Two discussion events took place during this residency. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with four people (B,C,D, E) involved in the provision of local arts, and one local politcial representative (A).

Interviews were generally conducted in the interviewees places of work. All interviews and field notes were transcribed and subject to detailed analysis employing a grounded theory appraoch (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I abstracted a number of key themes from the data and organised the discussion into three thematic chapters which follow.

The main obstacle I faced with the project was the lack of funding. Even though academics champion interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences, securing funding from research agencies remains incredibly challenging. The funding decision for this project reflected patterns in the broader research addresses in Chapter

3, i.e., work in and on the arts is at the pre-disposition of funders. I submitted my project for Irish Research Council funding and the project was awarded scores of 80 and 93 from assessors. The inconsistency in the scores is reflective of a general attitude to the arts. There is no shared normative understanding of their value. As a result, the project had to be truncated as I could not continue the study without the necessary financial support. Ironically, although the study criticises arts funding in Ireland, the only funding this research project secured came entirely from the arts sector.

Respondent	**Occupation**
A	**Local Representative**
B	**Art Director**
C	**Arts Officer**
D	**Art Director**
E	**Arts Officer**

Table 2. Semi-structured interviews**.**

Chapter Three: Is Art Oil, Or Are Boxes Being Ticked?

(3) The Social Organisation Behind The Artwork.

‘Art is our Oil’, (Respondent A) and 'they are just ticking boxes’ (Respondent C) are statements that describe attitudes from different Local Authorities. It gives a clear insight into the fluctuation and inconsistencies in attitudes and support for the arts. These deviations can occur within a Local Authority, between Local Authorities throughout the country (see Fig.4), and relationships between stakeholders at both a local and national level.

For most art centres, the artwork is paramount. The artist is the public face of exhibitions, or performances hosted and supported by art centres. However, there is a social organisation behind the artwork. That organisation has multiple components that connect it back to the national Government. The first is the artist, then the art centre staff, and the county arts office. There is the board of directors, the Local Authority, the Arts Council of Ireland, Culture Ireland, other funding bodies, and elected representatives. It is commonplace for elected representatives to be on the art centres board of directors. The Arts Council of Ireland hold concerns that county councillors on the board could be considered a conflict of interests. This was articulated at a recent information event hosted by the Arts Council of Ireland (ACI 2019). Respondent A was asked to comment on the Arts Council of Ireland’s concerns. They replied:

> I don’t think the arts council should do always, but if they do I bet they say it’s a reserve function of elected councillors to set both the annual budget, which includes the arts budget and the arts policy for the county. (Councillors do have a code of ethics to follow that should prevent them from manipulating their personal interests, so that is a non-reason). Also, as the (county) council itself is also funded by the arts council, it might in effect, create a closed circle of how the money is spent (Interview 2019).

County councillors are direct links to the Local Authority, the primary stakeholder. The other major stakeholder, the Arts Council is not represented on Arts Centre boards of management. Additionally, Arts Centre boards are typically made up of artists and business people. Members usually have considerable expertise in their own right. However, they may not have had previous experience as board members of an arts organisation. While appropriate information, training and support may be sought, it is not often readily available (ACI 2015:iii). There are three ways whereby new directors may join the Art Centre Board; election (by the members of the company, at the AGM); nomination by another body (such as a local authority);co-option by the Board (ACI 2015:23).

Creative Ireland and other funding bodies have a strong presence within the art centres community through funding awards and collaborations. The decisions of the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Central Government influence the running and functioning of the art centre. Without this organisation, it would be impossible for the art centre to operate. This chapter will address the variances, by interrogating the social organisations behind the artwork, beginning with the artist, the Arts Centre, the Local Authority, and finally the Arts Council of Ireland. I will diagnose the challenges faced by the Arts Centre, alongside the current changing and developing dynamic between stakeholders that are impacting the Arts Centre.

(3.1) The Artwork And The Artist

'Artists make art because they cannot survive or remain sane without making art. That is the highest definition; they also make art as their profession' (O'Kelly 2006: 6). Artists and their work are central to the art centre. The process of showcasing the practice of an individual artist begins with an informal discussion between the artist and the art centre director. The conversations build over the years into studio visits by directors, and then into intensive exhibition planning. The planning process can take up to two years and exhibitions are usually in place for six to eight weeks. During that time, they often involve events and discussions with experts and academics on the exhibition topic. The production, installation and launch of exhibitions necessitate the commissioning of expertise from local businesses and creative industries.

Additionally, numerous artists are the recipients of the art centres programme of funded residency awards or subsidised studio spaces, that afford artists the time and space to work in the creative environment of the Art Centre. The Art Centre is firmly embedded within the business community, supporting and enhancing the creative industries:

> Venues and local authority arts officers often provide the first supports and resources to emerging artists and organisations, stimulating economic activity and cultural entrepreneurship (ACI 2019: 46).

Contrarily, local planning has moved shopping to out of town locations, increasing the difficulty for small local businesses. Respondent E explains:

> Planning has supported a considerable level of ribbon development of shops including Tesco's, Aldi and Lidl outside the town centre which is effecting small shops and businesses (Interview June 2019)

(3.2) Art Centres

> Art centres are full-time, public facing, professionally-managed, building-based organisations. They support the creation, presentation and mediation of the arts across a range of art forms, and art practices. They support professional, collaborative, voluntary and amateur art practices (ACI 2019:2).

Arts Centre's are community spaces within the public realm with a remit to encourage arts practise and to provide an arts programme in contemporary art, theatre, dance, comedy, musical events, artists talks, artist's studios and residencies, educational workshops, host community groups, and run a coffee shop . In larger urban locations, the coffee shop/restaurant may be leased to a catering company. In rural communities, they tend to be smaller and are the responsibility of the Arts Centre. The coffee shop is a vital way to entice the community into the Arts Centre and it encourages people to extend their visit. It also brings in needed revenue.

The Local Authority involvement in culture is addressing a market failure – which means that this is still viewed as provision as opposed to resource exploitation (ACI 2019: 58). In total, there were 2,881 staff directly employed at the 138 year-round venues in 2016. Only 634 of these were employed on a full-time basis. Some 60% of staff were employed full-time, part-time or on contract. The remaining 40% were engaged as volunteers, or on employment schemes or internships, or some other form of temporary or unpaid arrangements (ACI 2019). Despite staffing constraints the salaries for the art sector are low, and decreasing:

> In the third quarter of 2018, average weekly earnings in the arts, entertainment, recreation and other service activities sector were two thirds of the average across all sectors (€494.98 compared to €740.32) 60% of PAYE jobs in performing arts organisations pay less than the average national annual earnings across all sectors in 2017 of €35,365 (Theatre Forum 2019).

Salaries are starting to drop. 'I have observed things like in Institution X when the advertised the replacement for the director of the gallery there. The salary had gone from over €100,000 to under €50,000' (Respondent D 2019). In both case studies the staff's salaries correspond to the findings reported by Theatre Forum. In county A, none of the staff received salaries. Every person involved in the art centre was volunteering, or on a community employment scheme.

Respondent B delineates:

> You were either volunteering or on a scheme, on the dole, or illegally working, and it's a shame but that's the way these things happen sometimes. I think there's a feeling that artists are a crazy bunch and they'll do whatever… it will look good on their CV's, rather than it will look good in their bank account, which is not on really (Interview 2019).

In the Brennanstown Arts Centre the salaries are low, and an extended pay freeze is impacting the emotional well-being of staff. Respondent D clarifies: 'salaries haven't gone up here, and when I say that I am talking about the welfare of people, of probably no significance in the last ten years'. The majority of the staff are part-time, and they are actively seeking volunteers. To combat the increased demands of the art centres growing community. The practice is commonplace throughout the country (see Fig 7). Respondent E describes the benefits of volunteering:

> I don't think that we should under estimate the value of volunteering in the arts. The arts provide something really essential for the individual, it allows them access to the light and dark part of themselves (Interview June 2019).

The Arts Council of Ireland, are staunch in their belief that artists must get paid. However, there is a disjuncture on this with the local authority around the art centre staff. The arts in rural Ireland would not function without volunteers. The majority of art sector workers are volunteering (see Fig.5). In essence, the neoliberal project is "an

anti-municipal project" (Crewe 2016). As local authorities are starved of finances and public policies are inexorably marketized there is a growing push for civil society – often in the form of volunteer labour- to fill gaps in public provision. The effects of austerity has led to a significant decline in the budgets- at national and local level for the arts. Not surprisingly, growing reliance on unpaid volunteers to keep the art centre afloat is an inevitable consequence of this financial squeeze (Crewe 2016).

There is also concern that the benevolence of volunteers is becoming established in usage, which in turn is causing trepidation that the art sector will become elitist:

> There is so much good will and passion coming from people who work in the arts, but I think we have to be very careful that we don't put systems in place, that we don't make it a really middle class kind of thing. That people who work in the arts have to be from a certain background (Respondent D 2019).

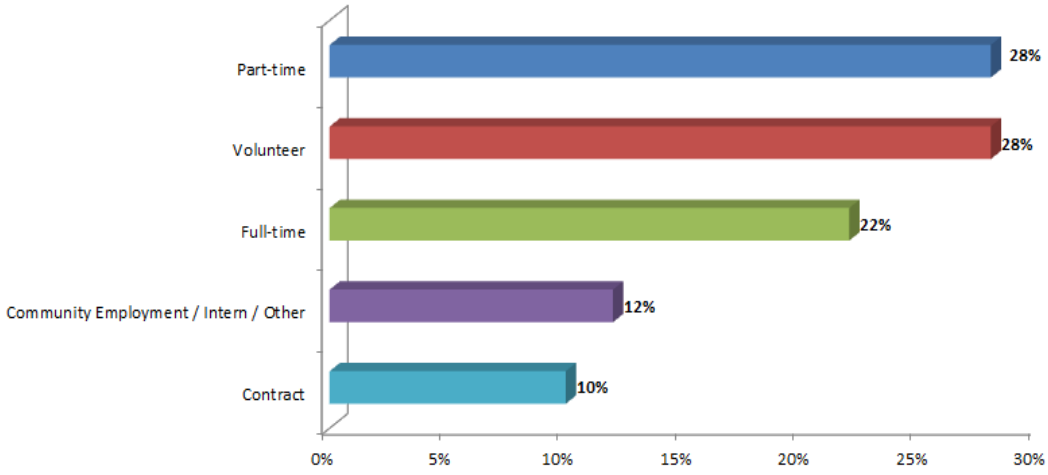

Figure 7. Category of employment at year-round arts centres (ACI 2019)

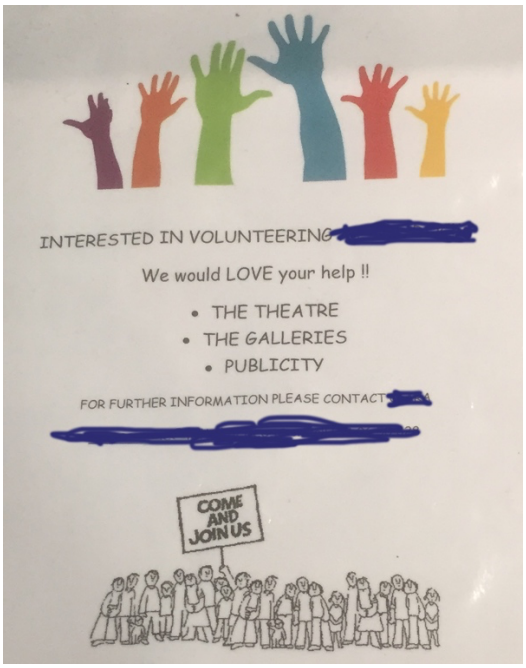

Figure 8. An Arts Centres volunteer campaign 2019.

Despite the significant staffing constraints, there is an expectation and requirement from stakeholders that art centres must deliver high-quality art events in all art forms of visual art, theatre, dance, music and literature. The Review of Art Centres and Venues Report has acknowledged some of the burdens on the directors of Arts Centres': ' Most venues are operating within the same amount of funding since before the recession, although costs have risen. Also, there are considerably more demands on time and staff'(ACI 2019:190). A substantial amount of time is spent validating budgets; 'you spend so much time showing value for money that you wonder where is the value in the time that you spend justifying yourself '(Interview 2019). The Arts Council of Ireland's, commitment to the arts is unquestionable, Local Authorities have

stated that they want to do more, over half of the Local Authorities (52%) said they would like to provide more support to arts venues if finance was made available.

In consequence, the Arts Council of Ireland emphasise; 'Substantially more funding is required for an industry that is chronically over-worked, under-staffed and under-paid (2019:190). 'Additional funding is required for a number of things, including professional staff, upgrading of facilities and programming' (ACI 2019: 56-57). In the Framework Policy to 2025 the government announced their 'commitment to increase resources for arts and heritage, to support Irish culture on the world stage, and to improve funding structures for investment in national and local services'(GOI 2015:2). However, their pledges failed to obtain public traction, 'the committee's report offers little that's new or surprising. The call for a cross-departmental approach to the arts is already happening via the new Creative Ireland structures'(Linehan 2017).

Linehan (2017) describes policy documents by government agencies as 'bureaucratic jargon'. The strategies focus is on the value of culture in society. It did not address the contribution of cultural leadership by directors and art centre staff. The art sector is working in a new and rapidly changing society and at the same time, delivering high-standing programmes with increasing expectations, in an under-resourced sector:

> I am 25 years working in the arts professionally, and I have been the director of everything I have done in those 25 years. [] I have to say that this is the most difficult I have ever had in terms of the spread of responsibility. So the programming aspect is problematic, we do our best and our programme is really quite good. It is considered quite good nationally (Interview 2019).

Art centre directors are congruent with their communities. They perceive community adjustments, evaluate and modify programmes accordingly. It appears that social changes are occurring organically. However, this is not the case Respondent D affirms, 'I think it probably looks quite organic on the outside, but on the inside, it is very structured really.'

The real experts in art centres are their directors. Nevertheless, they do not feel valued. The sense of disenchantment is ubiquitous. The Arts Council of Ireland have acknowledged the frustration in the Report on Arts Centres and Venues when an interviewee responded to a question, by stating 'I beg for a living' (2019:62). Feeling undervalued has become standard. When respondents were asked if they felt valued or appreciated by stakeholders there was a definite pattern in their responses;

> I would have to say minus 100. Minus 100, so underappreciated. There is no appreciation. None. Absolutely none. In fact yeah….in fact….very little sense from any of the funders. (Interview June 2019).

> I'm sure the arts council do appreciate it, I know the arts office definitely do, but if the elected representatives even know what's going on….I'd say not (Interview May 2019).

> We are ambitious. I had a level of ambition when I got here and I want to keep that going. We will keep going and we are really good. I feel for what we have we are doing pretty well. I think the danger of all of that is burn out. They use people up. They come with passion, they work really hard and then they go (Interview June 2019).

Respondents are demonstrating the lack of validation which impacts on them doing their jobs and the disenchantment they feel when they are unable to achieve their objectives. The responses demonstrate a breach in the basic human need for respect. It is a colossal failure by the stakeholders and needs prompt revision. Rogers and Ashforth (2014:1579) 'argue that respect is among the most important of all social cues that

employees receive from their work environment, as it validates their worth and meets universal human needs.'

However, there is a positive working relationship with Culture Ireland where mutual respect and trust are evident; 'you have to do half the work in applying to Culture Ireland for more money, and then they trust you to get on with it' (Conference Attendee 2019).

> I have to say that I have had the most amazing positive experience with Creative Ireland. We got funding for a national project. They speak to me like a peer, they treat me like an equal at meetings. We talk the way you and I talk, there is very little hierarchy other than the articulation of what their needs are, and what I can do. It's very normalised, I don't find that with the other funders (Interview June 2019).

(3.3) The County Arts Office

The county arts office has two roles, it is part of the Local Authority, and the county's art community. The County Arts Office has an in-depth knowledge of most artist in their county and can act as a mentor and advocate. The arts office grants financial support to artists at all career stages, festivals, educational programmes, culture night events, and represent the arts community at the county level.

In small Irish towns, the arts officer is well known to all in the arts community. Relationships between the county arts officer and the arts community are generally positive. Nonetheless, arts offices tend to be understaffed. Occasionally, the arts officer is the only staff member. Consequently, if an arts officer is on annual leave, sick, or resigns, artists have no representation. Tipton writing for The Irish Times (2014) articulates the complexities, 'Sligo doesn't have an arts officer in place[..]Things are

worse in Roscommon, where there hasn't been an arts officer in place for some time.' Five years on, many counties are still enduring the repercussions of an understaffed arts office. A respondents experience as the solitary staff member in the county arts office endorses this: 'Everything has to be done by me' (Interview June 2019).

Despite the increasing demands and financial constraints that interviewees must navigate, they were all cognizant of the lack of resources and strain that stakeholders function with and empathetic to their situation. Respondent E deduces, ' I think it is wise to be realistic about the resources available in the arts council, and also the resources available in local authorities. I think we just have resource issues' (June 2019). Another respondent postulates, ' I think in their case (Art Council of Ireland) their funding is so small, it is almost like buttering bread they are trying to spread it quite thinly, and the thing is that thin level of support is used really, really well throughout the country (June 2019).

> Then the arts council probably have to justify themselves when they do their estimates every year. I can't speak for the arts council, but anytime that I would have had the pleasure of sitting on a panel for the arts council the quality of the applications coming in, far exceeds the available funding to resource them. I am sure that is across the board an experience that the arts council would have (Interview June 2019).

> There is an awful lot going on for them (Local Authority). They are pulled every which way, and they are fighting themselves to do as much as possible. I am aware that so much has been pushed back onto local authorities by government departments that may have done certain jobs, and they are going 'no, the local authority can do that. The local authority can get the community to activate and do their own town improvement scheme.' I think there is a huge cultural shift for Local Authorities. In a way what worries me slightly, is the arts council seems to be putting their policy on to them which is more kind of a partnership approach with the Local Authorities without realising how fully stretched that they are (Interview June 2019).

(3.4) The Local Authority

Arts centres are mainly funded by Local Authorities (see Fig. 9). This funding is considerable and includes infrastructure and development. Some art centres are also receiving financial support from the Arts Council of Ireland, which is designated for programming. There are other sources of funding. However, the level of funding varies significantly from art centre to art centre (see Fig. 10).

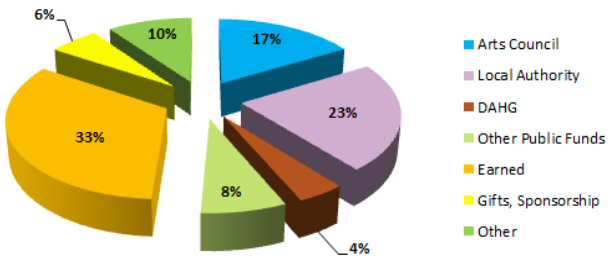

Figure 9. Extent and Range of Venue Funding by Source (ACI 2019).

According to the AIRO audit of venues in 2016, there are currently 138 year-round art centres, 102 of these venues regularly offer more than one art form, and 24 of the rest occasionally do so. The remaining 12 have the facilities to do so. Of that 138, the Local Authority funds 105 year-round venues (ACI 2019), and of that 138 the Arts Council of Ireland, funds 49. A list of all 138 venues is provided in the Appendix.

Fig. 10 focuses on a group of 48 art centres in receipt of Arts Council funding in 2017. The level of support that they received is in the table below. Earned income and funding from sources other than the Arts Council and Local Authorities are not included in the table.

No. of Venues	48	
Arts Council Funding	€5,386,250	€112,214
Local Authority Funding	€7,295,946	€151,999
Total Arts Council &Local Authority	€12,682,196	€264,213

Table 2: Arts Council and Local Authority funding for Arts Centres

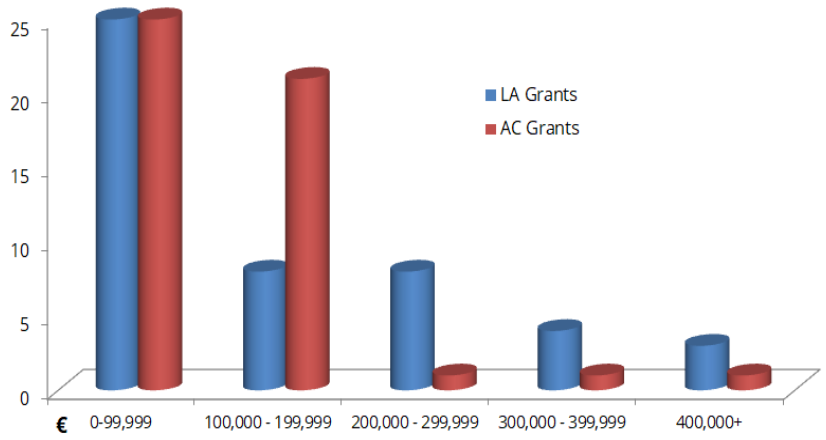

Figure 10. Arts Centre's in receipt of Arts Council Venue Funding 2017 (ACI 2019)

Albeit, the Local Authority have been consistent funders for the arts, it is a relatively new area of understanding for them. Art centres have only become part of their remit since the 1990s (Keating 2009; Mackin 2016). Staffing changes and newly elected members can affect attitudes, support, and crucially, funding decisions for the arts and the art centre. However, 'the weakness that the arts has in terms of political centrality, ideological support and evidence of policy success have made it largely a peripheral sector with limited staff, limited funds and a dependence on the abilities of individual councillors and officers to argue a case for it' (Gray 2017:320). Every five years, the membership of the Local Authority changes with local elections. It is not uncommon

for representatives to have no interest in the arts, yet these elected members vote on funding decisions that directly impact the Arts Centre.

It is evident from the variances in support for the arts throughout the country (see Fig.9) that many of the senior management in Local Authority's and elected representatives consider the arts to be a high priority, and others do not. The lack of appreciation is not necessarily their fault. It is the outcome of a generalised neglect of the arts and arts education in Ireland starting with the omission of arts from the national school programme until 1999 (GOI 1999). Currently, very few officials and councillors attend arts events or exhibition launches.

As a consequence, the arts are vulnerable to the personal preference and predispositions of changing personnel. Instead, the arts should be personality proofed and there should be safe guards in place to mitigate against voting practices weighted on personal opinion. Locally elected representatives and staff working in local authorities should be encouraged and incentivised to learn more about the role of arts and culture in society, and in their counties. In turn, I believe this would help to resolve the substantial disparity in arts funding throughout the country. Local Authorities attitude to the arts must be consistent because indifference has the potential to cause repercussions that affect not only the art centre but arts production generally throughout the county. Respondent C explains:

> The role of the local authority is crucial here because the arts council will only observe how much support is being provided by the local authority, and then they will decide on their own support proportionately, which I think is probably fair enough (2019).

(3.4.1) The Role of Elected Representatives

Local representatives play a significant role in the arts at the county level. They vote on funding allocation to the arts. Therefore, their support is crucial. Despite this, all interviewees were in agreement on the question of attendance of elected representatives and senior management from the Local Authority at cultural events and exhibition openings: 'Not enough of them, no' (Respondent A 2019). Attendance at events would allow for far greater insight and understanding into the work of local artists, and also could have a beneficial effect on funding decisions. Respondent A acknowledges this: 'It would ensure a continued understanding of the importance of the arts and creative sector for our county and in turn, would ensure that any budget decisions by elected members do not impact negatively on this sector.'

Furthermore, interviewees believe that a regular presence by senior management and elected representatives would assist in raising the profile of the arts sector. They were asked if a more significant visible effort/presence at launch nights would be beneficial?

> I think so, yes. The more people of influence in a community that show an interest the more the profile is raised, so yes I think so. Oh yeah, yes. Yes. I think if local representatives, not just councillors and TD's, but senior managers of local authorities, I think if they made a genuine effort to understand what it is that they are providing to the community, they would have a greater appreciation of the value of it. If the understood the value of it, the support would be there, it would be provided because they could see the rationale (Interview June 2019).

> I think so because most of the time that they are at something it is purely because it is part of the job, but it is probably that they don't have time on their calendar to socialise. I think it's purely that, they go to meetings, they go to openings, they go to funerals, they go to everything they have to go to but there probably isn't much time just to go and support something because it is a play, or it's an exhibition….. Look if they gave you the funding and never turned up I'd be happy enough, rather than turning up and no funding that would be no fun (Interview May 2019).

> I suppose it would (Interview June 2019).

Despite this the lack of attendance is glaringly apparent:

> I suppose senior management would expect if they have an arts officer, and if they pay an arts officer, it is that persons job. I mean if you are a senior executive in a local authority you have a lot of other services that you provide and probably better understood as the core services of the local authority (Interview June 2019).
>
> I understand where they are coming from, because like you know, there's lots of things that I wouldn't go to because I am just not interested, but they are elected representatives so they should be showing their face a little bit more (Interview May 2019).

It is difficult to comprehend how county Councillors and Local Authority senior management can fully appreciate the arts without first-hand experience. For this reason, it is crucial that the arts community and wider society are cognizant of the full impact that voting decisions by the elective representatives and the local authority has on the arts sector. Furthermore, there is an onus on the creative community to challenge representatives on their support for arts and culture at, county level, and articulate their demands for a significant increase in resources. Respondent C deduces:

> I would like to make this very important point, funding is not the most fundamental element in the development of creative activity in the community, it is the community itself. It is the creative sector within the community, and the bigger problem for the county is not the lack of funding, it's the lack of people to look for the funding.

Presently, there is an unequal distribution of investment in the arts throughout the Local Authorities. Respondent C notes that this is not entirely the fault of the Local Authority but is also the outcome of a lack of awareness and appreciation of the positive role that arts and culture can play in rural towns and communities: 'They [Local Authorities] respond to the demands of the community. In one or two other very small counties, rural counties primarily, there is no noticeable demand from the community.'

(3.5) The Arts Council

In 1951 the Arts Council of Ireland was established. Its primary role is to stimulate public interest in and promote the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts (ACI). The Arts Council of Ireland is an autonomous body; it is self-governing and subject to its own laws. On account of this, Respondent A believes that they essentially 'ignore democracy'. When preparing, drafting and publishing their most recent strategy for Local Authorities, they only consulted with Local Authority staff. They did not engage with elected representatives, or approach the national representative body (Association of Irish Local Government (AILG)) at any stage of the process. Nonetheless, elected representatives are expected to ensure the strategy is implemented and paid for at the local level (Respondent A, 2019). It is felt that the Arts Council of Ireland are alienating the elected representatives who are the ones charged with supporting and implementing their policies (Respondent A; Interview 2019)

The Arts Council of Ireland, is entirely dependent on the dissemination of funding allocation from the National Government. For this reason, it can change from year to year, rendering it impossible to implement long term strategic planning for Arts Council of Ireland and their beneficiaries. The Arts Council of Ireland is presently negotiating 'multi-annual planning for regularly funded organisations based on indicative levels of funding, with the proviso that actual funding may not meet the levels indicated, depending on the resources made available each year by the government (ACI 2019: viii).' The reason being, the ramifications of annual funding cause significant issues for Arts Centres. Feedback from Arts Centres broadly confirmed this:

> Arts Council of Ireland's funding mechanisms are regarded more critically than those of the Local Authorities: there is general dissatisfaction with the process of applying for / receiving Arts Council of Ireland funding (67% dissatisfied). However, venues

> are generally more satisfied with the process of applying for /receiving Local Authority funding (half were very satisfied) (ACI 2019: 54).

Principally, it is the time commitment, 'most venues are chronically understaffed and overwhelmed in dealing with increasing compliance issues' (ACI 2019: 188). Thus, complicated compliance and application systems are creating a causal sequence that impedes the time needed to administer long-term programming for a rapidly changing and culturally diverse society. Respondent D articulates the societal changes facing art centres in rural counties:

> Ideally, I think for us because we don't know. There is things we don't know about communities because they are new obviously. I think it is really good to that when we are activating the centre in a way that it is led from them a bit. I think that's what sort of works. It could just be very false trying to programme things in a slightly patronising way. So I think to do that work well, you really need a lot of time.

In addition, the application process is frustrating, which the Review of Art Centres and Venues Report acknowledges:

> It is impossible to have programmes in place in theatre, music, dance, opera etc. for the following year at time of Arts Council deadlines. As a result fictional programmes are being submitted and often bear no resemblance to final programme content - trust venues to know they can and will pull these programmes together in time and instead allow us to apply for a "Core Programme Cost" to cover day to day programming that can be correctly reported on as part of end of year submissions (ACI 2019: 62).

The Arts Council of Ireland has acted on this feedback and have made changes to the funding application process, which were considered to be improvements at recent meetings. The Arts Council of Ireland is actively restructuring the system of evaluation into local and county categories (ACI 2019: xii), and progressively reviewing the balance of funding between the Arts Council of Ireland and the Local Authority:

> It is reasonable to set a goal of achieving a more consistent, shared balance of the respective funding contributions by the Arts Council and Local Authorities with a view to resolving existing disparities over a longer period of time - say 5-7 years. (ACI 2019: 111).

Furthermore, the funding application process for the Arts Centre coincides with the County Arts Office. The significance of this is that the leadership of the arts across the country are taken up by a 'very detailed application process'(Respondent B &D). In art communities in small Irish towns, the local arts officer and art centre directors are easily accessible. However, during the application process, they are removed from the arts community. The informal, friendly, and necessary consultative service dissipates at this time. Albeit, the funding is essential for the arts to function; the application process itself can put a temporal constraint on the processes of engaging with the arts at grass-roots level in the local cultural community.

Additionally, there is an issue with transparency and communication regarding data collection and feedback in the applications process. The amount of data collected is considered excessive by directors. This matter was ventilated at a recent Arts Council of Ireland event. The explanation given was the data collected (from the last three years) is still too general, and the fact-finding will need to continue. Furthermore, the feedback from refused applications has been deemed unhelpful, Respondent B explains:

> If you look for feedback, and get the feedback, you think… 'oh god, I must have got it.' The feedback is usually so good…. but you don't. It's hard to know where you have gone wrong sometimes.

(3.6) Politicisation of the Arts

Although they invest heavily in the arts, ‘Local Councils are not explicitly mandated to invest in arts or culture’ (ACI 2019: 78). The majority of art centres operate under a Company Limited Guarantee (CLG). The Company Limited Guarantee effectively comes under the control of the parent Local Authorities.

> This control is exercised most directly through the appointment of directors to the boards of the companies. Lease or licence agreements and financial arrangements also provide vehicles for the owners of the venues to maintain control. However, they generally take a hands-off stance in relation to the day-to-day management and operation of the venues, and much responsibility lies with the boards and management (Art Council 2019:92).

Granting that in the majority of counties the Local Authority takes a 'hands-off stance', but it is not always the case. There are inconsistencies and divergences across the country. In 2012 the Luan Gallery in county Westmeath 'was the first purpose-built, modern visual art gallery located in the midlands’ (RIAI 2012), was due to be launched. Regardless of this, an elected representative profusely objected to a contemporary art installation that was part of the exhibition, ‘Borrowed Memories’, and on loan from the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA). The artwork, 'Fragments sur les Institutions Républicaines IV', was based on a collection of prisoners' messages smuggled out of the H-Block prison in 1981 (Mac Connell 2013). A local representative called for the removal of the artwork from the exhibition.

Figure 11. 'Fragments sur les Institutions Républicaines IV' by Shane Cullen. Installation image from The Luan Gallery (RTE 2013)

Figure 12. 'Fragments sur les Institutions Républicaines IV' by Shane Cullen. Installation image from the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA 2012).

While, these incidents are unusual, they nevertheless underline the fact that the local authority does have the ability to influence arts programming. Moreover, such incidents garner a lot of media coverage which can contribute to an anti-arts discourse among the public when the issue is framed in terms of "value for money" or "distasteful or offensive art." Respondent B has experienced the Local Authority assert its control;

> A problem with a lot of art centres is that they are only run because they are paid for by the county council. So the person funding you… and you are going to put on — whatever sort of play — say you had an art exhibition about homelessness and the county council is funding you, and all the art is saying — there's nothing being done for homelessness in the county. Well, you're going to get flak from the county council saying, 'look we are funding you and this is insulting us.'

In 2016 The Project Arts Centre removed a mural titled 'Repeal the 8th' from its front wall after it received a warning notice from Dublin City Council's Planning Department that the work was in violation of planning law (Linehan 2016). The artwork was commissioned by the feminist platform the HunReal Issues on behalf of the Project Arts Centre (Sette 2016). According to Linehan 'Maser's artistic practice is rooted in graffiti culture – which is by definition provisional, illegal and subject to brutal erasure' (2016). The artwork featured a simple red heart with white lettering inside it that read, 'Repeal the 8th'; it popped against the azure wall of the centre's building in Dublin's busy Temple Bar district (Sette 2016).

Figure 13. 'Repeal the 8th' by Maser at The Project Arts Centre, Temple Bar 2016 (Price 2018)

Figure 14. The removal of 'Repeal the 8th' by Maser at The Project Arts Centre (Becker 2018).

The Project Arts Centre Artistic Director Cian O'Brien "didn't know" the mural required planning permission. It was not the first to be painted on the building's exterior, but it was the first to be threatened with removal after the Dublin City Council received 11 written complaints from the public about the artwork (Sette 2016). The Arts Centre said it had received over 200 letters of support and 50 complaints about Maser's painting (Linehan 2016). Respondent A reported having similar experiences;

> If the Local Authority get one complaint about a play or exhibition they may get annoyed whereas there could be 20 positive reactions that they don't hear about. We have to be careful to balance the positives and the negatives. The negatives seem to have a louder voice sometimes. I think an arts centre shouldn't act as a community centre. An art centre should push the boundaries and in doing so it is bound to annoy some people. It's a bit of a balancing act as the Local Authority are the main funders of the arts but the art centre is the creative hub, it is not there to please everyone but to create great art. They should support an arts centre as the art community is an integral part our society. An art saying I love is " Art should disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed. (Interview May 2019).

Despite the broad support for "Repeal the 8th', the Charities Regulator issued a warning that the Project Arts Centre's display of Maser's artwork is 'political activity' and that they were therefore in breach of the Charities Act 2009 and not in line with 'charitable purpose', (Ryan 2018). Linehan appraises;

> In principle, though, it makes eminent sense for the council to exercise its powers to restrain companies or individuals from turning their properties into giant billboards – whatever their message - without going through some sort of legal process (2016).

It is the Local Authorities powers of restraint that are concerning because it facilitates the ability to censor at minor levels. Respondent C defines;

> In a situation where a local authority decided to flex its muscle, well then it could control the activities of the art centres and theatres. It could prohibit certain kinds of arts activities, certain kinds of performances, certain kinds of art exhibitions, and that is an appalling form of censorship, you know. It doesn't happen. I doesn't happen quite frankly but… the system is there to facilitate it if someone decided to make it happen. A case and point is the opening of the Luan Gallery where they had the writings of

> Bobby Sands, and the ex-Minister for Justice whose son was a county councillor, and he was a county councillor, he objected to it and almost called a halt to the opening of the gallery. I mean now… It provided priceless, priceless advertising and promotion, but promotion of the most negative aspects of local culture (Interview June 2019).

The public outrage to the removal of Maser's mural made national news, and the image went viral across social media; 'Angry tweets were posted. Hashtags were deployed. Twibbons were distributed. The image of the red logo being obliterated by blue paint has been used as a visual metaphor for Ireland's denial of women's reproductive rights' (Linehan 2016). However, there are occasions that do not command any media attention and where the Local Authority quietly subjugates the power of the art to touch and connect with otherness. Respondent B articulates the restrictions experienced, 'if you have a play that is dealing with issues whether it's trans-gender, whether it's whatever, all you need is one person to ring in and say 'this is a disgrace, what's going on in there.' Suddenly, the council jump to that rather than, fifty people saying to us 'it's amazing that has been put on' (Respondent B 2019).

Another example of the Local Authority tightening its control was, an event entitled 'A Question of the 8th', during the International Literary Festival Dublin (ILFD), was cancelled after the festival's core stakeholder, Dublin City Council raised objections (Finnegan 2018). The event was centred around Una Mullally's bestselling anthology, *Repeal The 8th* . Mullally clarified 'My event was about a book. It was not a campaigning event'. She stipulated:

> If there was an anthology out there… that was reflecting Ireland from an anti-choice or religious point of view, and that had been scheduled at a literature festival, and a local authority shut it down, I would be equally outraged. We should not stop people using art to discuss our stories and our society (Mullally 2018).

Further interference which manifested in physically altering an art work occurred in Kinsale, Co. Cork. After winning the National Tidy Town contest of 1986, Kinsale was recipient of a public art commission sponsored by the Arts Council of Ireland. Artist Eilis O'Connell was commissioned to create a public artwork. On 22 July 1988, 'The Great Wall of Kinsale' was officially unveiled to one thousand people at an opening ceremony. It is located at the town's seafront, the sculpture is composed of three tent-like arches linked together by a low winding form. Stretching 55 metres in length, the piece was then the largest of its kind in Ireland or the United Kingdom (Lynch 2012).

In 2015 a county councillor at a meeting of the Bandon Kinsale Municipal District area, asked for 'The Great Wall of Kinsale' – to be moved (Cronin and Hurley 2015).The artist Eilis O'Connell responded by explaining that the sculpture was 'destroyed a long time ago when the Kinsale Urban Development Council (KUDC) saw fit to alter the sculpture against my wishes.' The Urban Development Council had adapted the sculpture over the years to include 'water features, stagnant ponds, railings and flower pots' and all of these 'contribute to its current look of denigration' Cronin and Hurley 2015).

Figure 15. 'The Great Wall of Kinsale' by Eilis O'Connell (Leedin 2014)

O'Connell added, 'Ireland had not ratified the Berne Convention[ii] for the protection of Literary and Artistic Works, so, what they did back then in the late 80s would be illegal today.' The changes that were made to the artwork by the Urban Development Council against the will of O'Connell, were the subject of a show entitled 'Rocky Road' at the Crawford Gallery in Cork in 2012, which looked at public perception of artwork (Cronin and Hurley 2015).

These experiences challenge the Arts Council of Ireland's doctrine, which O'Kelly interprets as a commitment (even in the face of criticism) to strive to achieve the highest possible artistic standards:

> The Arts Council has a duty to elitism. This does not mean it excludes people by its support for only the very best there is[..] The challenge is to strive for the best: Greek tragedy, Fra Angelo, Edward Bond and Damian Hirst, Tom Murphy and John Field. If we don't demand that they be used as exemplars, we are colluding with the death of

> the imagination and reducing our artistic experience to a snap shot of our own moment in our own place (O'Kelly 2007: 6).

The capacity to interfere, control or censor the art centre's programming requires review. According to Muller censorship is 'an authoritarian intervention by a third party into an act of communication between the sender of a message and its receiver, a message intended for the public but prevented from ever reaching it' (Muller 2004:11). The control is generally governed and determined by the entity in power. Access to communication (or information) between the sender and the receiver would always be managed by those in a position of control who exercise their power and regulation through censoring means (Prodan 2019:179). Notwithstanding that these incidents are rare in Ireland, it is vital that art centre directors feel supported publicly in the work that they do. They should feel unrestricted, and be afforded the latitude and licence to be brave in their programming.

(3.6.1) Beware of the Words

The Arts Council of Ireland (2019: 74) have described their 'approach in Ireland is currently more consistent with the approach in the UK,' which gives cause for concern. Some of the language used in the Arts Council of Ireland's Strategy (2016-2025) is unsettling. Also, the reduction of public funds are having severe ramifications on art centres in rural British counties. Moraes, Daskalopoulou and Szmigin, (2019:2) explains:

> Arts Council England (ACE) now funds a greater number of organisations compared to previous years (ACE, 2018). However, many of these organisations have experienced either a stabilisation or reduction of public funds for the 2018–2022 period and have had to diversify their fundraising strategies. While arts organisations in wealthy areas and tourist destinations may benefit from this fund-raising orientation, it is significantly challenging for regional non-profit arts organisations outside London.

Regional art centres in the United Kingdom have to diversify and actively seek voluntary donations. Voluntary giving is more aligned with causes such as cancer, and 'potential givers may not be aware of arts organisations' needs,' (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2011; Body and Breeze, 2016; Payne, Scharf, Smith 2014: Moraes et al. 2019:2).

There is a leaning to neoliberalism that 'is embedded in arts organizations'(Alexander 2018:35) in Britain. Alexander (2018: 25) is particularly concerned with the commonplace phrase '"value for money" which suggests that government funds must be spent efficiently, in economic terms.' Bourdieu warns 'beware of the words'(quoted in Wacquant 1989:54) as they 'import with them in an occult manner, a whole worldview constructed around historized thinking: a kind of linguistic Trojan horse' (Grenfell 2012:251; Alexander 2018:34). The announcement by the central government of €80 million in funding allocation to the Arts Council of Ireland is in some sense a linguistic conjuring trick. The fact is that the financial increase is meagre and has not returned to pre-crash levels (see Fig.3 even though the population continues to expand and third spaces (post offices, public houses) continue to decline. It appears that in order to obtain the highest return on insufficient investment, the Arts Council of Ireland must cut its clothe accordingly. Point three of the Arts Council of Ireland's mission statement suggests the bind in which the Arts Council inevitably finds itself:

> We invest public monies allocated to us by government in supporting the artists and arts organizations to make work of excellence and in *other actions consistent with our remit* (ACI 2015:13).

Alexander (2018:35) recalls 'in the past, artists have flattered their patrons with compliments, beneficial portrayals, or inclusion in the artwork. Now the *practices*

through which arts organizations operate flatter the *ideology* of the patrons'. In order for arts organisations to be awarded government grants 'they must woo funders on the funders' terms'. It is critical that they incorporate business buzz words in grant applications, count audience numbers, track revenue, and produce balanced accounts (Alexander 2018:33-34):

> Funders do not seek to influence the 'content' of the arts. The changes they request, therefore, superficial and peripheral to the core 'business' of arts organizations. And yet, neoliberal interests penetrate these organizations through practices, perhaps even more deeply than they would if they focused on trying to influence content (Alexander 2018: 34).

Additionally, Arts Council of Ireland's 'investment strategy ensures our investments incentivise entrepreneurial and collaborative business actions' (ACI 2015:28). Alexander postulates that:

> Adopting neoliberal language is related to the reduction of autonomy, despite the fact that there is no state agency (or corporation) dictates what to display or perform, or proclaim what good art is. Looking for direct attacks on content misses the real issue in the hegemonic domination of arts organisations. The necessary changes will initially appear 'shallow', demonstrate a kind of acceptance of neoliberism and legitimates this belief system (2018:34).

Business centred approaches have been the preferred model for arts organisations in the United Kingdom because state funds diminished, corporate funding became a crucial resource, and the financial need of art organisations meant that they conformed to the demands of the state and corporate sector. Alexander (2018:33) relates this to the idea of 'coercive isomorphism' (see Fig.16) (DiMaggio and Powell 1983:150); which 'results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on an organization by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by the cultural expectations in the society within in which the organizations functions'.

Therefore, the language and neoliberal expectations, and the attempts to censor applied by stakeholders could be a consequence of what Bardes Mawritz et al., refers

to as the trickle-down effect, ‘where the behaviour of the superiors' indirectly impacts employees who hold positions two hierarchal levels below' (Bardes Mawritz et al. 2012:326). The Local Authority and Arts Council of Ireland are part of a social structure that dictates a line of dominance from the national government. The government's lack of investment in the arts is creating a causal nexus. The thin spread of resources by stakeholders and the justification that is required to obtain it, is causing a negative effect on the well-being of arts centre staff. Respondent E articulates the cause and effect of funding shortfalls:

> Money. Money is the main obstacle, you know. You could have a great centre but if you don’t have the people to resource it, you are at nothing. I mean, the arts centre without the people in it whether staff, both the staff to work in it and the artists to engage and make work in it. Without that you have no art centre. If you don’t have the money for programming you won’t be able to engage with an audience. Yeah. Money is the big problem (2019).

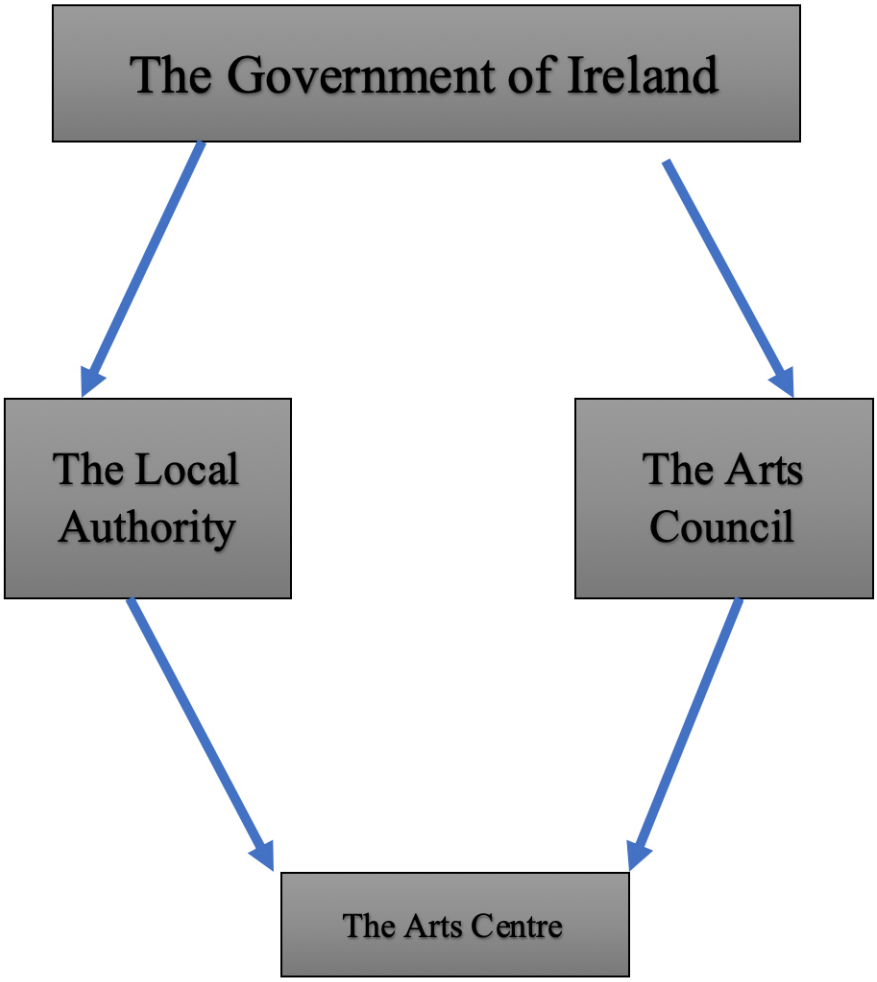

Figure 16. Theoretical Model of the Trickle-Down Effect.

The art centre is part of a hierarchal structure; Haley and Sidanius (2005:189) refer to this as 'social dominance.' They explain; 'there is a general human tendency to form and maintain group-based hierarchies. Such hierarchies, it is argued — whether predicated upon ethnicity, class, caste, or any other social designation — can be observed within any modern human society.' As Weber so clearly outlined, social hierarchies are the outcome of a long-term process of rationalisation and in the twenty-first century evidence of that rationalisation process can be seen in a myriad of domains

including the field of arts and culture. It is clear that in the context of Irish arts, a social hierarchy has been created, preserved, and recreated by a range of social institutions and organizations. Thus, affirming the potentially meaningful and influential roles that elected representatives hold concerning the arts centre in local and national government.

The role of representatives will be crucial for art centres in rural counties if Ireland continues to follow the consistencies in approaches to the arts with Britain. The Irish government have already reneged on funding commitments for the Parnell Cultural Quarter. In The Irish Times, Fintan O'Toole compares government attitudes to culture and sport given that on the day the Ryder Cup funding was announced by Government where the widely quoted figure is €50 million, but it could be more, plans for the Parnell Square's cultural quarter collapsed (2019). He surmises, that more important than the money is the force of 'the political will.' This observation is particular apposite given the relatively modest €40 million allocated by the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht to 'secure existing investment in arts and culture infrastructure nationwide, and ensure a regional balance', under the National Development Plan 2018-2027. There may also be additional funding from the Rural and Urban Regeneration and Development Funds (ACI 2019: V). The 'weather permitting' stance to funding commitments to the arts provides 'clear evidence that at the central government level this sector is simply not seen as being politically important (Gray & Wingfield 2011; Gray 2017:320).'

(3.7) Conclusion

Empirical evidence suggests that the Arts Council of Ireland and the Local Authorities work under considerable financial constraint, which creates difficulties and frustrations at every level in local arts provision, as Respondent D observes: 'I think that the Arts Council really are under pressure. I think they are on the back foot, that's the sense I get from them' (Respondent D 2019). The Arts Centre is fundamental to the production of culture at local level, to maintaining high standard of the arts, expanding audiences, enriching its community and enhancing its locality. Despite this, the arts sector often experiences their world as 'anomic.' Chamlin and Cochran, (1995:1) explain anomie as 'the contradictions between the values concerning means and ends produce a state of anomie.' Albert Cohen speaking to Robert Merton (1997;15:52) elaborates, 'at the centre of anomie theory is strain – dependent on disjunction so people feel strained. There is a lot of kinds of strain that people can experience, growing out of all kinds of socially structured circumstances.'

Strain is a legacy of the trickle-down effect where the art centre acquiesces to the coercion of hierarchies. The art sector may appears stable but in fact it is highly precarious. Publicly, employment within Arts Centres manifests as Local Authority positions that imply levels of job security. However, this is not the case in reality. The majority of Arts Centres have insufficient resources, and most of the staff are working part-time, on contracts, or are volunteering (see Fig.5). If an organisation were to speak out, there is a strong chance that it could reflect on them negatively. Merton (1997; 17:40) concludes 'the modal response in social structure and anomie – the very first one is conformity, and it is not assumed necessarily to be a psychological attribute again, but social systems provide the bate, the reward system. The reward and

punishment system to make for conformity'. He gives the example; there is a goal definition of "how have you been doing recently?" This puts enormous pressure on those occupants of positions in organisations who are responsible, or judged responsible'.

Art centres want to have a constructive and creative relationship with stakeholders. The real experts on Arts Centre's are their directors. They must be central to all dialogue and decision making concerning the Arts Centre. Arts Centres would benefit greatly from being included in dialogical policy development models. Such an approach might create what Giandomenico Majone (1988:157) describes as a type of policy enquiry, that attempts to embrace the complexity of the policy process, the essence of which is identified in processes of argumentation (Belfiore 2009). Belfiore (2009) explains that the main task for this form of policy analysis 'is not to determine theoretically correct solutions, but to raise issues, probe assumptions, stimulate debate, and especially to educate citizens to distinguish good and bad reasons' (Majone 1988: 157-8; Belfiore 2009:139). Respondent D articulates:

> I want to work in support of the arts council, like genuinely and I would like to feel that they genuinely work in support of me, and that we are really kind of in alignment. I suppose for that to happen is really good dialog on both sides. That you are listening to coal face type workers and that information goes up the line.

It is critical that dialog commences because it is generally accepted that rural art centres are particularly vulnerable concerning 'entrepreneurial and collaborative business actions' (ACI 2015:28). Hughes & Luksetich (2004: 218) support Alexander's (2018) argument on the negative consequences of rationalisation according to a neoliberal logic:

> The ability of newer, smaller organizations to replace government funds is weaker, in which case funding issues will have a much greater impact on budgets and expenditures […] The necessity of the entire sector to replace lost revenue will affect program delivery and non-profit behaviour. Programming and workshops may become more commercialized by focusing on blockbuster exhibits, popular venues, and less cultural or artistic performances and exhibits. In addition, prices may increase to replace lost revenue by restricting access to the younger and low-income population (Hughes & Luksetich 2004: 218).

Rural Arts Centres' are proactive and have responded by collaborating to support each other with funding from Culture Ireland. The group brings together six rural county art centres that have become strong proponents of one another. Respondent D clarifies: 'It is to bring together six art centres who might articulate our value better. So instead of us waiting for them to see us, can we do more to shout louder collectively'. The Arts Council of Ireland has suggested the need 'to establish and energise active venue clusters and networks' (2019: xii). However, there are many 'clusters and networks' already in place, particularly regarding touring productions. Out of necessity, these initiatives recognise the interdependence within the sector and have tried to create solidaristic relations that pool their resources more effectively. Nevertheless, a far greater 'structural cohesion' is required throughout the arts sector, where the relations of the members bond as a cohesive collective. The collective needs to have positional sub-groups that are relative to each other, alongside individual members (Moody & White 2003:105). Marlovsky and Lawler (1994) identify 'reachability' is an essential feature of relational cohesion (Moody & White 2003:106). The aim would be to develop 'group-level self-investment at the heart of what has been referred to as a common bond' (Prentice, Miller and Lightdale 1994; Leach, Van Zomeren , Zebel, Vliek, Pennekamp, Doosje, Ouwerk and Spears 2008:144) amongst the entire arts sector. For this reason, purposeful discourse is essential; artists, art groups, the community that utilise the Arts Centre, the arts sector, stakeholders, elected

representatives and wider society need to be cognizant of the issues confronting the rural Arts Centre.

Chapter 4: The Sociability of the Arts Centre

(4) The Audience in Front of the Artwork.

Art centres are as unique as individuals, and they differ on many levels. However, they do have a common bond, and that is their support of high-quality art and their objective to achieve encompassing audience engagement. Respondent E articulates some of the variances:

> They are all so unique, and the way they operate, and the way they are funded, and the way they are resourced, and the way they are able to embed themselves in their society perhaps their local context, perhaps their regional context, perhaps the national context that all is reflective of their mission (2019).

The distinctiveness and amplitude of Arts Centres' are confirmed by the Arts Council of Ireland (2019:95), 'a venue's unique circumstances influence the type of programming that it can deliver, and the extent to which it can generate income from sources other than the Arts Council and its Local Authority especially earned box-office revenue. The Arts Council of Ireland in the Review of Art Centres, and Venues 2019 describes the Arts Centre as Multi-Purpose Arts Venues (MAV). The Arts Council of Ireland acknowledges Arts Centre's significant social span:

> MAVs deliver a diverse and extensive set of outputs across a wide range of art forms. They are embedded in their communities, engaging with a range of audience types, and play a key role in delivering Arts Council strategy. There are also considerable strengths among MAVs – knowledge, experience, expertise, technical resources, etc (2019:ix).

The art centre is host to many individuals and community groups. With numerous rural localities losing shops, pubs and post offices, the objective of this chapter is to

investigate the extent to which the public art space can become a social focal point within the locality. I explore how the local community interacts with the rural Arts Centre, and assess whether it can enhance societal wellbeing and inclusion.

(4.1) Artwork

Theories on the beneficial effects of the arts- that represent distinct developments of the notion of dramatic catharsis- were cultivated by Aristotle (384/3–322/1 BC). In his poetics, Aristotle explained that experiencing pity and fear through the events witnessed on the stage has a cathartic effect on the audience (Belfiore & Bennett 2007:143). The perception that the arts have a central role in the promotion of emotional and physical wellbeing is today commonly accepted, to the extent that it is suggested that creativity and culture have an important evolutionary role to play, more so, in fact, than biological factors (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 318; Belfiore & Bennett 2007:143). Across art forms (e.g., music, literature, the visual arts, and drama), increasing evidence suggests that engagement with arts-based activities can contribute to multiple aspects of experienced, evaluative, and eudaimonic[iii] well-being, such as enriched experience, enjoyment, meaning, bonding, and aesthetic appreciation (Lomas 2016; Tymoszuk, Perkins, Spiro, Fancourt, and Williamson 2019:2).

The data gathered throughout the research project confirmed these findings. The artwork for both case studies addressed challenging societal issues. Domestic abuse was the primary focus of the Kellystown Gallery Space. The art practice is autoethnographic. The exhibition dealt with observing and experiencing violence from the perspective of a child.

Figure 17. 'The Parents', drawing. Kellystown Gallery Space.

Figure 18. 'Out of Body Experience', drawing. Kellystown Gallery Space.

Figure 19. 'Portrait of Father with Hat', porcelain, steel and corduroy cap. Kellystown Gallery Space.

The residency allowed for the production of artworks for the exhibition, which were then showcased to allow for immersive participant observation. The traditional promotional mediums of radio and the press were supportive of the project. Facilitators of community groups that could potentially be interested in visiting the exhibition and, might not normally consider attending art events received personal invitations. The exhibition received significant coverage in the local paper. The review was posted online and shared on social media. During the period of the exhibition, follow up emails were sent to community groups with phone calls. There were long conversations with administrators about the agreed necessity of highlighting abuse and giving it a platform for discussion. However, the positive telephone interactions did not materialise into the administrators visiting the exhibition. The exhibition touched on areas of expertise within many community groups. However, the lack of connection from administrators,

lead to the hypothesis that a more formal channel of communication is preferred such as official council correspondence or through social services. Although, some viewers visited twice; they had personal exposure to the content and wanted to convey their private experience, which they did on their return visit. Three women made contact online to express their gratitude for tackling the topic of domestic abuse (see Fig.20).

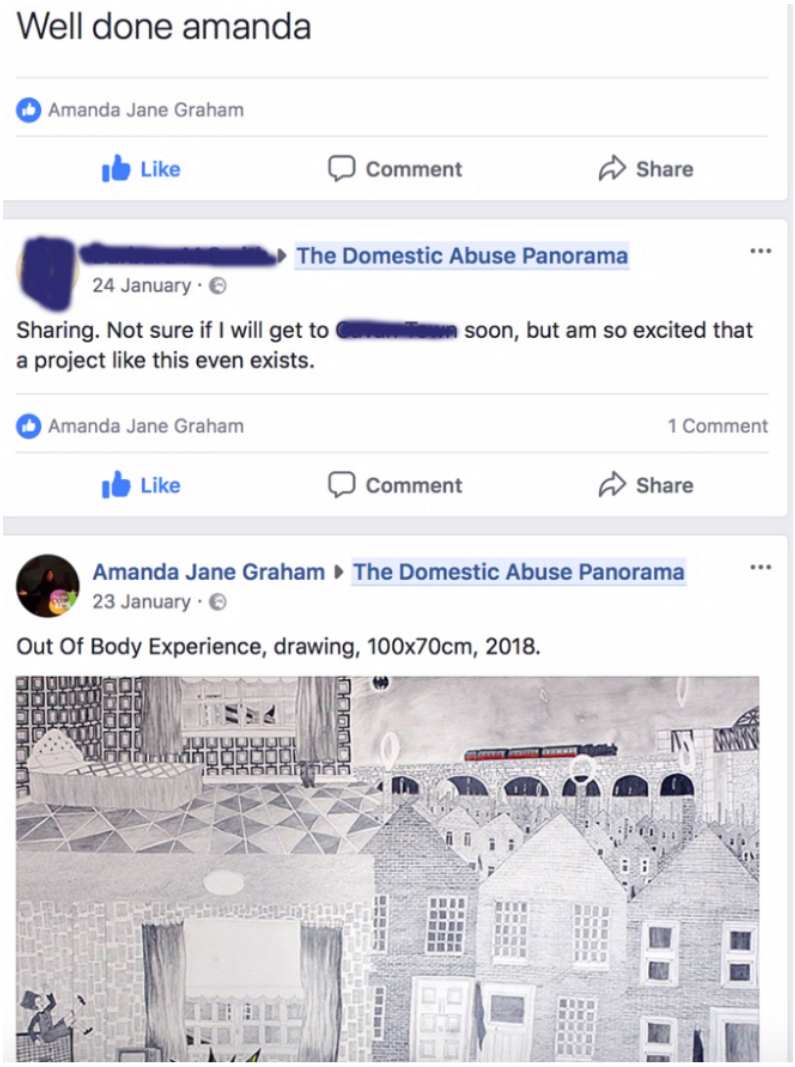

Figure 20. Displays public comments to the exhibition's event page (Facebook 2018).

The evidence gathered in the Brennanstown Arts Centre was comparable to the previous field study. Although the content was similar, a new exhibition was produced, which is a testament to the individuality of the Arts Centre. The artwork playfully deals with serious illness and domestic abuse. The installation approaches these subjects, through references to humour in popular culture. It supports the need for the human imagination to escape its bleak realities. It creates a juncture from the viewpoint of a young child and an adult child.

Figure 21. 'Wile E. & me', floor installation, Brennanstown Arts Centre.

Figure 22.'You Are Always A Chief To Me', drawings, egg tempera, emulsion, foam board collaged on panel. Brennanstown Arts Centre.

Figure 23.'Biff!', Drawing scanned on to foamtex. Brennanstown Arts Centre.

Deep conversations on social attitudes toward health, bereavement and domestic abuse were documented. The galleries received on average thirty visitors a day. From the thirty 20-25 interacted with me. On a daily basis 1-3 individuals took the opportunity to articulate personal disclosures. A lone male explained that his Dad was terminally ill and that this would be his last Christmas, another man disclosed that his mother had died during the year and it was his first Christmas on his own (Brennanstown Arts Centre: Attendee 11: 22 December 2018). A woman divulged that she felt closer to her mother since she died than while she was alive. The research residency spanned the Christmas holidays which could have added to the poignancy of personal revelations. On another occasion, a woman who related to the artwork spoke at length about her illness, her mother's death, her feelings on bereavement, domestic abuse and how to recognise it (Brennanstown Arts Centre: Attendee 7: 3 January 2019). Art is a way of confronting difficult issues, as it has dealt with the deeper questions of life for millenniums. Art can take care of that tormented mind. It can offer answers, acceptance, fighting spirit, and consolation (Bloem , Bastiaan, Ilja, Pfeijffer and Krack 2018:2). This is affirmed when a man who had only spoken to professionals about the institutional abuse he had suffered as a child shared his story with me. His family were unaware of his ordeal, he explained 'I don't want to give them nightmares'. He went on:

> It is great to be able to speak about abuse to someone who understands. I never thought that coming here to an exhibition that I would be speaking about this. Thank you. It's great to talk (Kellystown Gallery Space:Attendee 18,:23 March 2018).

There is a significant (and ever-growing) body of qualitative and quantitative 'evidence' regarding the value (both intrinsic and instrumental) that audiences place on their arts experiences, and the terms in which they conceive of and articulate this value[iv](Walmsley 2018:274). The ability of the art centre to establish a public platform

that can nurture conversations around societal taboos has proved to be beneficial. The fieldnotes recorded the level of public engagement experienced during both case studies was 66%-83%, i.e. two-thirds to more than four-fifths who visited the space had something to say about the exhibitions. The majority of individuals had experience of bereavement, but only a minority 20-25% of visitors that engaged spoke of exposure to domestic abuse. Their contact with abuse was based on personal experience, or that of a close friend, or family member. Questions arose about how to recognise domestic/coercive abuse and what action to take if concerned. Thus, justifying the need for experts to collaborate with the arts sector to achieve greater awareness around social issues.

Encouraging engagement with social relevant art work addresses Gray's (2002:86) concern that the arts are an 'attachment strategy' dependent on other policy incentives such as, economic growth, employment and social services that provide opportunities for policy development at the expense of the core elements of the arts. Alliances between Arts Centres' and specialised organisations could positively transform rural culture without compromising art standards. The role of arts and culture in social cohesion is widely acknowledged. However, 'culture is not a means to an end. It is an end itself' (Belfiore 2002:104). Culture has intrinsic value because it elevates challenging topics: 'Everything in art is a social issue, particularly the visual arts. There is always a mine to really get in at' (Respondent D 2019). Belfiore (2002:104-5) borrows the words of Lewis Biggs, ex-curator at the Tate of the North, Liverpool: "Culture is a successful regenerator because it is an end in itself: the activity is inseparable from the achievement" (Biggs 1996:62). The Arts Centre is a unique space and necessary social prop that establishes a public space that empowers people to open

up about personal experiences, gain an understanding of difficult social issues, and discover concurrences through the collective experience.

(4.2) Community Participation

(4.2.1) Social Hub

Art centres are neutral spaces where socialising does not revolve around Ireland's traditional drink culture. The Arts Centre possess many of the social characteristics of the pub; i.e., it is a semi-public space that 'provides a social site to maintain communal cohesion and to facilitate the infusion of social networks into the community. It is a site where the individual and group identities form within a community framework' (Scarborugh 2008:1). Traditionally in Ireland to be teetotal was considered antisocial which could create certain kinds of exclusion within pub culture. However, we know that pub culture itself has undergone a significant transformation in recent years related to changes in social behaviour, greater personal mobility and restrictive licencing and drink driving laws. The steepest declines in pub licencing recorded by the Revenue Commissioners have been in Border, Midland and Western regions, where 227 pubs were lost (Scarbrough 2008:1).

'Oldenburg has argued that 'third places' (neither workplace nor home) are crucial to the maintenance of a community and the enhancement of social capital. Oldenburg claims that the third-place provides continuity, regularity and a sense of place, that contribute to the construction of the self, and the projection of the self within the public sphere and the generation of a collective identity (cited in Scarbrough 2008:4:1). Scarbrough considers the pub to be an archetypal third place. It has developed over time organically to satisfy the social needs of community life (2008:4:1). Despite this,

many rural pubs are experiencing a decline in business. This has occurred despite a marked increase in rural populations (Scarbrough 2008:4:4).

Scarbrough posits that 'place-based boding groups typically attend third places to reinforce group identity and intimacy' (2008:4:6). She outlines:

> The presence of a third place is significant to a developed sense of identity, belonging and community cohesiveness in individuals. Third places require communities in which to grow and develop in order to reflect and provide for the needs of their members (2008:4:7).

As a result of pub, bank and post office closures, rural Ireland is losing its traditional third places. A community without propinquity has been characterised by social alienation, fragmentation, and what Oldenburg refers to as the 'problem of place' (Scarbrough 2008:4:7).

In the context of these social changes, it is worth assessing whether the Arts Centre has taken on the mantle of the traditional pub, in the process creating an inclusionary social space that can accommodate a wide range of visitors, that is more diverse and more cross-generational than a traditional pub clientele. Arts Centres fit the requirements described by Oldenburg as a third place. All interviewees were asked if the art centre has the potential to become a new social hub in small Irish towns, or are they already social hubs? All respondents described the Arts Centre as a social hub that has been in existence for some time. 'Yes. Absolutely yes'(Respondent C). 'I think art centres are social hubs, they are reflective of the community in which they operate'(Respondent A). 'I think some art centres are already' (Respondent E).

> It definitely has but probably more for artists than for community. It's just that I think that there's a community centre and there's an arts centre, I don't know if you can be

> both. The community centre is that, it is all encompassing. Bring everybody in, bring everybody together. Whereas an art centre has a different responsibility nearly, you know… I just think it's about good art and introduce it to the community and bring the community in that way. Rather than — 'oh let's bring the community all in here and make art' because I think that's a different angle altogether (Respondent B).

> Yeah. I don't know if the word new because I think it already is for an awful lot of them. Yes, I definitely do. And the idea of people using the building that are even quite tangentially involved in the arts is good for us. The idea of usage, people in doing things together like yoga, the bridge club, writers groups that may not be ever interested in publishing and working at a certain level. I think….one of the things that we said amongst the team that we found really good was that one day we realised that one group didn't want to talk to us (laugh), because you realise that they were doing their own thing and that this was their building, and in a way that is success (Respondent D).

(4.2.2) Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

In the Kellystown Arts Centre: I counted that 7-10% of the viewers had intellectual disabilities. Through discussions with the directors, it became evident that these individuals truly loved the arts and, attended every theatre, music, and visual art event advertised. Further exploration revealed that some of the programmes developed by Rehab Care and the local third level institute of education where centred around arts and culture. Some of the more talkative members of the group had been known to stop stage events with questions. For this reason, performers are made aware that there could be questions to the stage, while at the same time, the audience members are gently asked to keep all questions until after the performance. The performers always meet and greet the audience after every show. Thereupon, ratifying previous research (Matarasso, 1996; Walmsley, 2012) in that, the intimacy of the arts community in small Irish towns has 'a unique power', where all individuals can be accommodated and appreciated. Therefore, giving an insightful instance of informal, local inclusion and solidarity[v].

That solidarity was present between two groups of teenagers in the Brennanstown Arts Centre. Group one was a choral group with cognitive disabilities. The second group was from a local secondary school rehearsing for a play. They were both practising for performances happening in the theatre space at different times. Teenagers and young adults of all abilities shared that Arts Centre's facilities and both had lunch together as artists. Therefore, affirming research by Knutes Nyqvist and Stjerna (2017: 968) that artistic work, when compared with many other 'work options', can be conducted both as a personal project and as a social project, which enables multiple solutions when it comes to content and work procedures (Knutes 2009; Malmström 2006; Rowe, Savundranayagam, Lang and Montgomery 2011). Research has also demonstrated that artistic work does create meaning and structure in life for people with disabilities. It also involves social exchange with others, and increased self-confidence Boeltzig, Sullivan, Sulewski, and Hasnain 2009; Hall and Wilton 2011). The comradery between the teenagers of all abilities as they rehearsed their roles was discernible. The performers discussed their apprehension about their upcoming parts. The analysis reveals that the Arts Centre has two fundamental meanings to its participants; it is a place to create art, and at the same time a 'safe haven' (Knutes et.al 2017:980). The opportunity empowered the engagement of social difference. The benefits were have been documented:

> Participants are not ‘forced into’ predefined categories related to their disability. Instead there seems to be an openness to each other’s differences. The structure, the routines and the artwork itself are enabling difference. This environment affords both community and support, as if it was a safe haven (Knutes et.al 2017:980).

The Kellystown Arts Centre visibly supported the ‘safe haven’ concept in an interaction I observed and recorded in my field notes. When a man with cognitive

disabilities visited the gallery; he shook everyone's hand while wishing them a 'Happy Saint Patrick's day and Happy Easter'. The man's positivity was infectious. He explained that he had purchased tickets to all performances of an upcoming theatre festival, and spoke about the numerous gigs that he had recently attended, disclosing 'I like to look, listen and dance'. He mentioned a concert to which he was looking forward. I commented 'you will have the feet danced off yourself', To which he replied with indignation, 'there will be no dancing. It is a concert!' (Kellystown Arts Centre: Attendee 24: 16 March 2018).

The social exchange was unprompted; instead, it occurred spontaneously. This vignette demonstrates that the Art Centre is a neutral space with a low threshold of entry, and that participatory arts can act as a catalyst that can 'enable difference' in differentiated social contexts:

> 'Solidarity cannot be based on sameness— this would rob individuals of the freedom to develop themselves and their talents in *different* ways.[ ]Thus, the society Durkheim envisions is highly differentiated, but also fluid and open, so that individuals can move freely between social contexts (Herzog 2018:115).

(4.2.3) Age diversity

Age diversity was evident during both research residencies. Every age group, from the youngest to the oldest citizens, were represented. The Arts Centre then has a more inclusive profile than, for instance, the typical pub which tends to have a more restricted clientele. In the Kellystown Arts Centre, a woman who was part of a local theatre and choral group explained, 'I was ten and treading the boards here in 1959 and, I still am' (Kellystown Arts Centre: Attendee at Arts Centre Event: 31 March 2018).

There was a strong presence of boys from the local, national school, who visited the exhibition every afternoon. Their school is at the bottom of the road, a small group of maybe five or six would appear in the gallery. They moved like starlings in flight from one artwork to the other, every day there was a different group of boys. They always had questions, never about affinity or sentiment but instead about the construction of the work and, how long it took to make. It is difficult to categorically say these visits were transgressive and defiant of 'masculine norm adherence' (Petts et al., 2018:706)[vi]. However, the exhibition did receive a high number of male visitors and, the majority attended alone.

Although, all age groups visit the exhibitions, the programming in the Brennanstown Arts Centre is deliberately directed toward different age groups. Respondent D describes the intention behind the 'Classic Film Event';

> I suppose you have different conditions in terms of the demographics in different areas. So we would find that we put cultural cinema on around 11.30 once a month on a Tuesday. The idea is that it's a bit social so it's a cup of tea and some biscuits and then you go into the cinema. That's a particular demographic that really want to come and do something cultural but they don't want to do it at night time because they are older and they don't want to drive in a rural place.

The Classic Film programme is befitting rural research where 'social engagement and community participation have been identified as key components to healthy ageing (Le Mesurier 2003). The links between social fulfilment and the sense of belonging to part of a community and the ability to cope with loss, isolation and ill health are well established' (Cattan 2002; Levy, Slade, Kunkel and Kasl 2002; Heenan 2011:488). Pertinent in this regard is the Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England commissioned by the Secretary of State for Health. The Marmot Review found that

social participation increased healthy life expectancy. Social participation in older age is considered more beneficial for health than giving up smoking (Marmot, 2015; Gordon-Nesbitt and Howarth 2019).

Additionally, the Brennanstown Arts Centre hosts 'Baby Trad' workshops for parents and babies on a weekly basis, alongside parent and baby art classes that respond to the artwork in the galleries. The classes have a two-fold effect, very young children get the opportunity to work with professional artists, and experience the professional arts as infants. Furthermore, their parents, mainly mothers, get to visit the art centre, experience the arts, and socialise which is particularly pertinent in rural Irish counties.

The Irish Longitudinal Study of Ageing (TILDA) reports higher levels of perceived loneliness amongst women than men (Walsh, O'Shea and Scharf 2012). Public policy has focused on the young and the elderly, ignoring the middle. However, the mid-life population constitute for a sizeable and growing demographic. In Ireland, mid-life women represent 22 % of the national population, a figure that is predicted to increase steadily towards a peak of 26 % in 2041 (CSO 2016). In regard to women, gender-sensitive, rural interventions and investments may help to minimise emerging risks of social exclusion at mid-life and beyond. These include initiatives and opportunities that enhanced health and well-being services to safeguard the physical and mental self (Conder, Mirfin-Veitch and Gates 2015; Herbert 2018).

Currently in the UK, arts engagement, which often involves social interaction, is being offered as an antidote to loneliness by local authorities and voluntary organisations in a range of (primarily rural) locations (Gordon-Nesbitt and Howarth 2019:14). Social prescribing has been taking place on a small scale for several years. The practice enables health care practitioners to refer patients to a range of non-clinical

services. Currently, there is no agreed definition of social prescribing (Moffatt, Steer, Lawson, Penn and O'Brien 2017: 1-2). However, there is:

> A broad consensus that it helps patients to access non-clinical sources of support, predominantly in the community sector, and is a means to address the well documented social and economic factors that accompany long-term illness beyond the healthcare setting.

To date the services into which patients are referred vary, and can include activities that involve physical activity, or address broader economic and social issues that can involve referral into services such as welfare, debt, housing and employment issues (Moffatt, Steer & Lawson, et al. 2017: 1-2). Considering the beneficial aspects of the arts to health and well-being, access to and engagement in arts and culture as a domain within the social prescribing model requires examination.

The target groups are people with specific long-term health conditions (Moffatt, Steer & Lawson et al. 2017) which adds to the urgency of the consideration of the arts as a component of this prescribed model. It is acknowledged that there is the potential for credible psychosocial benefits to accrue for patients with mental health problems, and for health and well-being improvements to be seen in people with long-term conditions' (Moffatt, Steer & Lawson et al. 2017: 2). Furthermore, it is confirmed that 'participants appreciated the flexibility and open-door nature' of the service (Moffatt, Steer & Lawson et al. 2017: 6).

Social prescribing is still in its infancy in Ireland, but I think there is scope here (based on my empirical research) to argue for including access to/engagement in arts and culture as a domain within the social prescribing model. The model needs to be developed further and a prescription to engage with arts could be not only beneficial to referees but could be a really useful way of demonstrating the 'value-addedness' of

Arts Centres in the small town. Socially prescribed referrals to the Arts Centre could potentially direct clients to a range of appropriate programmes including exhibitions, workshops, choir and theatre groups in a setting within the public realm that wholly complements the socially prescribed model. Sennett among others has argued for maintaining and enhancing public space in the current conjuncture, and the Arts Centre, has the potential to develop its public role and expand its client base. In a world that is ever more privatised, Sennett counsels us to embody our public selves. For him 'the public person is fuller, more rational, more complete, and more liberated than the person in private life' (Sennett 2012:394). His insights echo and align closely with the words of Hannah Arendt who observed that 'the moment that one speaks to a stranger with whom one has no affective relationship is the moment one can leave oneself' (1959).

(4.2.4) Cross-cultural community

The evidence from the Brennanstown Arts Centre substantiated a robust cross-cultural community engaging with the Arts Centre. At an event hosted by the Brennanstown Arts Centre, 'I observed Irish, Nigerian, Thai, Filipino, Indian, American, French, English, Syrian and Panamanian' (Cultural event; Field notes, Brennanstown Arts Centre; 15 December 2018) community groups interacting. An international cultural group is established in the locality that organise regular social events. The collective celebrates the national day of every country, which ensures a full and lively calendar. The Brennanstown Arts Centre hosts the events for the group. Their social calendar closes with a massive gathering called, 'The Day of Nations', celebrating every culture. The Arts Centre was brimming with people for the occasion, many of whom wore traditional dress, and brought traditional food. A DJ played music.

People danced in the foyer, children were hula hooping, and others played traditional music on traditional instruments. The staff set up a large dressed table, poured glasses of water and supplied tea and coffee in large pump-action flasks. It was laid out as a self-service buffet. Many nationalities were represented as outlined above. There was a carnival atmosphere.

The visibility of positive intercultural social dynamics in the Brennanstown Arts Centre is critical to curtailing concealed discrimination. Rishbeth, Farnaz and Goran (2018:47) references Wessendorf (2013) in her research on the importance of "ethos of mixing" in the United Kingdom. Wessendorf concludes that culturally defined groups were judged negatively as not wanting to mix compared to groups viewed more positively. This perception was shaped by the visual presence (or absence) of a low-key participation, in community and commercial interactions, local shops, schools, playgrounds and summer fetes. The findings of the meta-synthesis highlight the relevance of location as well as identity being important in developing perception, and also to the impact of this on free movement and equal participation in public space.

Interestingly, the collective did not visit the gallery. Connecting with the group was the priority. For the international group, the Arts Centre is a social space and focused on interacting and connecting. Intercultural dynamics are transforming rural Irish societies. However, insufficient knowledge of other cultures can create prejudice. Rishbeth et al., (2018:47) sources Clark (2014:8) to conclude that 'socially constructed as morally reprehensible and anti-social for non-Roma is actually seen as being social, hospitable and inclusionary by Roma themselves.' For example, "loitering on street corners" is actually socialising with friends and "improper" rubbish disposal is actually

forms of recycling and income generation. Respondent D's description of different cultural approaches to utilising the Arts Centre supports Clark's theory:

> So say for example we have an event on here and it is super multicultural, well people coming here to that on a Saturday from certain cultures would see that as a big family event, so they might show up with all their children, grandparents, and a whole bunch of people. So those parents would be off chatting amongst themselves, so you might have sixteen children under the age of ten who are really enjoying tearing around the building, and in a way that's their culture. Whereas a child of a different culture might be more 'oh don't run in the galleries, I know not to touch a thing in the galleries.' So, it's not to control one or allow the other. You just need to understand, well, what might happen and to be open for that and ready. And to give everyone a really good experience as well. You don't want to be 'oh, don't touch!' You want to be like do you want us to tell you a little bit about that, or you're engaging. I think people, particularly middle eastern, the idea of family getting together is of really high value, and they are actually great events. We have had them here, and they are brilliant, and you know like Irish people that have been here for generations, centuries even – they read the arts centre in a different way (Interview 2019).

Therefore conviviality and casual participation in the public realm can have a double benefit, to establish a sense shared humanity of everyday life between people, and in giving visibility to others of a commonplace diversity that shapes new ideas about local belonging (Rishbeth et al. 2018). Importantly, embedding the Arts Centre as a third-place within rural communities not only helps to replace the missing post office or pub, but it may improve on the latter because the evidence shows its capacity to embrace ethnic and age diversity. It is a neutral space that respects, supports, and appreciates differences.

(4.2.5) On-line Community

Public relations and marketing activities of art organisations include exhibitions, theatre, education, and trying to spread information via social network services (SNS). Social network services is becoming an additional element in the promotion mix, in that it provides trustworthy information to lead users' engagement with marketing

activities. The new term "socialnomics" represents the prevalent influence of social networks on society, economics, politics, and culture (Lee, Kang and Jun Ahn 2017:1).

Qualman (2011) states that 'socialnomics' is the intersection of social media and word of mouth, creating 'world of mouth' advertising' (Bartlett 2012:14). Socialnomics is a form of 'word of mouth' on digital steroids. Consumers are doing research online at home before going out to shop. They use smartphones to scan QR codes in stores, which not only lets them comparison shop, it lets them get recommendations on the product from Facebook friends. Similarly, popular websites such as TripAdvisor link with Facebook where users observe hotel ratings and reviews from all of their friends who have visited (Bartlett 2012:14). Qualman (2010) predicts that 'eventually every product and service will be rated. Even people will be rated'. The challenge for Arts Centres is to acquire the resources to sift through all the data available effectively. Qualman (2010) recommends starting with personal connections (Bartlett 2012:14).

There is a remarkable growth of the online community and, how the arts are becoming increasingly dependent on it as a form of communication. Social media has many attributes, importantly it is of low financial cost and, its far-ranging capacity has the scope to connect and include people locally, nationally and globally instantly. Albeit, social media can be an essential networking resource, the face to face communication that it provides could have repercussions that are preventing cross-cultural interactions (Komito & Bates, 2009). There is little need for new community members to seek out local information from established residents because, the information is online or, accessed through their own familiar social media network and, the face-to-face connection to home is instantaneous. Electronic communication is

potentially alienating. The data from the Kellystown case study, notably the Kellystown Gallery Space supported the theory, because there was a greater connectivity through handheld devices than physical attendances.

However, research concerning the Arts Centre's online community deduces that mutual trust exists. This is not surprising as the evidence shows that publicly endorsed arts facilities enjoy high rates of trust among target audiences: 'Well-renowned art museums authorized by national institutions are assessed as trustworthy; as a result, they are assumed to provide trustful, rational, and objective information,' (Lee et al. 2017:4). Word-of-mouth through social media sharing has a meaningful effect on exhibition information content. The reliability of the institution and the exhibit information provided, have positive influences on the people receiving or reading the information; this also indicates that the exhibit information provided by friends have a positive influence on the word-of-mouth effect. The impact of social media sharing and networking was visible during both research residencies, but particularly apparent in the Brennanstown Arts Centre. That Arts Centre has a Vimeo channel, where every exhibiting artist speaks to the camera for three to five minutes. Each short video piece has received many hundreds of views. Lee et al. (2017:3) posits, 'in social network services, sharing the vivid experiences of others who had consumed previously experiential goods such as an art exhibition would fill the gap between indirect information and actual experiences.' Thus, the videos produced by the Arts Centre afford a three-dimensional view onto the exhibition to people viewing from a mobile device, and viewing remotely. Online posts, commentary, opinion and sharing may be influential in expanding an individual's insight of the exhibition, and the Arts Centres reach to those who can only visit remotely.

(4.3) Well-being of the arts community

The World Health Organization (WHO) posits that "Good health for communities is a resource and capacity that can contribute to achieving strong, dynamic and creative societies" (2013:39). There is a growing body of research linking the onset of psychosis with social adversity across the life course (Kirkbride, Barker, Cowden, Stamps, Yang, Jones and Cold 2008). Stress levels can diminish, and epigenetic changes can reverse through exposure to better environments. It implies that, rather than being an optional extra, good-quality environments are fundamental to improving health and well-being (Gordon-Nesbitt and Howarth 2019:10). The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW 2016) envisages arts engagement as a factor that can help to diminish the effects of health inequalities at the same time as policies are implemented to eradicate their causes. If this proposition is accepted, it stands to reason that arts engagement should be promoted across the social gradient according to need (Gordon-Nesbitt and Howarth 2019:15), and that programmes such as social prescribing take seriously the arts and cultural pathways towards better well-being.

A review of evidence showed that engaging with Arts Centres' provides: positive social experiences, leading to reduced social isolation; opportunities for learning and acquiring new skills; calming experiences, leading to decreased anxiety; increased positive emotions, such as optimism, hope and enjoyment; increased self-esteem and sense of identity; increased inspiration and opportunities for meaning-making; positive distraction from clinical environments, including hospitals and care homes; increased communication between families, caregivers and health professionals (Chatterjee & Camic, 2015; Chatterjee & Noble, 2013; Gordon-Nesbitt and Howarth 2019:12). It is

widely recognised that "relationships are a major determinant of health" (White, 2009:3), and arts engagement is regularly cited as a forum for building trusting relationships. By contrast, we have seen that being marginal to society has a deleterious effect upon health (Marmot, 2015; Gordon-Nesbitt and Howarth 2019:13).

The data recorded draws out significance concerning the contribution to the well-being of the community by the Arts Centre. The artwork can ignite conversations around societal taboos that touch people from all walks of life, and where the topics may be tricky to approach in other social contexts, the arts can provide an essential platform. Respondent D validates 'We had a show here that was so simple and so attractive, but when you really dug into that, it was an incredible minefield to talk about control, people, exclusion, inclusion, sexual identity, sexual politics, who gets to say things, who doesn't.' Artists talks and theatre events are hosted that support the exhibition, and its content and incorporate a social aspect. 'We try to have a bit of food to make it warm, so that it feels warm in terms of hospitality[]We also do a talk, so there is a focus- you can attend and listen to something, and you can give feedback [], like, you wouldn't feel a bit odd on your own' (Respondent D 2019). The artist discussion events include leading experts and academics invited in active consideration of the wider community. Respondent D describes the intent behind the programming:

> We did a great talk with people involved with Teagasc and a few farmers showed up. You have to mix it up a bit, you have to serve that community, but you can bring people in sometimes by research scientist from Teagasc showing up. You get people thinking 'I would be really interested in what she has to say, or he has to say.'

The data from the research residencies reported the Arts Centre is critical to the well-being of amateur and professional artists. For example in the Kellystown Arts Centre:

Every Friday the Arts Centre hosts an artist lunch. All creative practitioners from the community are invited, artists bring something they have prepared. An email reminder is sent out on Thursdays and, at one o'clock every Friday the kitchen is converted in to a banqueting room. It was the idea of a visual artist to combat the rural isolation that full time artists endure. Every week artists get to connect and network thus, strengthening community bonds and associations (Kellystown Art Centre event:2018).

Figure 24. Exhibition launch at the Brennanstown Arts Centre

Figure 25. Artists lunch at the Kellystown Arts Centre

The associations have forged networked solidarity that is essential to the welfare of artists, particularly those that are not Irish.

> This strong community affiliation and inclusivity was reaffirmed when a family member of one of the arts community died suddenly. The Arts Centre closed in order to facilitate that all staff could attend the memorial. The family are from eastern Europe, they have been living in the town for a number of years. The only Irish people at the memorial were from the cultural community. The artistic community has the resources to reach out to new community members and the capacity to embrace, introduce and involve them in a new social circle. The artist spoke directly to the creative kinship at the funeral; 'I will never forget this support. You are really great people' (Kellystown Arts Centre: Funeral: 15 March 2018).

Therefore, the possible contribution an Arts Centre can make to the cause of social inclusion is quite a complicated matter. Indeed, it is not limited to the more obvious issues of access and participation. Arts Centres' have chosen to act as agents of social

regeneration, to deliver positive social outcomes to specifically targeted groups affected by disadvantage and exclusion (Belfiore 2002: 102-3).

(4.3.1) Safe Haven

The evidence confirms that the Arts Centre is a safe space for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Knutes et. al 2017:980). The structure, the routines and the artwork itself are enabling difference. This environment affords inclusivity, support and sanctuary. The Arts Centre is creating an environment that is reinforcing moral development. Moral development is what Eisenberg, Carlo, Murphy and Van Court (1995a) describe as an understanding of, and compassion toward another's emotional state or condition and is similar to what another person is feeling or would be expected to feel' (Eisenberg 2000:671). As a result, Arts Centres are strengthening community safeguards and propagating a sense of well-being. Boostrom (1998: 407) affirms that we need to hear other voices in order to grow, but we also need to be able to respond to those voices, to criticise them, to challenge them, to sharpen our own perspectives through the friction of dialogue.

The evidence demonstrates that the Arts Centre supports individuals and groups who want to develop their own creativity, invest in themselves sometimes for purely 'hobby, or mental well-being, or genuinely have a desire to create and maybe feel that creating and getting involved in the arts is part of a work-life balance that really enhances their lives' (Respondent D 2019). From the observational analysis the reciprocal trust between the Arts Centre and its communities is apparent in the following excerpt from my field notes:

> The groups that utilise the Arts Centre do not need managing or assistance. There are no keys required because every door is always open. They arrive, meet, leave. The community is very comfortable about using the space the Arts Centre offers. This

> amenity is reciprocal because the staff members of the Arts Centre trust the groups that utilise the space implicitly. On no occasion has there been vandalism, graffiti, or even the rooms returned in an untidy manner. The Arts Centre enjoys stellar civic custodianship, the role that the staff play is an essential component of this correlation. They are always approachable, obliging, and interested in the centre's community. Very regularly, all of the back rooms are bustling with different groups meeting to practice, rehearse, or discuss their discipline (Brennanstown Arts Centre: Fieldnote Observations: Nov 2018- Jan 2019).

There is considerable proof the Arts Centre as a 'safe haven' is a significant resource to its community. People, particularly men of all ages, sit in the foyer of the Arts Centre. They appear to be passing the time. On a very wet Friday afternoon, a wedding party arrived at the Brennanstown Arts Centre for their wedding photos. They were so grateful to the Arts Centre for accommodating them. On another occasion, a woman with a pram escaped the winter weather to feed her baby discreetly. The Arts Centre offers a safe, warm space where people can sit without feeling they have to spend money. There is an expectation that if an individual plans to sit for an extended length of time in a coffee shop, restaurant, or bar that they would purchase products while they sat. There are no financial demands on people utilising the art centre. The community is welcome to sit there for lengthened periods. Families use the centre as a collection point for loved ones (Brennanstown Arts Centre: Fieldnote Observations: Nov 2018- Jan 2019). Sennett (2012:396) references Habermas to argue that, if you have a vivid public realm, eventually diverse interaction will occur. The whole politics of the public realm is to create that growing together so that one thinks about what race is or class without self-reference, occur more and more. The case can be made that the Arts Centre as a publicly accessible 'safe haven' constitutes part of the public realm, uniquely encouraging verbal exchanges between relative strangers simply because of their co-presence or in response to visual stimuli (art works). It also takes on some of the social functions formerly associated with pubs.

The Arts Centre has the potential to strengthen social capital—the trust, mutual understanding, and collective identity that roots cultural communities to place. Events at the Arts Centre frequently attract diverse audiences where that sense of a commitment to the community is palpable. For instance, when the Arts Centre at Kellystown was closing for renovations the community gathered to mark the closure as recorded in my field notes:

> The event was jam-packed. The community did the catering. Everyone went to such trouble, they baked cakes, buns, bread, and made sweets and sandwiches. The generosity of the community to the staff and the building was outstanding. The attendees ranged in age from new-born babies to octogenarians. Many people said that 'it is regrettable to lose the building for renovations.' One middle-aged woman stated, 'it's my social life.' Another woman living in the United States commented on social media, ' I remember going to bingo there with my mother. Great memories'(Kellystown Art Centre: Fieldnote Observations: 31 March 2018).

Building social capital for individuals may reinforce the social networks that enhance involvement within a community by bonding social capital (Grams and Warr 2003; Seifert and Stern 2010) as well as create access to new resources and opportunities and increase the potential for interaction and collaboration across cultural sectors and bridging social capital (Grodach 2011:76).

(4.4) Leisure Inequality

The empirical analysis demonstrated a gender disparity in terms of attendees. Over the course of my field work and participant observation at the three sites, the attendees were 60% male and 40% female. The attendance at art events such as exhibition launches, musical gigs, and theatre have a more favourable gender balance. As a consequence, there is a misconstrued interpretation of audience participation. Thus, creating the belief that there is a more extensive female representation than there actually is. Mc Ginnity and Russell (2008:x) infer that 'while women's and men's

employment time declines at weekends, women's unpaid work and caring time remain virtually unchanged; this leads to a gender gap in time devoted to leisure at weekends.'

There is substantial research that supports these observations, where women appear to be disadvantaged concerning adult leisure. While there is a sharp drop in men's hours of employment at the weekend, women's hours of unpaid work (caring and housework) continue unabated, which results in a gender gap in the time devoted to leisure at the weekends (Mc Ginnity and Russell 2008:29). Additionally, several studies have shown that women are less likely than men to spend free time alone or in the sole company of adults (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006; Bittman and Wajcman 2000; Craig and Mullan 2013; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Offer 2016).

Visiting the Arts Centre manifests as an enjoyable cultural excursion with children as noted in Chapter 1. Reflecting the high normative standards of contemporary parenting, mothers especially may feel pressured to spend as much time as possible with their children while engaging with them in activities believed to foster children's development (Hays 1996; Lareau 2003; Nelson 2010), and frustrated when they find it challenging to meet the expectations (Christopher 2012; Daly 2001; Hochschild 1997; Shaw 2008; Shaw and Dawson 2001; Offer 2016). Mc Ginnity and Russell (2008:8) refer to this as 'dual burden' or 'double shift' which suggest that women's greater involvement in employment has simply been added to their household work, or at least that men's involvement in housework and caring has not matched women's uptake of paid work. The accumulation of time over the year this difference between men and women becomes substantial. Indeed, 39 minutes per day amounts to women in Ireland having one extra month of committed time per year. It may have some implications for quality of life since those who have most committed time and least free time are found

to be subject to more significant time pressure and lower life satisfaction (McGinnity and Russell, 2007).

According to the research *Social Determinants of Mental Health* (2014) by the World Health Organisation:

> A person's mental health and many common mental disorders are shaped by various social, economic, and physical environments operating at different stages of life. Risk factors for many common mental disorders are heavily associated with social inequalities, whereby the greater the inequality the higher the inequality in risk.

For this reason, the lack of female participation is concerning because, 'studies found that being female increased the likelihood of the clinician diagnosing the patient with depression (Stoppe, Sandholzer, Huppertz, Duwe, and Staedt,1999; Borowski, Rubenstein, Meredith, Camp, Jackson-Triche and Well 2000; Bertakis, Helms, Azari, Leigh and Robbins 2001: WHC 2005:10). Higher work participation rates by women in Ireland without any significant shift in the demands posed by their traditional roles have been reflected in an increased rate of depression in married women, whereas rates for married men have decreased (WHC 2005;15). The mental health of Irish women is a significant concern for the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI); Gender is one of these social determinants of our health. 13% of female participants in the 2015 Healthy Ireland survey indicated a probable mental health problem in comparison to 6% for males (NWCI 2018:7). Unfortunately, the findings of this project show that there are deficits in mental health provision for women which need to be addressed (WCI 2018:40)

Despite many advances on the equality front, there are still many ways in which men and women experience the worlds of home, work and leisure as deeply gendered. To some degree, we can trace the persistence of inequalities to the patriarchal culture that infused the nascent state and was reinforced by orthodox Catholic ideology. After

all, Article 41.2.1 of the Irish Constitution states that "In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved." Furthermore, 'the State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home'. This Article reflects the general tenor of the Irish Constitution adapted in 1937, which is out of sync with the lived realities of men and women in contemporary Irish society.

(4.5) The potential for a cultural liaison coordinator

I have focused thus far in this chapter on the myriad social, health and civic potential of the Arts Centre. I have also noted that innovative programmes such as Social Prescribing could usefully adapt their protocols to include the referral of clients to engage with arts and cultural initiatives in their locality. I believe that the Arts Centre is socially inclusive and actively enhancing the health and well-being of individuals and its community. However, there is the potential to do more. The Social Inclusion Office (SIO) within county councils could play a vital role in facilitating the inclusion of new communities in their localities through arts and culture. Numerous projects have been financed and sustained by Arts Offices throughout the country that focus on minority groups. However, it is my experience that it is only ever the community involved that attends the programme, and not members of the community-at-large. In any dissemination events that occur as a result of the workshops, it is mainly the participants who took part that present. Community integration is undeveloped. Although, the programmes are enjoyable and affirming experiences for participants, these good intentions can manifest as tokenism. It is a problem that echoes the experience in the United Kingdom (Belfiore, 2002).[vii]

In his revised edition of *Local Government and the Arts revisited* , Gray claims that the arts sector has turned the tables on local governance because, in the case of policy attachment such as education and social inclusion, the ends and objectives remain those of arts actors, presented as if they conform to the interests of other actors and other ends and objectives. In other words, the suggestion is that the Arts pay lip service to the goals of education and social inclusion, ticking boxes, rather than fully aligning their arts programmes to address community needs (2017:319). There is a concern that this model could filter through to the Irish context. However, in Ireland, Arts Centres' and Local Arts Offices are endorsing insightful social inclusion policies, and there are many valid programmes in place. Nonetheless, they do not possess the relevant resources, such as staff, or skills in the social sciences to fully gauge the needs of the changing community and mediate its complexities. A survey on Irish museums in 2016, indicated that to a considerable degree multiple responsibilities were often assigned to a single individual, with very little time for those in full-time employment to devote themselves fully to any single category of work. An increase in staff had not accompanied the expansion of education and outreach programmes. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that these additional responsibilities are being taken on by existing staff members. This creates an added work burden, placing strains on resources and personnel (Mark-Fitzgerald 2017:210).

Orloff candidly conveys the burden of ' policy attachments.' He testifies:

> To move beyond their role as the trusted facilitators of the conversation about their communities and become activists in social justice, it seems, is asking a lot of most museum staff. We are not all trained, experienced, or, honestly even able to deliver programs in the complex realms of social justice (Orloff 2016:35).

In my study, the respondents standpoints are in alignment with Orloff's observation. The respondents articulate their concerns particularly about having to tackle challenges that they are not professionally equipped to deal with:

> I suppose one of the things we have worked on here of people getting involved would honestly take about ten times the amount of work that a similar event would take because you are brokering a lot of different things and that just takes time and the structure of the arts centre, it tends to run… you know. It has a structure and for people, in a way different communities behave in different ways in terms of hierarchies, you know sociologically operate in different ways. And so in that way be able to be relaxing, open and fluid and allow that to happen yet with your health a safety hat on, yet with your child protection layer on. So you are also dealing with people who understand things through a different lens and different convention, so getting all that right is very doable because the staff here are lovely, so it's very doable, but it just takes an awful lot more time.

A different respondent noted:

> When you cross-community like that, they all have slightly different ideas on what's allowed in a play maybe, what's allowed in a theatre piece, or a music piece. So you would need somebody really good to work with them. hands-on.

A third wondered about managing integrationist strategies:

> What are the conditions that might be different by including a range of artists into the building that are from a different cultural set of values that we might have? Our dressing room is set up as a mixed dressing room, so that might not be suitable. So there different things to think about.

Some practitioners note the real challenge in moving from doing integration in theory to practice:

> I have tried to engage with groups that work with travellers, and you bring even young travellers that haven't been fully socialised into this narrow isolationist thinking, and you bring them in with other children their own age from the settled community and they say 'oh my God. Look at all the decent people', and they just turn and run.

If county councils were to assign an employee to act as a cultural liaison coordinator, this person could potentially communicate and negotiate between the

Social Inclusion Office, the Local Arts Office and Arts Centre to design, implement and, oversee cross-cultural projects and enhance the current social inclusion objectives. County Councils would need to employ interdisciplinary expertise from the humanities, and social sciences tasked with building a comprehensive social inclusion programme through arts and culture. This would give the arts and culture a fundamental physical presence within civic society, and a firm foothold to work through community groups and organisations (Grams & Farrell, 2008)[viii]. This role would not be a desk job. Instead, it would involve constant fieldwork. Hence, enacting the role of a cultural liaison coordinator would encourage active cross-cultural community participation. Many topics and experiences that can be communicated through arts and cultural practice are mirrored within all cultures. The commonality of experience needs to be accessed, and cross-community involvement in all programmes is paramount, in order to do so. The role of arts and culture in social cohesion is widely acknowledged (Belfiore, 2002)[ix]. Rishbeth et al. (2018:50) acknowledges that there is a need for authentic professional engagement with ethnic difference and changing population profiles.

The positive response from respondents strengthens the provision for cultural liaison personnel. Furthermore, in the Brennanstown Arts Centre, where there is a buoyant cross-cultural community, the Local Arts Office, Social Inclusion Office, and Heritage Office (HO) all share a workspace. Cultural conversations are on-going. It is an unusual working arrangement due to the small size of the county, and the small number of staff members, but it has the effect of moving beyond silos and creating cross-fertilisation of ideas:

> All these areas and persons employed in same, are working in the same department in the Local Authority, so most sit alongside each other and interact already in their various programmes. If the role was required, then yes this would be ideal. An appreciation and understanding of the two disciplines would give a very valued

> contribution to ensuring that both sectors could be best serviced. There should be 70% or more spent on fieldwork and minimise the desk job criteria (Respondent A 2019).

Although this county has had some cross-cultural success compared to other counties, the national benchmark remains unacceptably low. As there has been significant work already realised by Social Inclusion Offices, Local Arts Offices, Arts Centres and Heritage Offices. It would be relatively inexpensive to link these resources, to individuals, groups and communities to bring visible cross-cultural interaction into the public realm. It is attainable by utilising the connections established by the Social Inclusion Office, employing artist from the Local Arts Office's extensive list of practitioners to deliver programmes, and collaborating with the Arts Centre to avail of their space to host, or showcase events. All respondents endorsed the suggestion:

> Local authorities now contain all the elements to create a more enriched, progressive, healthy community such as social inclusion, social workers, heritage offices, recreation officers, arts officers. I mean if these.. each one of these elements work alone in a silo and if they were encouraged to work together as an integrated service as culture and community, then you could achieve far greater results. Finally, the local authority possesses the human resources to develop a community, but the human resources they have and the professional services they have don't work together, they all work individually.

A different respondent noted that:

> There are so many marginalised communities within Ireland that go along with that, our history with the travelling community. There's quite a big divide, the settled community and the travelling community have done so much work within their own community to gain a status for themselves, but are we really responding to that. I think that when you are programming, the truth of it is that's the pressure.

The aim of the recommendation is not to overburden other Local Authority departments, but instead to utilise the capacity of the arts as a partner for social change. In speaking about the United Kingdom, Sandell (1999; 2003:52) maintains that 'many museums find themselves excluded from new initiatives as they are rarely considered as appropriate partners by social, welfare or health agencies'. It is a consequential

oversight because by establishing participatory environments involving relationships among the full range of people in their locale, these non-profit organisations are tapping into, involving, and presenting a breadth of human experience as only the cultural field can do (Grams and Farrell 2008:15).

Chapter 5: A Portrait of the Arts Centre

(5) Conclusion

The research categorically identifies and elaborates upon the communities that utilise Arts Centres in small Irish towns. It determines the Arts Centre as an indispensable aspect of the rural town landscape — establishing that the multi-purpose space is providing high-end contemporary art programming, it is a home for creative collectives and a welcoming, warm and safe social space for its community. It provides a neutral multi-purpose social space in the public realm where the staff have created a safe and inclusive environment for individuals and community groups.

There is a strong sense of community ownership of the Arts Centre, which is nurtured and encouraged by the staff, and the Arts Centre has taken on some of the social functions formerly associated with rural pubs in small Irish towns. Oldenburg calls these 'third places' and he has argued that they are crucial to the preservation of communities and the enrichment of social capital (Scarbrough 2008:4:1). As a consequence of considered and effective programme planning, the events hosted by Arts Centres have established new community connections, that build trust, mutual understanding, and collective identity that roots cultural communities to place. Hence, the social capital of rural communities has significantly enhanced. There is strong evidence of the diverse connection of age, abilities and cultures enjoying each other's company, and the contemporary arts. The data gathered throughout the research project supported the evidence that engagement with arts-based activities can contribute to enhanced well-being, such as enriched experience, enjoyment, meaning, bonding, and

aesthetic appreciation (Lomas 2016; Tymoszuk et al., 2019:2). Furthermore, the Arts Centre comprehensively affirms Scarbrough's argument that 'the presence of a third-place is significant to a developed sense of identity, belonging and community cohesiveness in individuals'(2008:4:7).

Arts Centres frequently commission artworks that address challenging societal topics, the artwork in the three exhibitions/research residencies recorded deep conversations on social attitudes toward health, bereavement, and domestic abuse. During the research project, a significant number of individuals took the opportunity to articulate personal disclosures. Thus, upholding the consensus regarding the value that audiences place on their arts experiences and the terms in which they conceive of and articulate this value (Walmsley 2018:274). The data collated during this study delineates that the Arts Centre is a unique public space in rural Ireland that enables people to open up about personal experiences, gain an understanding of difficult social issues, and discover unity through the collective experience.

The research has validated the evidence that the Arts Centre is a safe space for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Knutes et. al 2017:980). Boostrom (1998: 407) affirms that 'we need to hear other voices in order to grow:' the structure, the programming and the artwork itself are enabling difference by progressing the understanding of another's emotional state or condition through reciprocal action. The Arts Centre is endorsing an environment that is reinforcing moral development (Eisenberg et al. 1994a).

The investigation has demonstrated that the Arts Centre encourages individuals and groups who want to develop their creativity. Furthermore, it accommodates people to freely sit in the foyer of the Arts Centre. The Arts Centre offers a safe, warm space

where people can relax without any financial demands. The community is welcome to stay there for lengthened periods. It is proactively building social capital for individuals by sustaining social networks that enhance community involvement and connect social capital (Grams and Warr 2003; Seifert and Stern 2010). The data categorically details that Arts Centres are strengthening community safeguards and propagating a sense of well-being, and providing its community with a 'safe haven' in the public realm,.

From analysis it is apparent that the Arts Centre is critical to the well-being of amateur and professional artists. Moreover, it is vital to the livelihoods of artists, as a touring venue for musicians and theatre groups, exhibitions, workshops and many artists talks hosted. The Kellystown Arts Centre programmed a weekly 'artist lunch' event to combat the rural isolation that full-time artists endure. Every week artists get to connect and network, thus, strengthening community bonds and associations (Kellystown Art Centre event:2018).

Additionally, numerous artists are the recipients of exhibition commissions, and of the art centres programme of funded residency awards. The production, installation and launch of exhibitions involve expertise from local businesses and creative industries, and therefore, actively supporting and enhancing the creative industries in the challenging rural environment:

> Venues and local authority arts officers often provide the first supports and resources to emerging artists and organisations, stimulating economic activity and cultural entrepreneurship (ACI 2019: 46).

Albeit, Arts Centre's are an indispensable aspect of rural communities, the study has evidenced that the art sector in Ireland is overstretched; 'Money is the main obstacle' (Respondent E 2019). Moreover, considerable time and energy go into the

process of seeking funding in order to ensure programming. Staff members must also contend with a myriad of policy documents emanating from government agencies whose content has been described by one journalist as 'bureaucratic jargon' (Linehan 2017). Not surprisingly, this investigation has identified that morale amongst the sector is at a concerning low point.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews and secondary data from the Arts Council of Ireland, Central Statistics Office, and the media I presented evidence that there is a national disparity and inequality in Arts Centre provision and arts funding, which deserves urgent redress. Furthermore, the analysis has formed a real and convincing urgency to personality proof the arts. What is now needed is a cross-national study focused on funding allocation to ensure national parity. In terms of good governance it is important that locally elected representatives and Local Authority personnel who hold voting power in relation to provision for the arts should, in so far as possible, set aside their subjective biases. The study has identified that for many local representatives, arts and culture are either not on their radar, or fall well down their list of priorities. This should not result in arts and culture being marginalised at local level.

A question raised by this study is the facility to control the Arts Centre is active in a small number of the Local Authorities. The Local Authorities capability to control the content produced by the Arts Centre amounts to a form of censorship (Muller 2004: Prodan 2019) and demands urgent attention from the central government. Generally taking 'a hands-off stance concerning the day-to-day management and operation of the venues'(Art Council 2019:92), does not go far enough. Although incidences of interference is rare, they do occur. There is a tendency by Local Authorities to respond to a complaint from one member of the public and ignore the fact that the majority of

people appreciate what the Arts Centre show cases. Negative publicity always gains more traction in the news media than positive publicity. Considering the Local Authority members are not generally represented at Arts Centre events, utilising their ability to censor creates incongruity. The facility that allows county councillors to try to impose personal opinions on the Arts Centre should be reviewed, and ultimately, removed. A protocol of impartiality is fundamental for art in Ireland. Moreover, impartiality would provide some cover for the Local Authority in cases of vexatious or petty complaints.

The research has thrown up questions concerning the use of 'neoliberal language' that is used by the Arts Council of Ireland in its publications, and their admission to having policies that are in line with the United Kingdom (2019: 74). The Arts Council of Ireland is requesting that Arts Centres become more financially resourceful and seek other sources of income (2019:95). The onus on the Arts Centre to become profitable could potentially be at the expense of the visual arts, because 'it is an art form that does not have significant ways of generating income from alternative sources '(ACI 2019:126). Currently, visual art spaces are widespread but not to the same extent as performance spaces. Just over 60% of the 138 venues stated that they have galleries[…] Gallery spaces are similarly varied - the average gallery floor space is 117m2, with a much lower median value of 88m2, which suggests that a majority of gallery spaces are below the statistical average (ACI 2019:10-11). The concern surrounding the Arts Council of Ireland's language is the current reduction in funding to Arts Centres in the United Kingdom by the Arts Council of England (Moraes et al. 2019:2) which has led to regional art centres in the UK actively seeking voluntary donations. The Arts Council of Ireland's language is pointing in a similar direction. The majority of Art Centres in Ireland operate under a Company Limited Guarantee; they are charities. The Arts

Council of Ireland have stated; ‘Arts venues are adaptable and creative both in their efforts to reach audiences and in their need to generate sufficient income to remain viable’ (ACI 2019:12). Research in the United Kingdom has substantiated that it is particularly tricky for regional venues to acquire voluntary donations. Know-how of voluntary giving to the arts is scarce (MTM 2017), and participants highlight government responsibility discursively by criticising the increased responsibility on individuals for systemic issues (Moraes et al. 2019:8). Moraes et al. affirms that participants did not understand arts organisations as bodies needing support. If the Arts Council of Irelands policies follow those of the Arts Council of England, it could be detrimental for some rural Arts Centres and for the visual arts in particular..

Currently, the directors of Arts Centres are not involved or consulted fully on policy documents. The establishment of a national advisory board for art centres needs consideration. The board would include significant Arts Centre representation and have multiple benefits. The experiences and expertise would be accessible to Arts Centre directors nationally; it could hold a supportive and advisory function, and represent and advocate for Arts Centres at a national level. Furthermore, an advisory board could prove to be cost-effective as stakeholders could receive feedback almost instantaneously.

The research has illuminated that the well-being of Arts Centre staff requires prioritisation from the stakeholders. An advisory board could assist in boosting morale. Marmot describes health-damaging work as ‘characterised by high demand with no control over the work task, by high effort and little reward’ (2015: 172; Gordon-Nesbitt and Howarth 2019:9). An enhanced working synergy between the Arts Centres and the stakeholders would greatly benefit the rural arts. It is evident from the data that the

communication channels between the Arts Council of Ireland and Arts Centre directors must be revised. There is a stated preference amongst Arts Centre directors consulted for working with Creative Ireland, rather than the Arts Council of Ireland. As one director noted: 'You have to do half the work in applying to Culture Ireland for more money, and then they trust you to get on with it' (Conference Attendee 2019). In describing the working experience with Creative Ireland Respondent C notes the parity of esteem rather than hierarchical basis to the relationship: 'They speak to me like a peer, they treat me like an equal at meetings. We talk the way you and I talk. There is very little hierarchy other than the articulation of what their needs are, and what I can do….I don't find that with the other funders' (Interview June 2019). Ultimately, the Arts Council of Ireland needs to address their communication issue. It must take precedence before the implementation of any plans or policies. A respectful working environment where stakeholders and Arts Centre directors work in support of and advocate for each other is critical to the well-being of the arts sector. Besides, a unified and supportive stance might assist in raising the priority of the arts at the central government level.

Ultimately, the lack of resources is the issue for the Arts Centre. The arts in Ireland hold a low political priority. It is not solely the responsibility of the Arts Centre, or the County Arts Office to argue the case for the arts. There is a superficial solidarity towards the arts in small Irish towns, to raise the political ranking of the rural arts change is essential. There needs to be significant solidarity. Supporting the Arts Centre is the duty of all who avail of it. There is a particular obligation on artists from every artform to advocate for the Arts Centre, and inter-organisational collaboration by Arts Centres to advance public awareness of the issues that confront rural Arts Centres.

Visible solidarity has proven successful for artists in directing focus on causes where the government has backtracked.

For instance, in 2016 film director Lenny Abrahamson criticised the apparent downgrading of the status of arts and culture due to the varied range of responsibilities in the portfolio assigned to Minister Heather Humphreys (Clark 2016).'Art is not easy. It is there for everybody, but it requires effort, and not everybody is prepared to make an effort (O'Kelly 2006: 3)'. The broader arts community are the voice of Irish art; that voice requires a solidaristic voice to be conspicuous and to be heard at national and local levels.

I have suggested that social prescribing in Ireland could be expanded to include referrals to arts and culture engagement for clients. This would be a timely and innovative intervention at a time when mental health difficulties are on the rise among many segments of the population. I have also suggested that another avenue toward extending the scope of the Arts Centre is to create a role of cultural coordinator. Rural Ireland is growing increasingly diverse with foreign nationals accounting for 5.8% of the total population living in rural areas (O'Sullivan 2013). Although Arts Centres' and Local Arts Offices have several social inclusion programmes in place, community integration is undeveloped. A key policy priority should be, therefore, to devise a job description and employ an individual with interdisciplinary expertise in the arts and social sciences. This individual would be charged with the design, implementation and, oversight of cross-cultural projects. This would enhance the current social inclusion objectives that would create greater visibility for the arts and in turn garner greater community support (Grams and Farrell 2008). The coordinator would act as a linchpin between the Local Arts Office, the Arts Centre and the Social Inclusion Office. They

would work with established data and connections to forge affiliations with new community members from diverse backgrounds. The position requires constant fieldwork and time to build alliances. The study has identified that there is broad support for the role of a cultural coordinator among local administrators in the arts sector. Minority communities and 'hard to reach' groups can be challenging to access. Furthermore, the research confirmed a preference by community groups and organisations in Kellystown for formal channels of communication through county council officials or social services. There are numerous reasons why this is the case including a lack of trust in wider society, a lack of knowledge about the Arts Centre as a social space, perceived social distance based on cultural difference and a history of being marginalised or excluded in other contexts.

The arts sector is under-resourced creating time constraints, leaving little time for full-time employment devoted to any single category. Staff increases has not accompanied the expansion of education and outreach programmes (Mark-Fitzgerald 2017). Furthermore, the arts sector generally do not possess the skillsets to negotiate the complexities of self-exclusion, or the cultural requirements communities might need. Chet Orloff clarifies these points, 'We are not all trained, experienced, or, honestly even able to deliver programs in the complex realms of social justice' (Orloff 2016:35).

The role of arts and culture in social cohesion is acknowledged (Belfiore, 2002). The need for professional engagement with ethnic diversity and changing population profiles is confirmed (Rishbeth et al. 2018). The linking of services within the Local Authority could potentially be an inexpensive process because of the stellar work already accomplished in these departments. Everything is in place to implement this

role. Respondent C confirms this; ‘Finally,… the local authority possesses the human resources to develop a community, but the human resources they have and the professional services they have don’t work together, they all work individually’.

A cultural coordinator would potentially establish a participatory environment involving cross-cultural relationships among the Local Authority departments and the people in the locality. Which would be facilitated by the cultural coordinator. By utilising the contacts of the Social Inclusion Office, the artists the Local Arts Office supports and the social space that the Arts Centre provides to tap into, and involve minority groups in a breadth of human experience only the cultural field can do (Grams and Farrell 2008).

Future research could examine the role of a cultural coordinator. Initiating an interdisciplinary pilot project with a Local Authority and stakeholders would create a template which could be assessed and evaluated. If successful in terms of ‘creating visible cross-cultural connections, and giving the engagement that is vital in containing discrimination visibility’ (Rishbeth et al.2018:47) the model could be adapted for other localities in Ireland and beyond. Due to the transforming dynamic of rural populations, communities must gain sufficient knowledge of each other cultures to establish a basis for mutual respect and tolerance. This is all the more pressing as we witness rural communities taking action to prevent the Department of Justice from assigning asylum seekers to their localities. The rural Arts Centre possess the capacity to be the cornerstone that provides a safe haven from which to build more inclusive communities. The Arts Centre in twenty-first century Ireland can fulfil a mandate as a ‘ great good place’ (Oldenburg 1999) in small Irish towns.

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Appendices

Semi-structured interview questions

1. Do you believe that the art centre has the potential to become a new social hub in small Irish towns?
2. In the time of your involvement with the art centre, have you observed a change in the audience make up?
3. Do you feel the influx of non-locals has influenced this change?
4. Do you feel that this has been a positive/negative change?
5. In what ways has it been positive/negative?
6. Do you feel that new community members are influencing the direction that the art centre is going in?
7. Do feel that the art centre is supporting cross-cultural engagement?
8. If so, do you believe that this is a unique quality for public spaces in rural Ireland?
9. Does the art centre support social inclusion for people of all abilities?
10. Have you seen evidence of this?
11. Could you give an example?
12. Through the artwork exhibited, do you feel that the art centre is drawing focus on challenging societal issues?
13. Do you believe that through its programme, the art centre is becoming a unique space for discussion around social issues within rural communities?
14. Are there barriers that the art centre has to navigate in delivering its programmes, such as location, funding, and staffing?
15. Could you give examples?
16. Do you feel appreciated by your funding bodies?

17. Why?
18. Do you feel that the local authority values the arts?
19. Why?
20. Do members of the local authority and public representatives attend/support exhibition openings?
21. Do you think a more significant visible effort/presence at launch nights would be beneficial?
22. Do you feel that funding bodies could do more to assist art centres in expanding their reach?
23. If so, how?
24. Do you feel that funding applications are too time-consuming?
25. Are funding applications stressful?
26. If yes, what could be done to change this, and how could the time be better spent?
27. Do you consider the art community to be a community within the wider community?
28. If so, could you give examples of this?
29. Is the art centre a meeting point for the arts community and other groups?
30. What groups utilise the art centre?
31. Do you feel that departments within the local authority such as, the social inclusion office could play a more significant role in assisting the art centre in reaching groups that might not have previously considered the arts?
32. Do you think that a coordinator that would liaise between the art office, art centre and social inclusion office would assist in placing the arts firmly within the community and disadvantaged groups in particular?
33. Do you feel that for this role, the individual needs to have an interdisciplinary background of the arts and social issues? If yes/no, why?

34. If you consider this to be an essential role, do you feel that it should be a desk job, or instead involve fieldwork?

Consent Form

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

Roinn Socheolaíochta Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Maynooth University Department of Sociology

June 12, 2019

The role of the local arts centre in small Irish towns.

Dear Participant,

My name is Amanda Graham. I am a visual artist undertaking a sociological study of the local arts centre as a potential new social hub within small Irish towns. My full contact details and those of my supervisor, Dr Rebecca King O'Riain are included below.

I am interested in the extent to which the arts centre is a focal point for the community and whether and how it is used by the community-at-large. To that end I am interviews with people who work in the art centre. My aim is to gather information in order to assess and evaluate the role of arts centres in contemporary Irish society. Your help in pursuing this aim would be gratefully appreciated.

I anticipate that the focus interview will not exceed 45 minutes and with your consent I would like to record it so that it can be transcribed for subsequent analysis. All of your information will be kept confidential and stored safely. Recorded material will be erased after transcription. Transcripts will be held in a locked cabinet. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential and no identifying names or private information will be used in the analysis of data unless you have explicitly given me permission to do so. If the latter is the case, you can withdraw your consent at any time up until the work is published as well as exercise your right to access your data at your discretion.

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to refuse to take part, and you may refuse to answer any questions or discontinue the interview at any point. If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Thank You.

Amanda Jane Graham

Researcher: Amanda Graham, amanda.graham.2018@mumail.ie. Student Number: 17252027
Supervisor: Dr Rebecca King O'Riain, *Department of Sociology, Maynooth University.*
Tel: (01) 708 3941 email: rebecca.king-oriain@mu.ie

_____

"I have read the description above and consent to participate."

Signed _____

Date _____

Roinn Socheolaíochta Ollscoil Mhá Nuad, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad, Maigh Nuad, Co. Chill Dara, Éire.
Maynooth University Department of Sociology, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland.

T +353 1 708 3659 **E** sociology.department@nuim.ie **W** maynoothuniversity.ie/sociology

List of Venues in Receipt of Arts Council Venue Funding, 2018

1	Aras Eanna
2	Axis Arts Centre
3	Backstage Theatre
4	Ballina Arts Centre
5	Balor Arts Centre
6	Birr Theatre & Arts Centre
7	Civic Theatre
8	Cork Opera House
9	Courthouse Arts Centre
10	Dock, The
11	Draiocht
12	Droichead Arts Centre
13	Dunamaise Arts Centre
14	Everyman
15	Friars' Gate Theatre
16	Galway Arts Centre
17	Garage Theatre
18	Garter Lane Arts Centre
19	Glens
20	Glor - Irish Music Centre
21	Grianán Theatre
22	Hawk's Well Theatre
23	Lime Tree Theatre/Belltable
24	Linenhall Arts Centre
25	Mermaid Arts Centre
26	Mill Theatre, The
27	Model The
28	Mullingar Integrated Arts
29	Pavilion Theatre
30	Project Arts Centre
31	Ramor Theatre
32	Regional Cultural Centre
33	Riverbank Arts Centre
34	Roscommon Arts Centre
35	Rua Red
36	Siamsa Tire
37	Sirius Arts Centre
38	Smock Alley
39	Solstice Arts Centre
40	Source Arts Centre
41	St John's Listowel
42	Táin An
43	Theatre Forum
44	Tipperary Excel
45	Town Hall Theatre
46	Triskel Arts Centre
47	VISUAL & GB Shaw
48	Waterford Theatre Royal
49	Watergate Theatre
50	West Cork Arts Centre Uillinn
51	Wexford Arts Centre

Figure 26.List of Venues in Receipt of Arts Council Venue Funding, 2018 (ACI 2019)

Endnotes

[i] The names of the Counties and the Arts Centres have been anonymized.

[ii] *Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (Berne Convention)*

An international copyright treaty created in 1886 that requires member countries to adopt certain minimum protections for artistic and literary works. More specifically, the Berne Convention:

Sets out three basic principles for protection:

- member countries must give works originating in another contracting country the same protection under the convention as the works of the member country's own nationals;
- protection is automatic and member countries must not condition protection on compliance with any formalities; and
- protection does not depend on the existence of protection in the work's country of origin, with limited exceptions.
- Requires member countries to adopt minimum standards of protection relating to the:
- types of works protected;
- rights protected (for example, the rights to reproduce, translate, make adaptations and arrangements of, and broadcast the work, and the moral rights of attribution and integrity); and
- duration of protection (generally the life of the author plus 50 years).

[iii] Eudaimonic well-being includes multiple aspects related to optimal functioning, such as the basic psychological needs of relatedness, autonomy, and competence as well as engagement, purpose in life, and accomplishment (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 2017). This multidimensional structure has been confirmed to capture elements important to the well-being of older adults (Vanhoutte, 2014), and reflects multiple priorities in healthy aging. Psychological well-being, in particular eudaimonic well-being, has also been associated with longer life ex- pectancy and better health outcomes in old age (Cohen, Bavishi, & Rozanski, 2016; Ryff, 2017; Steptoe, Deaton, & Stone, 2015).

[iv] Based on diverse methods of audience enquiry, these empirical studies have articulated cultural value in the following terms: emotional impact, stimulation and flight; engagement, escapism and captivation; knowledge and risk; authenticity and collective engagement;

learning and challenge; energy and tension; shared experience and atmosphere; personal resonance and inspiration; empowerment and renewal; aesthetic growth and self-actualization; improved social skills, better relationships and family cohesion (Walmsley 2018).

[v] Rural touring is not a poor substitute for the kind of experience offered by urban arts venues. It is qualitatively different in several respects. The facilities may not be as good, but the intimacy of the space, the opportunity to meet the performers, the fact that most of the audience know each other—these and other factors give a village hall show a unique power.[...]Both artists and audiences consistently feel that such shows are exciting, memorable and have a quality which is distinctly valuable.

[vi] In an initial operationalization of masculine norm adherence, Levant, Hirsch, Celentano, and Cozza (1992) included restrictive emotionality, strict avoidance of the feminine, toughness, aggressiveness, self-reliance, achievement, detached relationships, homophobia, and hypersexuality as domains of hegemonic masculinity(Petts et al., 2018:706).

[vii] It is interesting to note that the DCMS has taken on board the cause of the arts' contribution to inclusion despite the fact that Phyllida Shaw, author of the Research Report: Arts and Neighbourhood Renewal—a literature review on arts and social in/exclusion commissioned by the PAT 10—came to the conclusion that "it remains a fact that relative to the volume of arts activity taking place in the country's poorest neighbourhoods, the evidence of the contribution it makes to neighbourhood renewal is paltry" (DCMS, 1999b, p. 6). It is indeed very significant that, despite the official admission of the lack of indisputable evidence of the effectiveness of the arts in contributing to social cohesion and neighbourhood regeneration, in recent years, Britain has witnessed an increasing use of publicly funded arts initiatives to address socio-economic problems, ranging from major capital projects to local participatory projects.

[viii] These ideas suggest the importance of knowing, understanding and sharing resources with a community as a prerequisite to the community valuing the work of the organisation. Through relationship building, organisations are engaged in the kind of give-and-take that sets the tone for organisations to be viewed as a community participant. This might mean attending community meetings, sitting on boards of local services agencies, or exchanging services, favours, and sometimes money, all in support of shared local services. Such community-involved relationships seek to move beyond building specific bridges to local venues. Through such reciprocal exchanges, arts organisations are seeking ways to incorporate new groups as part of their core constituency. They are also becoming part of these very communities.

[ix] The impression that social issues will probably gain a substantial centrality in future cultural policies seems to be reinforced by the European Community's cultural programme Culture 2000, which builds upon the commitment to cultural access expressed by the Article 151 of the Treaty of Amsterdam (ex-Article 128 of the Treaty of Maastricht). The programme formally acknowledges the contribution that culture can make to social cohesion across Europe. Consequently, targets of the programme's

initiatives are essentially all European citizens, but in particular the young and socially underprivileged ones (European Commission, 2000).