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Title	The Bealtaine Festival: A Celebration of Older People in the Arts
Author(s)	Ní Léime, Áine; O'Shea, Eamon
Publication Date	2008
Publisher	Irish Centre for Social Gerontology
Link to publisher's version	<a href="http://bealtaine.com/sites/all/files/Bealtaine_Evaluation_Full_1.pdf">http://bealtaine.com/sites/all/files/Bealtaine_Evaluation_Full_1.pdf</a>
Item record	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/1616">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/1616</a>

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2008

# The Bealtaine Festival

## A Celebration of Older People in the Arts

Áine Ní Léime & Eamon O'Shea

Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, National University of Ireland, Galway



Irish Centre for Social Gerontology

**Published by Age & Opportunity**

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**ISBN 1 900578 66 2**

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Design by Language  
**[www.language.ie](http://www.language.ie)**

The logo for Age & Opportunity features the word 'age' in a dark blue sans-serif font, followed by a stylized graphic of two overlapping curved shapes in blue and pink, and then the word 'opportunity' in a larger, bold, dark blue sans-serif font.  
**age & opportunity**  
Promoting greater participation by older people

The logo for bea(ta)inefestival features the word 'bea(ta)inefestival' in a black serif font, with a small decorative flourish above the 't'. Below it, the tagline 'celebrating creativity in older age' is written in a smaller, black sans-serif font.  
**bea(ta)inefestival**  
celebrating creativity in older age

## Foreword

Bealtaine is an arts festival that unites a range of different organisations and individuals under a single banner with a single purpose. It is unique in harnessing contributions from small community groups and local active retirement organisations as well as those of national and regional arts and cultural bodies, local authorities, public libraries and care settings. It affects the lives of individuals in small towns and large cities, in community settings, in arts venues and in care settings. It has led to people in later years participating in the arts for the first time, with many of them going on to participate for the rest of their lives.

Bealtaine is also unique in being an arts festival co-ordinated by Age & Opportunity, a national voluntary organisation, managed by a board whose members are older people, whose core funding comes from the health sector. Age & Opportunity's primary purpose is to improve the quality of life of older people by promoting their greater participation in various aspects of life. One of our areas of work is the arts – and it is one that we experience as potent and enriching. We believe in the inclusion of older people in the country's arts life, not just as audience but also as creators, participants and decision-makers, and we have come to recognise that people participating in the arts benefit most where artistic excellence is pursued and sustained over a long period of time.

We were very glad to have been able to commission this evaluation, which looks at important aspects of the work that we have been engaged in with our Bealtaine partners over the past thirteen or so years. One significant focus of this evaluation has been to ascertain if Bealtaine has had a positive influence on the general health, mental health and social activities of older people, and we are delighted that the relevant findings are so positive.

Proven social, health and well-being outcomes make it all the more compelling that society as a whole should value the arts and invest in increasing cultural inclusion. That is not to say, of course, that Bealtaine, or indeed any participatory or community arts event, should be judged solely on the perception of remedial benefit. Engagement in an artistic process is not only enjoyable and essentially health-promoting in our view, but also intrinsically valuable in its own right. What continues to motivate and to inspire us are the effects that we witness through Bealtaine on people's lives and sometimes on the lives of communities – effects that are broad and deep and that often amount to nothing less than transformation.

## Foreword

Mary Plunkett,  
Adele Keegan,  
Teresa Egan and  
Emma Fitzpatrick  
work on 'Charcoal  
and Chocolate',  
an exploration of  
contemporary art  
through drawing,  
at IMMA.

(Bealtaine 2004)

### Photo

Mirjam Keune



We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge our main Bealtaine funder, the Arts Council. We wish to thank the three hundred or so organisations who join with us in organising Bealtaine events each year, as well as the members of the Bealtaine Steering Group. The findings of this report represent an endorsement of all our work. Finally, we thank Áine Ní Léime and Eamon O'Shea of the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, National University of Ireland, Galway, who undertook this work in such a comprehensive and committed way.

**Mamo McDonald**

**Hon. President, Age & Opportunity**

**June 2008**

# Acknowledgements

## Authors' Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to thank all those at Age & Opportunity who provided context and content for the report, especially Ann Leahy, Dominic Campbell and Marianna Cullen. We would also like to thank all of the members of the consultative sub-committee associated with the project (including Anne McCarthy and Helen O'Donoghue) and all members of the Bealtaine Steering Group who provided input and comments.

We would like to extend special thanks to Anna Rust, research assistant, for her work on data gathering, entry and preliminary analysis, to Christine De Largy for work on several aspects of project management, data management and analysis and to Deirdre McKenna for her work on the literature review.

We would also like to thank all of those who responded to questionnaires and/or provided information, including organisers and members of Active Retirement Associations who completed participants' questionnaires. Finally, we would particularly like to thank those organisers, artists, facilitators, participants, members of the steering group and others who participated in group and individual interviews and who shared their views and experiences of Bealtaine with us.

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### Origins and Objectives

Age & Opportunity promotes the participation of older people in the arts through an annual month-long national festival – Bealtaine – that celebrates creativity in older age. It is the largest co-operative arts festival in Ireland and arguably its biggest arts festival. Although the core of the festival takes place during the month of May, its effects are felt throughout the year. Bealtaine aims to engage older people in the arts in Ireland in a participative and collective manner. It provides an opportunity for people to enjoy arts activities in later life that would not have been available to many of them in their earlier years. The festival incorporates all forms of art including music, theatre, literature, poetry, dance, film, storytelling, painting, drawing, print-making, sculpture and photography. Bealtaine involves co-operation and collaboration between Age & Opportunity and a range of agencies and organisations including: national cultural institutions,

national and regional arts bodies, public libraries, Active Retirement Associations, long-stay care facilities, local authorities and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

There are two key dimensions to the Bealtaine programme. First, Bealtaine brings arts programmes to older people in Ireland, thereby providing opportunities for creativity that participants might not otherwise experience. Second, Bealtaine contains the potential to make a significant contribution to the health and well-being of older people participating in the various activities associated with the programme. Creativity is a key factor in adaptation to ageing and a number of studies have also shown benefits for health and social outcomes in older people. The evidence from the limited number of international studies that have been carried out suggests that creativity strengthens self-confidence and morale in later life, contributes to physical health, and enriches relationships through greater social connectivity. The purpose of the current study is to assess the contribution of the Bealtaine festival to the promotion of the participation of older people in the arts in Ireland and to improving the health and well-being of older people. We incorporate both creativity and health and social gain elements as part of the evaluation.

**Bealtaine provides an outlet for social connections that enrich the experience of ageing and provide hope and expectation through enhanced social relationships with others**

## Methodology

In terms of the methodology for the study, we decided to focus primarily on the impact and implications of Bealtaine for a variety of current stakeholders including: organisers of events, facilitators, arts agencies, older people and policy-makers. The organisers are key figures in the dissemination of the festival. For that reason, we undertook a postal survey of all Bealtaine 2007 organisers across the country. The number of completed questionnaires returned was 187, representing a 43% response rate from this source. Postal questionnaires were also sent to members of one randomly selected Active Retirement Association engaged with Bealtaine in each county in Ireland. This was necessary to explore the impact of the festival on older people themselves. Members of Active Retirement Associations from over half (14) of the 26 counties responded to the survey yielding a total of 253 completed questionnaires. The views of older people were also solicited through a questionnaire handed out at a regular Bealtaine-inspired event run by the Irish Film Institute. 103 questionnaires were returned from this source. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with 26 people including facilitators, artists, participants, organisers and policy-makers associated with the Bealtaine festival. Four members of a dance programme took

part in a group interview as did five members of a long-established writers' group that had its origins in Bealtaine in 1999.

## Bealtaine Programme

Bealtaine has grown steadily in the past ten years and the number of participants has multiplied seven-fold to an estimated 51,000 in 2007. The number of organisers or partners involved in Bealtaine has increased ten-fold since 1996. This growth is observable in all sectors with a particularly large increase in the number of day care centres and Active Retirement Associations involved in the programme. Most organisations currently engaged with Bealtaine have ongoing events or programmes for older people that run every year. A high proportion (88%) of these organisations say that their programmes will continue into the future; those who did not expect to continue gave reasons such as lack of interest due to the age profile of membership increasing and difficulties in regard to funding.

The total reported cash spending on Bealtaine by organisations other than Age & Opportunity amounted to €285,549 in 2007. The direct grant from the Arts Council for Bealtaine in the same year was €70,000, but the Council also probably contributed

indirectly through its financial support of other agencies and organisations involved with the festival. Overall spending represents a considerable multiplier on Arts Council investment in terms of direct and indirect funding. Fundraising continues to be the major source of multiplier finance, accounting for over one-quarter of all monies spent on the programme. Local authority budgets account for 21% of all funding, while library budgets contribute 11% to overall expenditure. Cash transfers represent only part of overall resource allocation for Bealtaine events and activities. Two-thirds of all organisations surveyed reported using other ‘in-kind’ resources to supplement direct financial expenditure. Active Retirement Associations are particularly reliant on members’ own time contributions to arts events and activities.

### **Bealtaine and the Arts**

Three-quarters of respondents believe that one of the most important achievements of Bealtaine is that it stimulates older people to participate in the arts. Face-to-face interviews confirm that Bealtaine is valued by participants for this and for the sense of celebration and identification with other older people that participation in Bealtaine engenders. Most participants believe that Bealtaine has succeeded

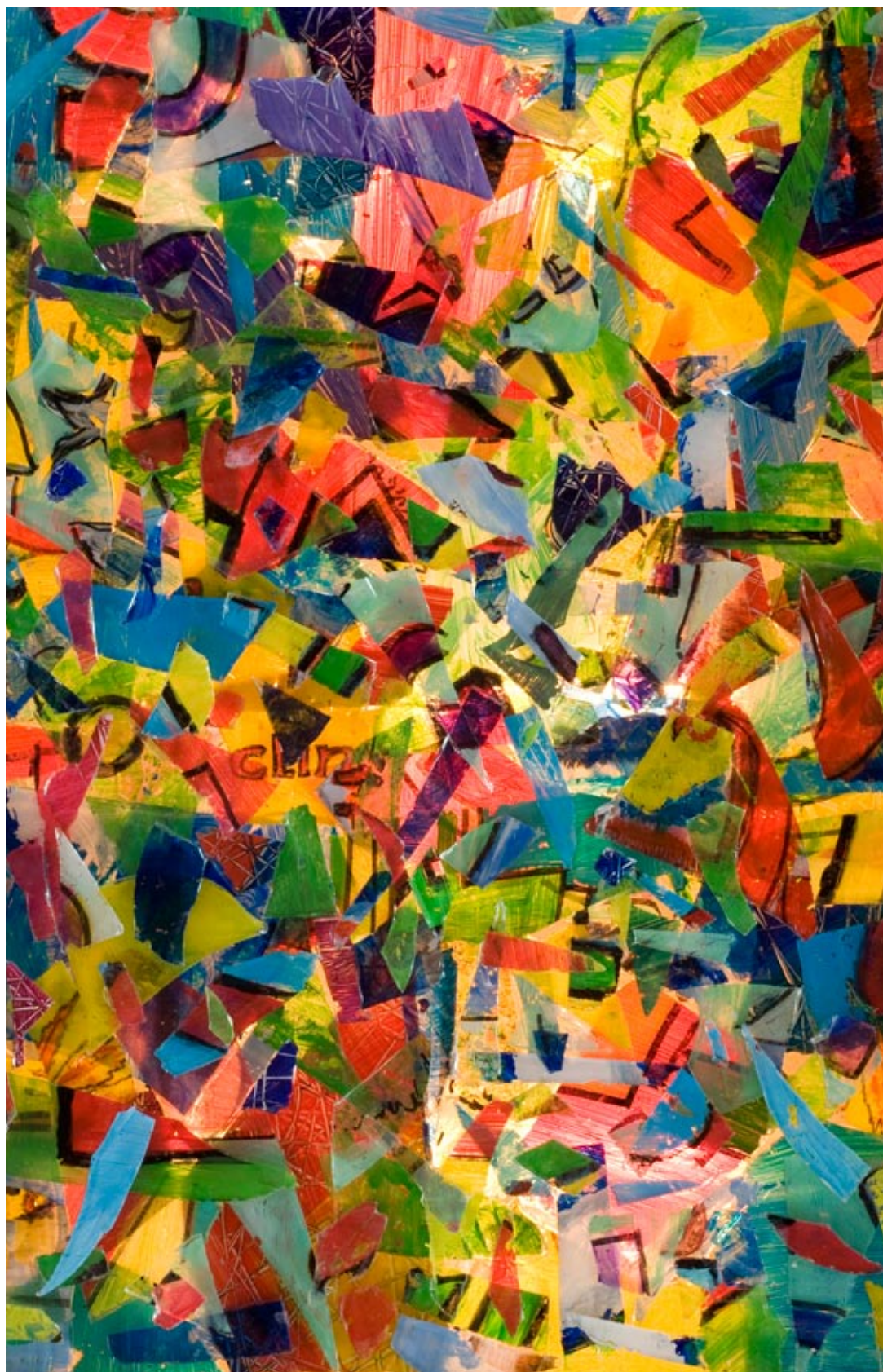
in promoting positive attitudes to the arts in society and say that it has helped broaden the base of artistic endeavour in the country. However, while Bealtaine has succeeded in attracting new and participatory audiences to the arts, some groups remain excluded, especially older people who lack transport, those who live alone and are not members of older people’s groups, men and people who are housebound.

Organisers were generally happy with the artistic quality of Bealtaine events/programmes. The availability of professional artists/facilitators seemed to matter for quality; a number of organisations said that quality suffered when it was difficult to find professional facilitators in the locality. Some organisers said that the quality of events varied, but the social aspect of the events/programmes often compensated for inferior quality. Overall, artists and facilitators see Bealtaine as important in providing a vehicle for showcasing and validating their work with older people and for highlighting the potential contribution of older people to the arts in Ireland, both as participants and consumers.

### **Bealtaine and Health and Social Gain**

Bealtaine provides significant health and quality of life gains for participants.





‘Breaking the Mould’  
by Arts for an Active  
Mind with Paul  
Cialis at West Cork  
Arts Centre  
(Bealtaine 2008)

**Photo**  
Phil Pound  
Photography

People feel better because of Bealtaine. The creative expression associated with Bealtaine fosters feelings of well-being that improves psychological outlook and morale among participants and older audiences. Dancing, drama and visual art programmes were specifically mentioned by respondents as encouraging personal development. Taking part in local arts projects is a popular way of becoming involved in community activities. Bealtaine provides an outlet for social connections that enrich the experience of ageing and provide hope and expectation through enhanced social relationships with others. Interviews confirmed that participants succeed in extending their social networks through participation in Bealtaine in a variety of ways ranging from the formation of lasting friendships in their own groups to meeting other older people involved in similar activities locally and elsewhere. Self-confidence and self-esteem are enhanced; social cohesion and social capital are nurtured.

### Public Policy for Bealtaine

Responsibility for arts policy in Ireland is largely vested in the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Arts Council. However, there is currently no unifying arts policy for older people, which means that existing supports remain fragmented and inconsistent

across sectors and regions. Older people are not referenced as a target group in the Department's Arts and Culture Plan, 2008; similarly, older people are not explicitly mentioned in Arts Council strategic planning documents. Not surprisingly, in view of the absences referenced above, the Health Service Executive (HSE) does not currently have an official policy on older people and the arts. Arts activity for older people within the local authority sector, although better, tends to be fragmented and dependent on financial resources, staff capacity, local circumstances and whether the arts officer has an interest in developing such programmes. Public policy needs to impact on the wide variety of agencies with responsibility for the delivery of arts programmes and community-based education programmes for older people. To achieve this goal, co-responsibility for policy for the arts and older people should be taken up by the Office of the Minister for Older People, whose remit covers many different government departments and agencies, with new funding being made available to organisations involved in the production of successful creative programmes for older people in a variety of settings.

Bealtaine operates within a policy vacuum that serves to undermine rather than enhance the work of the



Poet Brendan  
Kennelly provides the  
theme 'forever begin'  
for 2007

(Bealtaine 2007)

#### Photo

Mark Condren,  
courtesy of The  
Sunday Tribune



festival in achieving specified goals and objectives. The Bealtaine festival remains precariously funded, without adequate staffing and without any full-time staff, depending on the goodwill and enthusiasm of volunteers for its survival. This raises questions of sustainability in the long run, particularly if increases in expectations among the public are not met by the continued delivery of a high-quality arts programme. A national policy for older people and the arts is necessary to support Bealtaine and to realise the considerable potential for health and social gain associated with creative activities and events in this area.

#### Bealtaine's Future

Bealtaine is the major creative programme for older people in Ireland and has global recognition as an innovative and original festival. The festival is part of the creative landscape for older people and their families, and its effects are felt locally and nationally. Bealtaine yields considerable health and social gains for older people across a wide range of indicators. Unfortunately, these gains have not yet been recognised by an official system that continues to view resource allocation for older people in terms of an illness paradigm rather than a health-enhancing paradigm. Older people are holistic beings with multiple needs that cannot be met solely through health and social care interventions. For that reason, we need a strategic plan for older people and the arts that recognises the importance of equality of access to creative programmes for every older person in the country. The existence of such a plan would provide important support to Bealtaine in terms of increased resources and funding, allowing it to maintain its pre-eminent global position. More practically, it would facilitate the hiring of additional staff that would help broaden and deepen the programme across the country. This would facilitate greater efficiency and information-sharing, as well as facilitating further growth in the festival programme.

US-based Liz Lerman Dance Exchange collaborates with the Dunamais Arts Centre in Portlaoise and the Source Arts Centre in Thurles to create a poignant performance (Bealtaine 2008)

**Photo**  
Alf Harvey







# 1 Introduction

Age & Opportunity promotes the participation of older people in the arts through an annual month-long national festival – Bealtaine – that celebrates creativity in older age. This festival creates opportunities for older people to participate at various levels in the arts in Ireland, the effects of which are felt throughout the year. Bealtaine encourages a democratic form of engagement with the arts which is accessible to all older people. This principle is based on Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by which ‘everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts’. It is the largest co-operative arts festival in Ireland and arguably its biggest arts festival. Bealtaine incorporates all forms of art including music, theatre, literature, poetry, dance, film, storytelling, painting, drawing, print-making, sculpture and photography. Bealtaine involves co-operation and collaboration between Age & Opportunity and a range of agencies and organisations including: national cultural institutions, national and regional arts bodies, public libraries, Active Retirement Associations, local authorities and the HSE.

Bealtaine aims to engage older people in the arts in Ireland in a participative and collective manner. It provides opportunities for creative activity

among older people that would not be available otherwise. Historically, arts and culture were not seen as a priority in Ireland, and Bealtaine provides an opportunity for a cohort of older people to enjoy arts activities in their later life that would have not been available to many of them in their earlier life. There are many barriers to participation by older people in the arts. Some of these barriers arise from ageist attitudes within society that prevent full participation by older people in economic, social and cultural life. Information is also crucial to enable participation, and its absence leads to marginalisation among older people. The absence of a coherent public policy on participation by older people in the arts is also a significant barrier to the involvement of older people in creative activity. In general, while involvement in the arts continues to be very strongly influenced by social and economic background, those aged over 55, and particularly those over 65, are also less likely to go to arts events (NESF 2007, Lunn and Kelly 2008).

Creativity is a key factor in adaptation to ageing, and a number of studies have also shown benefits for health outcomes in older people. Cohen (2000, 2007) has identified four areas where creativity enhances personal and social well-being:

Dancer and Bealtaine  
Ambassador,  
Joanna Banks.  
(Bealtaine 2004)

**Photo**  
Tommy Clancy



- creativity strengthens morale in later life,
- creativity contributes to physical health as we age,
- creativity enriches relationships,
- creativity provides a legacy to successive generations.

Matarasso (1997) highlighted six potential areas where participation in the arts can lead to positive outcomes. First, participation in the arts can have a significant impact on people's self-confidence, and as a result on their social lives. Second, participatory arts projects can contribute to social cohesion. Third, participation can lead to greater community empowerment and self-determination. Fourth, local image and identity can be enhanced. Fifth, participating in the arts can enhance imagination and vision and make a big difference in developing people's creativity and confidence about the arts. Finally, people feel healthier and happier as a result of increased participation in the arts.

The purpose of the current study is to assess the contribution of the Bealtaine festival to the promotion of the participation of older people in the arts in Ireland and to improving the health and well-being of older people.

The report will consider whether Bealtaine is achieving its own stated aims in terms of:

- promoting recognition of our capacity to grow and be creative in older age and ensuring that this is reflected in policy development at all levels,
- developing opportunities for older people to participate meaningfully as artists, organisers, audience and critics,
- developing and articulating a national policy for the arts in older age that acknowledges the potency of the arts to transform lives.

The potential health and social gains associated with participation in Bealtaine will also be considered, as well as its impact on social cohesion and social capital. There have been very few studies of this type conducted in other countries, mainly because Bealtaine is such a unique festival, but also because the creativity evaluation literature on older people is largely underdeveloped. Most research on participation in the arts focuses on the involvement of younger people. There is a broad amount of literature on specific outcomes such as improvement in health, or personal impacts, but very few studies that seek to integrate both of these with the artistic merit and endeavour of creative programmes.

Participants at an art workshop, as part of the Maugherow Intergenerational Arts Project in Sligo (Bealtaine 2008)



Our study aims to incorporate health and social gain and creativity elements as part of the evaluation. The evaluation of the programme will involve interviews and discussion groups with older participants, observations, interviews with artists, project co-ordinators and stakeholders and data collected through postal questionnaires.

The report is structured as follows:

**Chapter 2** provides information on the Bealtaine programme, including an account of its origins, aims and objectives. This is followed in **Chapter 3** by an exploration of the relevant evaluation literature in this

broad area. Methodology is covered in **Chapter 4**. The range of activities covered by Bealtaine is outlined in **Chapter 5**. **Chapter 6** examines the impact of Bealtaine on arts policy and practice. **Chapter 7** explores the impact of Bealtaine on older participants. **Chapter 8** brings together some conclusions based on the analysis undertaken in the previous chapters.

Emer Mayock and  
Peter Horan perform  
as part of the 'From  
Hand To Hand' series  
of concerts

(Bealtaine 2006)

**Photo**

Stephen Doyle







## 2 The Bealtaine Festival: Origins, Objectives, Funding and Public Policy

### 2.1 Origins of Bealtaine

The Bealtaine festival is a month-long arts festival that takes place throughout Ireland in May every year. The purpose of the festival is to celebrate creativity in older age, highlighting older people's current engagement in the creative arts, and encouraging their continuing and future participation. The inaugural Bealtaine festival was held in May 1996, initiated and co-ordinated by the largely State-funded organisation Age & Opportunity, whose general remit it is to promote greater participation in society by older people in Ireland. The launch of the Bealtaine festival was the culmination of a process which started in the late 1980s, when Age & Opportunity and a number of other organisations such as the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin Corporation and the Eastern Health Board organised 'Active Age' weeks and a short arts festival (the 'Maytime' festival, held in 1995).

During the same period, local groups of older people engaged in the arts were emerging; they were supported by public libraries and the Vocational Education Committees. In 1993, Ireland was a founding member of the European Arts and Older People Network, and this provided links with European groups. In 1995, a committee was formed to hold a countrywide festival; a voluntary co-ordinator was provided by Age & Opportunity, and other national cultural institutions became involved. The resulting Bealtaine festival has grown in scope and ambition, and is recognised globally as the first such festival of its kind - a national festival celebrating older people in the arts. It has, in fact, come to be regarded as a model of international best practice by other European countries and regions.

### 2.2 Aims of Bealtaine

The aims of Bealtaine reflect the broader objectives of Age & Opportunity which include promoting greater participation in society by older people in Ireland. The organisation promotes an ethos of empowerment and equality in relation to ageing, and views older people as a societal resource with rights of participation, consultation and decision-making (Moloney 2006). In order to achieve these aims, it makes submissions to various government

The inaugural Bealtaine festival was held in May 1996, initiated and co-ordinated by the largely State-funded organisation Age & Opportunity whose general remit it is to promote greater participation in society by older people in Ireland

Kitty Hayes  
illustrates the vibrant  
West Clare style  
(Bealtaine 2006)

**Photo**  
Gerry Leddin





departments and bodies such as the Arts Council and the National Economic and Social Forum to ensure that the views of older people and the arts are represented<sup>1</sup>.

In a review prepared for the Arts Council in 2003, Age & Opportunity outlined the overall vision of the Bealtaine festival as:

- to bring about a shift in attitudes and practices that will create opportunities for older people to participate fully and meaningfully in the arts.

The specific aims of the festival are described as:

- 1 Promoting recognition of our capacity to grow and be creative in older age and ensuring that this is reflected in policy and practice at all levels.
- 2 Developing opportunities for older people to participate meaningfully in the arts as artists, organisers, audience and critics.
- 3 Developing and articulating a national policy for the arts in older

age that acknowledges the potency of the arts to transform lives.

(From the Bealtaine leaflet)

There are varying views within the steering committee of Bealtaine itself about what constitutes concepts such as ‘meaningful participation’ and ‘high artistic quality’ (Age & Opportunity 2003). However, there appears to be some agreement that such values are best attained in a programme where the participants are consulted and empowered, and where the process is regarded as at least as important as the product. Ideally, the participant experience should be transformative, creatively engaging and a stimulus to critical understanding (Moloney 2006).

It is generally recognised that in order to maximise the value and quality of a festival like Bealtaine, a high degree of input is required in terms of time, expertise and money. This level of quality is more likely to be attainable in professionally-led programmes that culminate in Bealtaine and continue from year to year. However, it is also possible to have high quality in peer-led and shorter-term programmes.

Inclusiveness is also a major aim of the festival with the intention of fostering involvement in the arts among all sectors of older people. There is an acute awareness on the

1 Since 2004, Age & Opportunity has made submissions to the Minister of State for Older People, the Arts Council, the National Economic and Social Forum and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism.

part of Age & Opportunity that because of the harsh economic and social conditions that prevailed when older people in Ireland were growing up, appreciation of (or even basic exposure to) the arts was often seen as a luxury, and was unlikely to form part of formal or informal education (Moloney 2006). A recent report has found that certain groups (i.e. people with lower income or lower educational attainment, and men) are much less likely to be involved in the arts than other groups (Lunn and Kelly 2008). Other studies confirm this lack of ownership over arts institutions and the feeling that the arts are “not for them” (Fleming and Gallagher 2000). In cognisance of this, a further aim of Bealtaine has

been to encourage programmes and events that are accessible and familiar to audiences prior to or alongside more experimental, challenging and long-lasting programmes. In addition, participation may open the door to deeper engagement with existing or new forms of creative activity. A nationwide festival of this kind which fosters co-operation between national and local arts organisations and older people’s groups encourages the breaking down of barriers to participation. It offers opportunities for older people to come into the national cultural institutions and for the institutions to bring their services to the wider community.

Molly Cawley,  
Suran Karimi and  
Mexally Smko  
Mexallo collaborate  
on Magic Me’s  
intercultural,  
intergenerational  
project in association  
with Age &  
Opportunity, Sligo  
Arts Office and  
Ballymote Family  
Resource Centre  
(Bealtaine 2008)

**Photo**  
James Connolly  
Photography



### 2.3 Organisation, funding and strategy of Bealtaine

The following section sets out the way in which the festival is organised, staffed and funded and how the strategy of Age & Opportunity has evolved in recent years in response to developments such as the growth of the festival and funding cuts.

#### Bealtaine as an umbrella

Age & Opportunity, which is managed by a volunteer board of older people, acts as a focal point for the festival, and is generally responsible for the co-ordination and administration of the festival at a national level.

A central theme is chosen annually and organisers are informed of this and may use it to base their events and programmes around if they wish.

Age & Opportunity runs its own central Bealtaine artistic programme of events, which are designed to be inspirational and/or to disseminate learning. It also co-ordinates the national launch of the festival and promotes the festival through the media.

#### Liaising with Bealtaine partners

Bealtaine is now a vast countrywide festival and most of the events and programmes are provided directly by Age & Opportunity's partner organisations – national cultural institutions, local authorities, arts centres, arts organisations,

HSE-related organisations, libraries, older people's groups and community groups. Some of these organisations also co-ordinate and advertise their own programmes. A large part of the role of Age & Opportunity is to liaise with and provide information and support to these partner organisations. Every year, it contacts all of the organisations on its database in December or January and encourages them to prepare an event/programme for Bealtaine. As part of this function, it used to hold regional meetings to enable idea-sharing and to encourage particular ways of working, until funding cutbacks meant that this was no longer possible.

Age & Opportunity recently produced a set of guidelines for organisers working with older people in the arts (Moloney 2006). Currently, the main mechanism for engaging in consultation and getting feedback from partners is by means of evaluation forms completed after the festival, by unsolicited informal feedback and through the steering committee which has representatives from many partner organisations. Age & Opportunity works closely with some of the Bealtaine partners, particularly those represented on the steering group, and those who organise their own Bealtaine programmes and submit them for inclusion in the national Bealtaine programme; this includes groups ranging from public

libraries to arts organisations to small local groups. There is another group of organisations with whom the relationship with Age & Opportunity tends to be mediated through arts officers or other central organisers. These groups may have very little contact with Age & Opportunity and may arrange their own events – Age & Opportunity has little control over the content or quality of such events. This is in keeping with one of the aims of Age & Opportunity – to promote autonomy among older people. However, one of the challenges Age & Opportunity faces is that of disseminating its ethos among these groups while simultaneously encouraging them to be independent.

### Publicising the festival

Age & Opportunity organises national and local media advertising for the festival on radio. As part of its promotional campaign in recent years, it asked various significant older artists (for example Jennifer Johnston and Robert Ballagh) to act as ambassadors for the festival. Recently, Age & Opportunity has developed a Bealtaine website with national and county listings that organisers and potential audiences may consult for information. Another important part of publicising the festival is the production of a colourful programme.

### Staffing

Bealtaine has a (part-time) Artistic Director and relies on extensive administrative input and support from Age & Opportunity core staff. In 2007, for example, there was input from the Assistant Chief Executive, the Editorial Assistant, the Media Coordinator, Database Administrator, Administrator, Information Administrator and the Finance Officer. Bealtaine had a full-time festival director funded by the Arts Council for two years up to the end of 2002 (see Table 2.1). However, due to cuts in its own budget, the Arts Council decided not to continue funding this post in late 2002. In 2003, local Health Boards also had funding cutbacks and one of the main implications of this for Bealtaine was that most Health Boards stopped funding the regional networking meetings.

### Bealtaine Steering Committee

Bealtaine has a steering committee whose role it is to develop and advise on policy and strategy. Members of the steering committee currently include a local authority arts officer, the director of an arts centre, a county librarian, a representative from the HSE, a representative from IMMA and from the Irish Film Institute, and two members from the board of Age & Opportunity. Members of Age & Opportunity staff who work on the Bealtaine festival also attend.

The two board members are also involved with groups representing older people. Membership of the committee changes periodically; for example, the Abbey Theatre used to be represented, but is not at present.

### Informing and Influencing Policy

One of the functions of Age & Opportunity is to inform and influence policy-makers and implementers to develop a policy for older people and the arts. To this end, Age & Opportunity makes submissions to the relevant Government Departments and bodies at appropriate times, such as prior to when policy documents are being drawn up in order to press for the inclusion of older people in arts policy. In the past four years, it has made submissions to the Minister of State for Older People, the Arts Council, the National Economic and Social Forum and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. Age & Opportunity has links with many of the national organisations representing older people, such as the Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament, and has joined forces with them occasionally in seeking to influence policy. Age & Opportunity also has links with European organisations involved in ageing.

### Funding

Table 2.1 shows the main annual external funding received for the Bealtaine festival. There was a decrease in funding in 2003 from the Arts Council and also around that time, funding ceased to be available from the Health Boards for regional meetings.

### Strategic Developments

In the early years of Bealtaine, much of the effort went into achieving broader participation and legitimating the notion of older people's involvement in the arts. As the festival has grown and matured, and society has changed, the role of Age & Opportunity has evolved. Bealtaine still has not taken root in a few areas, while in others, the challenge is to deepen engagement and improve quality and increase access. Its challenge is to promote high artistic quality on the one hand and to be inclusive of and accessible to the grassroots organisations (older people's organisations and day care centres) on the other.

There have been changes in the strategy of Age & Opportunity over recent years partly in response to funding cutbacks (see Table 2.1) in the context of the growth and maturing of the festival itself. For two years prior to 2003, Bealtaine had a full-time director/co-ordinator which enabled it to hold regional meetings that facilitated

**Table 2.1: Funding of Bealtaine**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>Arts Council</b>	35,221					
<b>Revenue Grant</b>	10,971*	25,000	30,000	35,000	45,000	70,000
<b>Dublin City Council</b>	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	7,500	5,000
<b>Health Boards</b>	14,720	7,500				
<b>Poetry Ireland</b>		1,000	1,000	300		
<b>Others</b>	1,500		500	500		
<b>Dublin Docklands Development Authority</b>						70,000**
<b>Total External</b>	64,912	36,000	34,000	38,300	52,500	145,000
<b>Age &amp; Opportunity***</b>	38,345	43,136	39,493	45,525	41,594	65,000
<b>Total</b>	103,257	79,136	73,493	83,825	94,094	210,000

\* Additional once-off funding of €10,971 for commissioning

\*\* Once-off “Murmur” project

\*\*\* Age & Opportunity figures do not include Age & Opportunity’s in-kind contributions including core staff time, rent, heat, phone, etc.

idea-sharing between organisers and provided a vital link between Age & Opportunity and organisations around the country; this also provided a forum for debate/discussion about older people and arts policy and had the potential to form a lobby group to press for policy change. However, since the cutbacks were imposed, Age & Opportunity no longer has either the staff or the financial resources to hold regional meetings.

In 2004, Age & Opportunity employed consultants to help consider its future approach and subsequently adopted a new strategic direction. Partly in order to re-energise the festival, to attract more Arts Council funding, and to provide continuity, it engaged a new part-time Artistic Director. It has subsequently placed an increased emphasis on developing Bealtaine’s own central artistic programme of events. The idea behind this is to encourage greater participation by older people,



artists and organisers by giving example and inspiration to groups around the country, since it no longer has the resources to hold meetings and engage in more direct contact. Part of its recent strategy has been to engage in advocacy for the festival and to give a clearer message of what the festival is about. This is reflected in the festival programme, which no longer simply provides lists of all events, but instead features inspirational articles.

Given the limitations on its resources and the growth and maturity of the festival, it has adopted some alternative strategies to achieve the further dissemination of the festival, to improve the artistic quality of events, to increase the profile and to provide a brand/identity that organisers around the country can identify with. It provides events as part of its artistic programme which aims to provide training and example to facilitators (e.g. the Liz Lerman dance workshops). The intention is that such workshops would act both to disseminate learning and as a stimulus to other groups to organise similar events and programmes around the country.

Other initiatives that provide inspiration and inclusiveness for organisations across the country include the 'Ambassadors' Programme' which was widely promoted in 2007 and

'The Lost Art of Letter Writing Project' in libraries. Another recent initiative that provides support and guidance for organisers was the publication of a set of 'Guidelines for Bealtaine organisers and others involved in the Arts and Older People' (Moloney 2006).

Another Age & Opportunity initiative which was not developed specifically for Bealtaine but which also encourages the sustained involvement of older people in creative activities is the 'Creative Exchanges' programme – an arts in health-care settings programme. This is a training programme devised by Age & Opportunity, in conjunction with artists, for staff who work in care settings in order to train them to facilitate creative programmes for older people. Many of those who complete this training use the Bealtaine Festival to showcase work produced in their programmes.

The strategy of developing a strong central artistic programme for Bealtaine has been successful in that the festival has achieved an enhanced profile and stronger advocacy for older people in the arts and the programme was awarded more Arts Council funding in 2008. However, this amount is ring-fenced for programming only and may not be used for other activities such as consultation and support.

Buí Bolg, with local  
Active Retirement  
groups, launch 2007  
with a ceremony  
of fire and light on  
Duncannon Beach  
(Bealtaine 2007)

**Photo**  
Dylan Vaughan  
Photography





## 2.4 National Policies on Older People and the Arts

Responsibility for arts policy in Ireland is largely vested in the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Arts Council. However, there is no unifying arts policy for older people, which means that existing supports remain fragmented and inconsistent across sectors and regions. The following provides a brief summary of the main agencies with responsibility for policy and practice in relation to the delivery of creative programmes for older people in the country.

### The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism

The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism was established in June 2002. There is no specific reference to the participation of older people in the Departmental arts policy documents. The Department's Arts and Culture Plan, 2008 states that "developing access and opportunity for an ever-wider audience is a leading strategic objective for the Department, its agencies and institutions". However, older people are not mentioned as a target group, while a whole section of the plan is devoted to 'Community, youth and

multiculturalism' (Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism 2008). Quite clearly, while all groups are equal some are more equal than others.

### The Arts Council

The Arts Council, an independent statutory agency, is the state body that sets out arts policy in detail. While the Council does have specific written policies set out for certain sectors such as young people and people with disabilities in its strategy and policy documents, it does not currently have one for older people (The Arts Council 2005a, 2005c, and 2005d). In response to a question on this issue, a representative of the Arts Council said that while it does not have a specific written policy for older people, that events and programmes for older people in the arts generally are implicitly included under its policy on Participatory Arts and its policy on Arts and Health (Interview with Head of Participation, The Arts Council, see Arts Council, 2003, 2005a, 2005b).<sup>2</sup> This may be contrasted with the approach of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland who explicitly states its commitment to the promotion of the arts among older people in its policy document "Creative Connections: a 5 year plan for developing the Arts 2007-2012" (Arts Council of Northern Ireland 2007). A representative from the Arts Council said that developing a

2 In fact, in practice, many older people's groups/ community groups do apply for and receive funding for projects under these headings.

Bealtaine  
Ambassador Robert  
Ballagh mentors  
Ratoath Community  
Art Group, supported  
by Meath County  
Council Arts Office  
(Bealtaine 2008)

**Photo**  
Janet Bolger



written policy for older people and the Arts is not a priority for it at this time – its focus is on cultural diversity this year. The Arts Council representative indicated that the Council values the work done by the Bealtaine festival, particularly the provision of guidelines for best practice, the imaginative artistic programme, the redesign of the programme, and the work in health-care settings; it considers that Bealtaine operates as a model of good practice and this is evidenced by the increase in funding given in 2008 (increased from €0,000 in 2007 to €00,000). However, as has been highlighted by Age & Opportunity, the fact that there is still no written policy for older people and

the arts leaves programmes for older people, and indeed the Bealtaine festival itself, vulnerable to cuts in funding (see Age & Opportunity submission to the Arts Council).

#### **The Health Service Executive**

The Health Service Executive (HSE) does not currently have an official policy on older people and the arts (information from telephone call to HSE steering committee member). Some regional Health Boards used to fund the regional meetings that Bealtaine held around the country; however, this funding was cut when general health budgets were cut back in 2003. At the moment, the issue of

whether arts activity for older people is funded is at the discretion of local area managers. In practice, many arts programmes throughout the country are funded both in residential settings (hospitals and nursing homes) and in day care centres under arts in health care programmes; many of these cater for older people. Again, however, the impetus for initiating and supporting these programmes depends on the interest and resources of local managers in the facilities and/or interest by local arts officers/librarians, rather than it being an accepted formal part of HSE policy and practice.

### Local Authorities

Under the Arts Act of 2003, local authorities are playing an ever-increasing role in articulating and delivering policy at a local level. The fact that the Arts Council has a written policy for young people and the arts makes it more likely that local authorities have an impetus to develop programmes for young people. Some of the local authorities have youth officers, whereas programmes for older people tend to be developed at the discretion of the county manager and/or the arts officer and tends to depend on a number of factors: financial resources, staff capacity, local circumstances and whether the arts officer has an interest in developing such programmes. In some of the local authorities with the

most active Bealtaine programmes, the arts officers have either a strong commitment to or experience of working with older people either in Ireland or abroad. Under the Arts Act, 2003, Part 2 Section 6(1), each local authority is to prepare and implement plans for the development of the arts within its functional area. This increasing role of local authorities in the area of the arts is recognised in their policy document ‘Partnership for the Arts: Arts Council Goals 2006-2010’ (Arts Council 2005). A report by the NESF (2007: 40) notes the important role of local authorities in the arts:

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In terms of legislation, local authorities are the organisations given the most responsibility for broadening participation in and access to the arts, taking social inclusion into account.

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The NESF report also notes, however, that there is little centralised policy and direction for the local authority arts offices. The report also recommends better policy co-ordination between national bodies and local authorities.

### Minister of State for Older People

Given that it is charged with promoting and protecting the holistic interests of older people, the Office of the Minister

of State for Older People would appear to be an obvious place to develop a strategy (including an arts policy) for this group. However, there is currently no such strategy or policy in place. A new strategy is due to be formulated in the coming months. It will be interesting to see if there is any formal consideration of the role of culture and creativity programmes in the evolving strategy.

### Library policy

In general, libraries are increasingly interested in social inclusion; they want to provide services that attract customers from a wide range of groups in the population (including older people). This is one reason why more and more of them are becoming involved in providing classes and events for older people.

### Educational policy: lifelong learning

The rationale and ethos for lifelong learning (to give a second chance to those who did not receive educational opportunities when they were young) provide an obvious reason for Age & Opportunity to link up with the Department of Education and Science. Age & Opportunity might seek to have the arts and older people prominently included in educational policy – specifically within lifelong learning. At the level of practice, inter-generational projects have been

very successful within Bealtaine in terms of their impact on individuals and on communities.

### Conclusion

Bealtaine operates within a policy vacuum that serves to undermine rather than enhance the work of the festival in achieving the goals set out by the organisers. There is no coherent, or even fragmented, policy for the arts and older people in Ireland. When there is an emphasis placed on creativity programmes, the needs of younger people and multicultural groups are more likely to be highlighted than the needs of older participants. The Bealtaine festival remains precariously funded and without adequate staffing levels, depending on the goodwill and enthusiasm of volunteers for its survival. In the absence of a coherent policy on the arts for older people, Bealtaine cannot hope to fulfil even its own objectives, let alone its potential. In particular, participation is likely to be uneven and truncated, with many older people excluded from the potential benefits of participation. This is a pity, given the major gains associated with the programme, all of which are set out in later chapters.

Cyrileen Power, Rita Costello and Frank Marshall take part in the 'Stories in Motion II' programme at The Abbey Theatre (Bealtaine 2005)

**Photo**  
Fiona Morgan







### 3 Evaluating Creativity Programmes for Older People

The impact of cultural activity on individuals is a relatively new field of research, but there has been an increasing number of studies that seek to measure the impact of involvement in the arts on the health and social well-being of older people. Some of the potential generic benefits of participation in arts programmes have already been outlined in the introductory chapter. Although this research is relatively underdeveloped, a survey of arts for health projects suggests that there are physical, psychological and social benefits to participants (Health Development Agency 2000). Those involved in providing and facilitating these programmes and those participating in the programmes have long been convinced of their beneficial effects (OCS Consulting 2004). There is increasing recognition among health professionals that involvement in the arts contributes to positive

health outcomes (Smith 2002). In a study about cultural activities and mortality, attending cultural events has been shown to be linked, though not necessarily causally, to longevity (Bygren et al 1996, Konlaan et al 2000).

New research on psychological growth and development in the second half of life has led to a new understanding of the capacity for positive change and self-expression in the second half of life. A recent US community-based study of the impact of professionally conducted cultural programmes on older adults found benefits in relation to physical health, increased morale, reduced loneliness and increased activity (Cohen et al 2007). Part of the impact of these creativity programmes may arise from participants achieving a sense of mastery over a particular activity (Rodin 1989), or through the social engagement and connectivity associated with the creative programme (Glass et al 1999). Recent research in the UK also suggests that programmes which promote active social contact, which encourage creativity and which use mentoring, are likely to positively affect health and well-being (Greaves and Farbus 2006). Impacts included reduced depression, increased social support, increased alertness, social activity, self-worth and optimism about life and, for some people, there were stronger transformational changes.

The impact of cultural activity on individuals is a relatively new field of research, but there has been an increasing number of studies that seek to measure the impact of involvement in the arts on the health and social well-being of older people



The Abbey Theatre  
partners Age &  
Opportunity to bring  
Liz Lerman Dance  
Exchange workshops  
and performance  
to Dublin

Bealtaine 2007

**Photo**  
Photocall Ireland



A recent review of the literature on community-based arts projects found that people identified the following as the main areas where positive personal changes had occurred in their lives (Newman et al 2003):

- making new friends,
- being happier,
- more creative and confident,
- a reduced sense of isolation,
- more people taking up training (in the arts).

The same study identified the following impacts on society - social changes which build up trust and encourage the formation of social capital:

- more cross-cultural community understanding,
- stronger sense of 'locality',
- bringing different groups together,
- improvement in organisational skills.

Research also suggests that participation in the arts encourages social inclusion and breaks down barriers (Lowe 2000, White and Robson 2003) thereby providing a rationale for investment in the arts to encourage community cohesion and development.

A study on the quality of life for older people in long-stay care settings in Ireland indicates that there is a lack

of meaningful creative activities for residents in many of these facilities and that this has a negative impact on their quality of life (Murphy et al 2006). In the absence of creative activities, many people are isolated and lonely and find that they are lacking in purpose and have few opportunities to develop themselves physically and mentally. They have few choices and little chance to exercise autonomy in their lives, particularly where they are physically frail. A number of recent studies have found that arts programmes involving music, visual arts and drama, among other activities have a profound impact on the quality of life of older people in residential care. There are positive impacts on health, psychological well-being and autonomy (OCS 2004, Russell 2007).

Festivals generate economic and social returns as well as personal benefits. Much of the research on festivals has focussed more on the economic than the social impact of festivals on a given region (see, for example, Chhabra et al 2003). The economics literature on festivals has little relevance for the Bealtaine programme, given the way the programme is organised and delivered as a largely participatory programme. However, there has been a limited number of studies on the social and political impact of festivals at a national level. For example, it has been

noted that festivals can be inclusive and accessible as well as providing an occasion for collective celebration. Festivals can foster solidarity and identification and self-esteem among a particular group and help advocacy for the group (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2004). In the case of Bealtaine, it might be expected, for example, to encourage cohesion and pride among older people. Participatory festivals can also encourage the development of skills and provide an impetus to prepare for public performance and/or exhibition. They may also encourage State bodies, voluntary groups and individuals to work together, thereby building social capital (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2004). There have been studies of individual arts projects which suggest that the building of trust, the use of professionally-trained artists and the provision of sustained funding and support are important elements in achieving some of the transformative effects outlined above (see, for example, Mayo County Council 2002, Moloney and McCarthy 2006). Providing access and transport, tailoring the programmes to the needs of the participants, developing a positive group identity and building confidence and self-efficacy were also found to be important.

For some older people, their main involvement with Bealtaine is as part of an audience attending events. A study in Sweden examined the effects of attending cultural events (visits to the cinema, theatre, concerts and live music performances, museums and art exhibitions) and found that attendance had positive impacts on the maintenance of health (Johansson et al 2001).

## Conclusion

The creative spirit that dwells within each of us can have a powerful effect, if liberated, on our health and social well-being and on the society within which we live. It is clear from the limited number of studies done that the arts and creative expression promote health while ageing. Participatory arts programmes can have positive effects on the general health, mental health and social activities of older people. While causal relationships are difficult to establish, there are signs that creativity matters for ageing well. There are also social gains from creativity programmes linked to solidarity, social connectedness and social capital. The task of this report is to explore whether Bealtaine provides any, some or all of these benefits to participants in Ireland.



Caption?





## 4 Methodology

The aim of this research is to assess whether the Bealtaine festival is achieving its own stated aims, focussing on the following aspects:

- 1 Dissemination of the festival throughout Ireland (extent and level of ‘embedded’ness of the festival),
- 2 Impact on the practice of organisers of the festival (impact on their own awareness and practice, connection with other groups),
- 3 Impact on facilitators of the various arts programmes/events,
- 4 Impact on older participants in terms of the extent and quality of their experience of participation as well as the impact on their quality of life, self-expression, social networking, engagement with community,
- 5 Impact on national and local arts policy.

There is little analogous research from which to derive a methodology since the Bealtaine festival is unique.

Research on the impact of arts festivals tends to look at the economic and social impact of festivals on a given

community or area. However, the Bealtaine festival is unusual in that it is a nationwide festival for older people so the community at whom the festival is targeted is diffuse, diverse and locally-centred. The aims of Bealtaine are to develop opportunities for participation by older people in the arts and to promote recognition of the capacity for creativity in older age among policy-makers, among the national and local arts institutions and among the general population. In order to assess the impact of the festival, we decided to focus primarily on the impact of Bealtaine on current stakeholders (older people, organisers, facilitators, policy-makers). In addition, an attempt was also made to obtain the views of a small number of selected older people and organisers who do not currently participate in Bealtaine to establish why they do not participate.

The evaluation is designed to address the following questions:

- Is Bealtaine achieving its stated aims?
- Are there impacts on older participants from the perspective of health and social gain?
- What (if any) are the societal impacts of Bealtaine?

The Bealtaine festival is unusual in that ... the community at whom the festival is targeted is diffuse, diverse and locally-centred





Kitty Sean  
Cunningham lilts  
at 'The Glen Road'  
sessions in Donegal  
(Bealtaine 2008)

**Photo**  
Simon Houston

In order to assess the overall impact of the festival countrywide, we decided to adopt the following methods:

#### Review of Age & Opportunity documentation

Conduct a review of previous evaluations/reports on Bealtaine to assess the growth of the festival in terms of numbers of organisers, participants, events and geographical spread from its first year in 1996 to 2007. Documents reviewed included internal policy documents, policy and/or funding submissions to government bodies, additional details of funding and staffing. Information from this review was used to describe the aims, operation and funding of the festival.

#### Interviews with Age & Opportunity personnel and members of the Bealtaine steering committee

The Assistant CEO, with responsibility for Bealtaine, and the Artistic Director of the festival, as well as four (other) members of the steering committee, were interviewed (a local authority arts officer, a representative from a national cultural institution (IMMA), from a county library and from an arts centre). Information from these interviews was used to clarify the current aims and strategies employed by Age & Opportunity with regard to Bealtaine as well as to obtain the views of interviewees on the operation

and impact of the festival. These interviews also helped inform the design of the questionnaire.

#### Postal survey of organisers

A questionnaire ('Questionnaire 1') was sent to all of the organisers of the festival on Age & Opportunity's contact list for 2007, as well as to some extra organisers, in order to obtain their assessment of the impact of the festival. The organisers are key figures in the dissemination of the festival. The survey attempts to assess whether Bealtaine is achieving its own stated aims in the views of the organisers. The design of the questionnaire was informed by the interviews with members of the steering committee, and was designed after consultation with a sub-committee of the steering group. As well as having open questions, the questionnaire also specifically addresses some of the main domains identified as important in the literature in terms of personal and social impacts.

A pilot survey was conducted; eighteen surveys were sent out to the different types of organisations and nine were returned completed. Some minor adaptations were carried out as a result of this. For example, a question on the impact of Bealtaine on spiritual well-being was removed from the questionnaire as organisers did not feel they could answer this.

Derek Speirs  
discusses his  
exhibition  
'Celebrating  
Creativity in  
Older Age' with  
Fintan O'Toole  
(Bealtaine 2002)

**Photo**  
Tommy Clancy



The areas covered in the Questionnaire 1 included the following:

- Type of organisation,
- Level and type of involvement and spending,
- Bealtaine as a stimulator of new activities,
- Artistic quality of events/ programmes,
- Most useful aspects of Bealtaine,
- Bealtaine as:
  - a showcase for work,
  - a promoter of links with other organisations,
  - an inspiring programme,
- Degree to which Bealtaine is socially inclusive,
- Satisfaction with Bealtaine,
- Impact on attitudes to ageing in Irish society,
- Impact on profile of older people in national and local arts programmes,
- Impact on older people in the following ways: facilitating self-expression; encouraging personal development; encouraging critical thinking; improving quality of life; encouraging additional social networking.

The questionnaire was sent to all Bealtaine organisers listed on the Age & Opportunity database. Some additional lists of organisers



were obtained from central contact points, including local authorities and HSE agencies, so the total number of questionnaires sent out was 435. The number of completed questionnaires returned was 187, representing a 43% response rate (Table 4.1).

#### Postal survey to participants and members of Active Retirement Associations (ARAs)

A short questionnaire ('Questionnaire 2') was sent to members of one Active Retirement Association in each county in Ireland. This questionnaire was also sent to three ARAs in order to pilot it. Members of Active Retirement Associations from over half (14) of the 26 counties returned completed questionnaires and a total of 253 completed questionnaires was received. The questions covered in this survey included the following:

- Demographic section – age-group, gender,
- Type of event/programme attended,
- Impact of Bealtaine in the following areas:
  - Encouraging self-expression,
  - Encouraging personal development,
  - Fostering spiritual exploration and development,
  - Thinking critically about the arts,
  - Improving quality of life,

- Meeting new people,
- Involvement with local community.

These are very similar to Section E of Questionnaire 1 and they are also designed to assess the impact of Bealtaine on older participants – this time from the viewpoint of the participants themselves. A question on spiritual exploration was included in this questionnaire.

#### Wild Strawberries Film Club

A questionnaire ('Questionnaire 3') was handed out at a regular event run by the Irish Film Institute that arose directly from and is involved with the Bealtaine festival. This event is a monthly film club for people over the age of 50 and it involves a short introduction, a screening, and an informal discussion afterwards. The event is free and the films are chosen specifically for the audience. There were 103 questionnaires completed. This offered an opportunity to gain access to a group of older participants whose main involvement in Bealtaine was as part of an audience, to assess the impact on them.

#### Interviews with facilitators, artists and organisers

In addition to those already listed above, interviews were conducted with four artists who facilitated visual arts programmes in different settings:

**Table 4.1:** Response to survey

Type of organisation*	Number of surveys issued	Number received	Response rate
National cultural institutions**	10	8	80%
Arts centres/regional arts organisations	57	16	28%
Local authority arts offices	28	17	61%
Public libraries	59	22	37%
Active retirement / older people's groups / community groups	177	79	45%
Health-care facilities: day care centres / hospitals	104	45	43%
All organisations	435	187	43%

\* Categorised differently from Age & Opportunity.

\*\* National cultural institutions – see list at Appendix 1. (Only those participating in 2007 received a questionnaire. For the purposes of this report, the Irish Film Institute is also included as a national cultural institution, although it is not on the official list on the Council for National Cultural Institutions website).

**N.B.** Extra contact details were obtained for some counties; questionnaires were sent to all local authority arts officers in Ireland, hence higher total numbers of questionnaires were issued than those listed on Age & Opportunity's database. Pilot survey reduces overall numbers by 17.

in hospitals, in the Irish Museum of Modern Art and in community settings. Interviews were also conducted with: a facilitator of a dance programme, two drama facilitators, a facilitator of an inter-generational programme, two facilitators of writers' workshops, a care-worker in a hospital, a librarian

and three local authority arts officers. These interviews were conducted in order to allow for a more detailed and nuanced picture to emerge than is possible to obtain from quantitative data alone. For example, as previous researchers have noted, it is difficult to describe the benefits of engaging

in creative activity and interviews allowed respondents the opportunity to expand on this and other issues.

#### Phone-calls on participation

Phone-calls were made to five libraries, five Active Retirement Associations, five day care centres, five local authority arts offices, all of whom did not participate in Bealtaine in 2007 to see why they did not participate and what might facilitate their future involvement.

#### Interviews with participants in various programmes

Interviews were carried out with participants in a variety of types of programme in Bealtaine. Four members of a dance programme took part in a group interview as did five members of a long-established writers' group that had its origins in Bealtaine in 1999. A participant in a visual arts programme, in an inter-generational (drama) project and in a writers' workshop were interviewed. The focus of these interviews was on the impact on them of participating in Bealtaine and Bealtaine-related events/programmes. They were asked how they became involved and then how it affected them under the headings set out above.

#### Interviews with policy-makers and implementers

Interviews were conducted with the Director of the Abbey Theatre, the Regional Development Officer of the Irish Film Institute and the Head of Participation in the Arts Council, as well as selected local authority arts officers and a county librarian. These interviews sought the views of these individuals regarding their experience of Bealtaine and policy and practice in their organisations regarding arts and older people.

#### Documentary/website search

The websites of all local authorities were searched to see if they had a written policy on older people and the arts. Where there was out-of-date or insufficient information on websites, the search was supplemented by contacting the local authority by phone or by e-mail. All national cultural institutions were also contacted by e-mail to see if they had a written policy on older people.



Former Board member Grace Slattery at the launch of the first Bealtaine festival (Bealtaine 1996)





The cast of 'Silver Stars', a song cycle on the lives of older gay men, written by Seán Millar, perform at the Project Arts Centre, supported by Age & Opportunity (Bealtaine 2008)

**Photo**  
Colm Hogan





## The Bealtaine Festival

### Ambassadors



**Eamon Morrissey**



**Geraldine Plunkett**



**Paddy Moloney**



**Veronica Dunne**



**John Quinn**



**Joanna Banks**



**Tomás MacAnna**



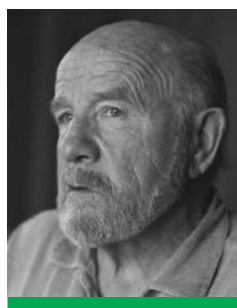
**Mick Lally**



**Jennifer Johnston**



**Liam Clancy**



**Eugene McCabe**



**Dervla Murphy**



**Robert Ballagh**

## The Bealtaine Festival

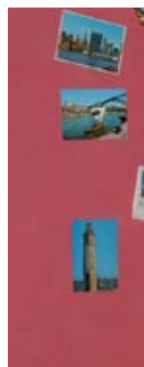
A retrospective look back, 1996 — 2008

In 2007, Age & Opportunity began inviting established older Irish artists to become Bealtaine Ambassadors. These are artists of the highest rank and reputation, working in diverse creative fields. While a number have taken a mentoring role among groups fostering creativity, the endorsement that our Ambassadors bring to the festival honours all older people who participate in Bealtaine.



# The Bealtaine Festival

A retrospective look back, 1996 — 2008

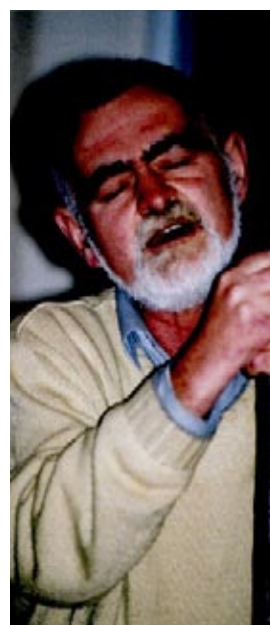


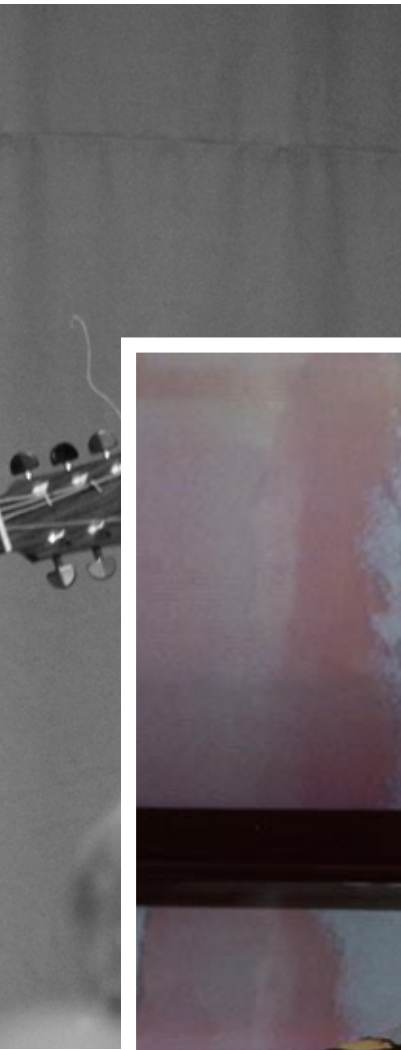




## The Bealtaine Festival

A retrospective look back, 1996 — 2008

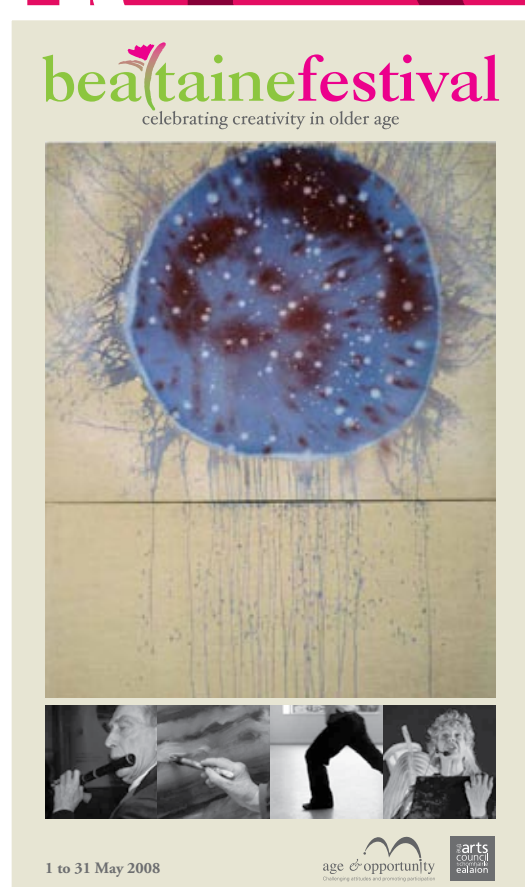
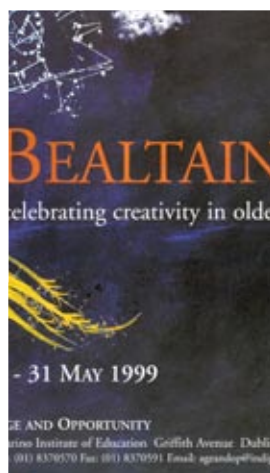


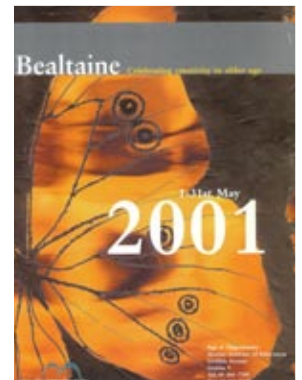




## The Bealtaine Festival

A retrospective look back, 1996 — 2008





## 5 Bealtaine in Practice

This chapter outlines the growth and spread of the festival in terms of size and numbers of organisers, events and counties covered. It describes the level of profile and media coverage provided in 2007. It outlines the main features and highlights of the festival in Bealtaine's own artistic programme and some special events organised by Bealtaine partners. It then outlines the nature of participation, level of spending and sources of funding as revealed by the survey data. Finally, it presents the views of organisers and artists/facilitators on the following issues: most important aspects of Bealtaine; satisfaction with

administration of the festival; degree of inclusiveness; artistic quality of events/programmes; impact on promoting positive attitudes to ageing in society; fostering links between organisations.

### 5.1 Growth of Bealtaine

It is clear from the statistics in Table 5.1 that the number of Bealtaine events has grown steadily and that the festival has spread to encompass all counties (there is, however, some unevenness as some counties have relatively few activities, e.g. Carlow has only one event listed for 2007, whereas several have well-established Bealtaine programmes

**Table 5.1: Growth and spread of Bealtaine**

Year	1996	2000	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>Number of events</b>	52	184	575	700	838	1000** approx	1300**
<b>Number of counties</b>	8	26	26	26	25	26	26
<b>Number of participants</b>	> 7000*	Not available	25,000*	26,000*	33,400*	40,000*	51,245*

**Source:** Age & Opportunity, 1996; Reid, 2000; Age & Opportunity, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007

\* The number of participants is estimated.

\*\* From 2006 onwards, the number of events (and participants) is estimated since, due to a change in strategy, the Bealtaine programme does not now list all events countrywide and many events take place during Bealtaine that are not included.





Works from the  
'Charcoal and  
Chocolate'  
programme  
at IMMA  
(Bealtaine 2005)

**Photo**  
Mirjam Keune

Table 5.2: Number of Bealtaine organisers

Organisers	Numbers in 1996	Numbers in 2000	Numbers in 2007
National Cultural Institutions	5	9	12
Arts Offices	3	13	16
Arts Centres	5	8	52
Culture / Heritage	2	3	10
Public Libraries	5	19	27
Active Retirement / Clubs / Community Groups	13	31	115
Day Care Centres / HSE	3	18	105
Total	36	101	337

Source: Bealtaine Evaluations 1996, 2000 and 2007

with many events). The number of participants has also multiplied seven-fold to 51,000 in 2007. From the perspective of numbers of events and coverage, the opportunities for older people to participate in artistic events as audiences have increased.

The number of organisers or partners involved in Bealtaine has increased ten-fold since 1996 (Table 5.2). This growth is observable in all sectors with a particularly large increase in the

number of day care centres and Active Retirement Associations involved. This implies that Bealtaine has become an established annual feature in most national and many local organisations of all types.

Promotion of the festival

In terms of promoting the festival, there has been increased coverage in national and local radio and newspapers over the years. In 2007, there were 1,711 column centimetres of media coverage of Bealtaine in national newspapers and 10,939 in local/regional newspapers – this has an estimated value of €226,000 and represented a 21% increase on 2006.

3 Information in this section is taken from the Bealtaine programme for 2007.

In addition, Bealtaine events featured 18 times on 12 different radio stations. There was a national radio advertising campaign which lasted for two weeks and a local radio campaign on 15 radio stations. The Bealtaine ambassadors featured prominently in the national promotional campaign. A new dedicated Bealtaine web address was introduced in 2007 and there was a 50% increase in usage compared with the previous year. The website has both a national programme – the Bealtaine programme, and county listings and these were downloaded 580 and 540 times during April and May respectively.

## 5.2 Bealtaine events in 2007

This section covers some of the main features of Bealtaine in 2007, covering events organised directly by Age & Opportunity and those organised by Bealtaine partners.

### Unifying theme for festival

In recent years, Age & Opportunity has provided a suggested theme for the festival each year. This provides organisations around the country with a unifying element to which they can link their events if they wish. The theme for 2007 was 'Forever Begin' and it implies that getting older may be a time for discovery or rediscovery of our creativity.<sup>3</sup>

### Events organised by Age & Opportunity

The artistic programme is designed to foster cohesion, provide examples of innovative events, disseminate best practice and celebrate creativity in older age.

### Opening Ceremony in Wexford

The opening ceremony for Bealtaine in 2007 was a ceremony of fire and light and it took place on Duncannon Beach in Co. Wexford. It was created with Buí Bolg, a street theatre company and with older people from the area, young dancers and fire artists.

### Public Libraries and 'The Lost Art of Letter Writing'

This was run jointly by local public libraries, the Library Council, the National Library and Age & Opportunity. Older people around the country were invited to write a letter about something they had learned from life, send it to their local library and to Bealtaine. Some of the letters were posted on the Bealtaine website. The National Library and many public libraries ran letter writing workshops. The National Library (and some public libraries) also held an exhibition of letters from their collections.

### Murmur – Dublin Docklands Whisper in Your Ear project

The Dublin Docklands Development Authority co-commissioned this project

for which older Dubliners told stories about their local area. These were recorded and the public could then listen to the stories on a mobile phone while actually experiencing being in the area itself. A sign marked the locations where the stories could be accessed.

#### Liz Lerman Dance Exchange / Abbey Theatre with Bealtaine

An inter-generational dance company from Maryland in the US gave a six-day workshop at the DanceHouse studio in Foley Street, Dublin. The workshop included people who had never danced before, as well as professional dancers, and culminated in an informal public performance. As well as providing inspiration, and an opportunity for older people to participate in dance, and validating the creative capacity of older dancers, it was an opportunity for professional dancers/facilitators in Ireland to learn new skills which they could pass on to others.

#### Bealtaine Billboards

In 2005, Mayo County Arts Office ran a campaign where artworks by participants in painting workshops at care centres were exhibited on billboards around the county. This was extended countrywide in 2007 when billboards in ten locations around the country featured artworks by older people.

#### Special Events organised by Bealtaine Partners

Several Bealtaine partners (for example IMMA, the Abbey Theatre, the Irish Film Institute, West Cork Arts Centre, the Arts Offices of Mayo, Sligo and Offaly County Councils) have extensive programmes and organised special events for 2007. The following is just a selection of these events:

**Bealtaine Film Tour** by Access cinema and the IFI. A film, 'Ladies in Lavender', was selected and shown 36 times in 32 venues nationwide. Apart from the tour, the IFI held a Bealtaine film festival in Dublin in May. This included the screening of five films chosen specifically for the members of the club and a talk by the director of 'Ladies in Lavender'.

**Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA):** Programme of gallery visits, an open studio, a public talk and film (on US artist Georgia O'Keeffe in older age), participation with the National Gallery in the 'Drawing Day' programme.

**Public libraries:** 'The Lost art of Letter Writing'. Extensive programmes in at least seven libraries, e.g. storytelling in care centres organised by Wexford library.



**Table 5.3: Current and future participation in Bealtaine**

Type of organisation	Participation in 2007	Ongoing events targeting older people	No. of years participating in Bealtaine (average)	Intend to continue
National cultural institutions	8 (100%)	6 (75%)	6.00	5 (62.5%)
Arts centres/regional arts organisations	16 (100%)	13 (81%)	3.93	12 (86%)
Local authority arts offices	14 (82%)	13 (77%)	5.67	12 (86%)
Public Libraries	22 (100%)	22 (100%)	5.67	19 (91%)
Active retirement / older people's groups / community groups	72 (91%)	59 (75.64%)	4.84	59 (86%)
Health-care facilities: day care centres / hospitals	44 (98%)	36 (82%)	3.88	40 (98%)
All organisations	176 (94%)	149 (80.5%)	4.72	147 (88%)

**Mayo County Council:** Inter-generational arts residency Bread and Puppet Theatre working with Mayo Artsquad, created puppets and props for circus and theatre performances in May involving local community groups of all ages.

**Health-care Facilities / Day Care Centres / Hospitals:** Many health-related centres and institutions participate in Bealtaine. For many of them, it is a focal point in a year-long programme of activities.

### 5.3 Participation, spending and sources of funding in 2007

A very high proportion of each type of organisation who responded to the postal survey had participated in 2007 (Table 5.3). Those who did not participate said that they had other priorities this year (see Section 6.4). Most organisations have ongoing events or programmes specifically targeting older people that run every year. A high proportion (88%) of organisations said that their programmes will continue in the future; those who did not expect to continue gave reasons such as



lack of interest from members as the age profile increases and difficulties in regard to funding. Two of the national cultural institutions that are not continuing, are about to be refurbished while one is unsure due to restructuring and possible staff changes. Local authorities who may not be involved in future cite shortages of staff, funding and space as well as other priorities as possible barriers to their participation in the future. A small number of non-participating organisations were contacted to see why they had not participated. They gave the following reasons: lack of awareness of the festival; changing age profile of membership membership; lack of funding. Some say they would like to participate in the future.

#### 5.4 Types of events

As was the case in previous years, organisations reported providing a wide variety of events and programmes. These varied according to the type of organisation, the resources they had at their disposal in terms of staffing, expertise, interest and so on. The list below is not comprehensive as not

every organisation responded in detail to the question. However, it gives an idea of the wide variety of events and programmes that are part of the festival.

#### National Cultural Institutions

Events are listed in order of frequency: tours of art galleries and museums; exhibitions of paintings and letters; lectures on aspects of the visual arts and on writing and heritage; art/craft workshops; musical events/workshops. There were special events such as a (week-long) inter-generational dance workshop jointly funded by Age & Opportunity and the Abbey Theatre which took place in DanceHouse in Foley Street, Dublin and the 'Lost Art of Letter-writing' project in the National Library.

#### Regional Arts Institutions/Arts Centres

These included Art and Craft workshops, art exhibitions, drama workshops, musical events/workshops, heritage lectures/workshops, creative writing workshops, plays, film screenings, social events, literary events and storytelling.

#### Public Libraries

The most popular events were visual art exhibitions, art classes, art/craft workshops, drama workshops, literary events, storytelling, computer classes, digital photography, film screenings, and showcases of local talent.

5 It should be noted that Age & Opportunity also gave direct funding of €65,000 and the Dublin Docklands Authority spent €70,000 on the Murmur project.

### Older People's Groups/ Community Groups

Multiple events including: visual art/craft exhibitions/art classes; musical events/workshops; film screenings; heritage lecture/events tours, inter-generational events; tea-dances; gramophone circles; literary events; drama.

### Health-care Facilities

Most held a variety of events including: art classes/visual exhibitions; drama workshops; heritage lectures/events/tour; circus.

### Local Authority Arts Offices

Many held a variety of events involving two or more of the following: visual art exhibitions, art classes; social events; launch of the festival; film screenings; musical events and workshops; dance; literary events. Some local authorities/arts centres have very extensive programmes involving many organisations.

## 5.5 Spending on Bealtaine 2007

The total cash spending on Bealtaine by organisers in 2007 amounted to €285,549 (Table 5.4). This is likely to be an underestimate as 21% of respondents did not answer this question.

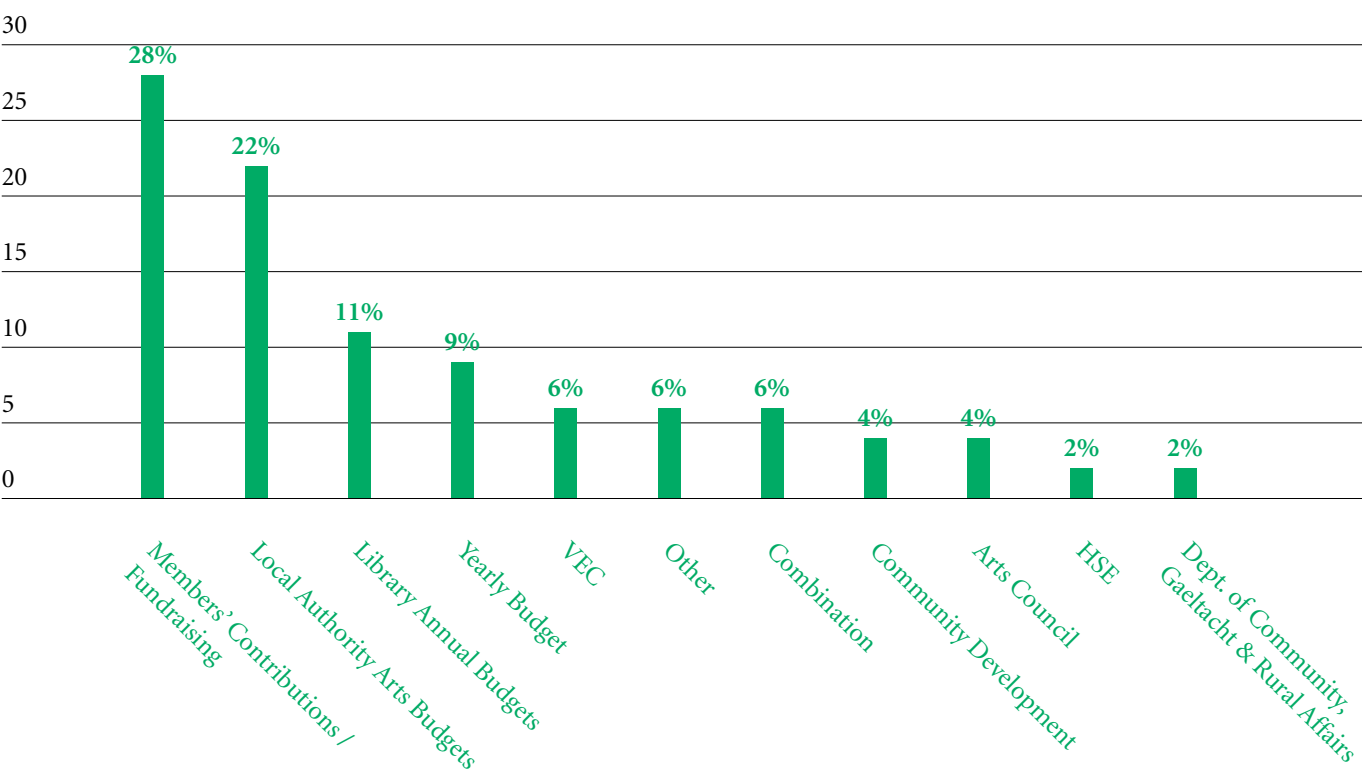
The direct grant to Age & Opportunity by the Arts Council for spending on Bealtaine for 2007 was €70,000. Overall spending, therefore, represents a considerable multiplier on its investment in terms of cash spending alone<sup>5</sup>. The amount of direct cash spent represents only part of the actual cost of providing the events and programmes. Two-thirds of organisations reported using other ('in-kind') resources in addition to cash spent. Overall, the top three cited 'in-kind' resources used were:

- "Staff time in organising, administration and arranging exhibitions" (25%),
- "Staff time/venues and materials provided" (19%),
- "Expenses provided through fundraising/membership donation" (9%).

Within each type of organisation, the 'in-kind' resources used can vary:

- For many older people's organisations/community groups, time was spent fundraising to pay for expenses associated with Bealtaine. Some groups bought their own materials and volunteer labour was used. Some also said their events did not cost much and that their membership contributions covered costs,

Figure 5.1: Sources of Funding



- For the arts centres/regional arts organisation group, the top three ‘in-kind’ resources used were: staff time in organisation, providing venues and materials, and staff time in arranging exhibitions and tutoring,
- For libraries, the main resources used were staff time organising and running classes, providing venues and refreshments and volunteer labour,
- For national cultural institutions, ‘in-kind’ resources were staff time in organising, box-office, advertising, arranging exhibitions, lectures, tours, etc.,

6 The response rate is the percentage of organisations that responded to the question; this includes organisations who entered zero as a response.

**Table 5.4: Cash spending on Bealtaine Festival in 2007**

Type of organisation	Average (€)	Minimum per organisation (€)	Maximum per organisation (€)	Amount spent on Bealtaine in 2007 (€)
National cultural institutions	1,250	150	4,000	8,750
Arts centres / regional arts organisations	1,339	0	6,000	18,750
Local authority arts offices	11,346	500	42,500	147,500
Public Libraries	2,515	0	20,000	47,785
Active retirement / older people's groups / community groups	702	0	8,000	41,415
Health-care facilities: day care centres / hospitals	610	0	8,000	21,349
All organisations	1,942.5	0	42,500	285,549

Note: The response rate is 79% which is 147 out of 187 surveyed answered this question.<sup>6</sup>

- Local authority arts officers used staff time in organising events, providing venues, paid performer fees and artists' residencies,
- The health-care facilities had the most varied range of 'in-kind' resources: staff time, providing materials and venues, volunteers time, fundraising, time spent raising support from the Arts Council/local authority/community development groups, etc.

It appears that while Bealtaine has generated a large amount of direct cash spending on the arts, organisers have also drawn extensively on 'in-kind' resources. There is no reference to commercial sponsorship, although there may be some included under the heading 'fundraising'. Apart from this, many organisations have developed programmes for older people which run throughout the year outside of Bealtaine. For example, while Mayo



County Council spent €42,500 directly on Bealtaine in 2007, they also spent €20,000 on a mentoring programme and €5,000 on other (non-Bealtaine) programmes for older people. This is also true of institutions such as IMMA. While this additional spending is not necessarily directly attributable to the existence of Bealtaine, it is likely that the existence of successful Bealtaine programmes plays at least some part in encouraging the provision of these other programmes for older people.

### Sources of funding

Organisations report drawing on a wide variety of sources to fund Bealtaine events and programmes (Figure 5.1). Fundraising continues to be the major source of finance.

The interviews and questionnaires suggest that people from older people's groups and health-related facilities (particularly day care centres) find the necessity to fundraise burdensome and would like more information/advice from Age & Opportunity on how to obtain funding. It appears that the Active Retirement Associations in particular are reliant on members' contributions and on fundraising. The category 'other' includes funding from individuals or groups connected with the organisation (for example 'Friends of X hospital').

## 5.6 Views of Bealtaine from organisers, artists and facilitators

### Most important aspects of Bealtaine

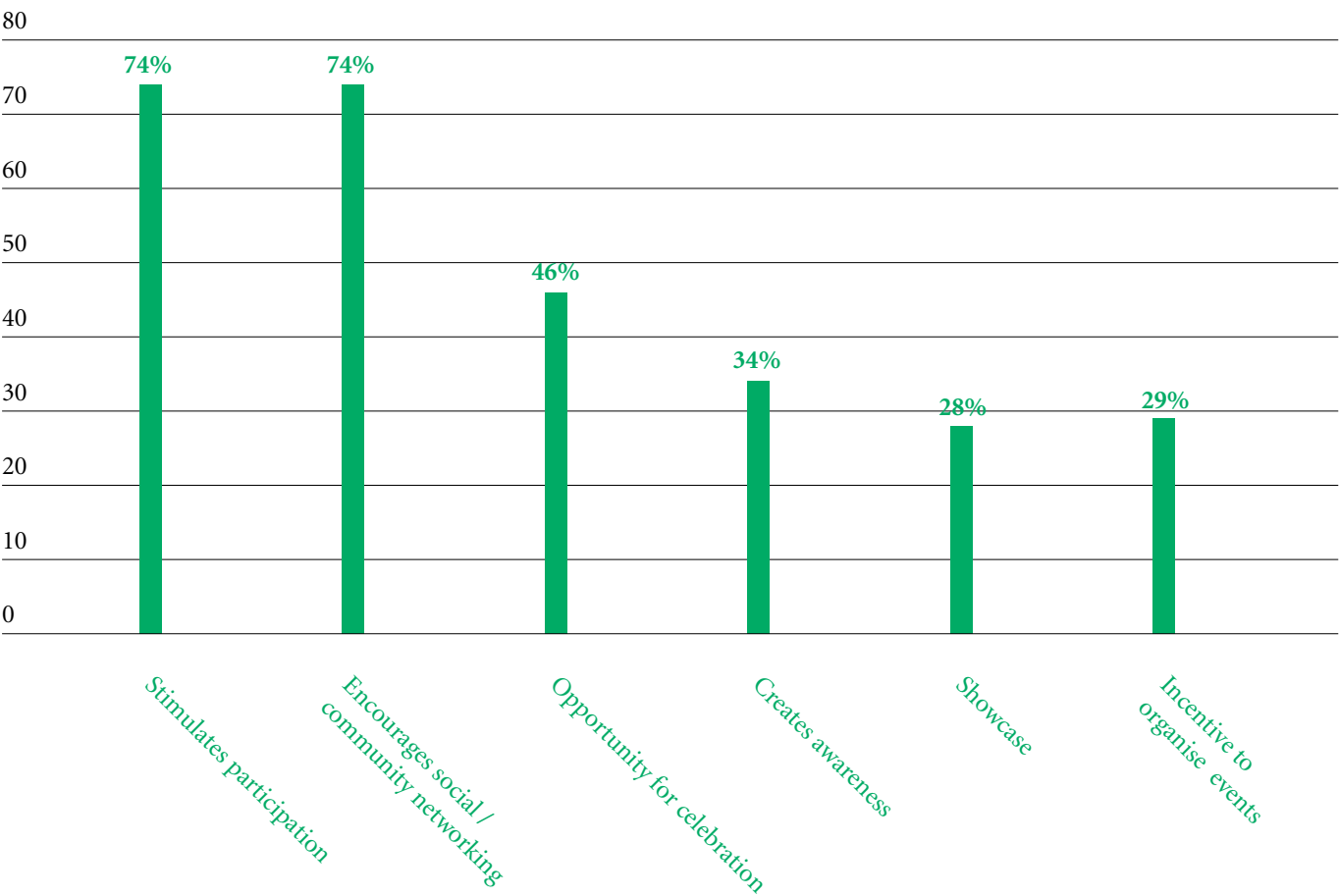
Respondents were asked to state what they considered to be the most important aspects of Bealtaine from the perspective of their organisation (Figure 5.2). They could choose up to four aspects and were asked to list them in order of importance. The list in Figure 5.2 summarises aspects of Bealtaine that organisers included (from 1 to 4) in their list. It represents an aggregation of the characteristics that were cited most often by organisations as important. A number of themes emerged which indicate that some of Bealtaine's aims are being achieved. A large majority (74%) of organisers believe that one of the most important achievements of Bealtaine is that it stimulates older people to participate in the arts. One local authority arts officer states that:

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**“I would have no doubt but that Bealtaine has encouraged people – nationally, I think it certainly has ....actually participating in the arts and when I say ‘participating’, I mean taking part themselves, but also being receivers, being part of the audience .... and going to galleries, or theatre or whatever.”** (Interview with local authority arts officer)

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Figure 5.2: Most important aspects of Bealtaine



Interestingly, a similar proportion identifies the social/community networking generated by Bealtaine as the most useful outcome; this is significant both in terms of quality of life for individual participants and for the building up of social capital in the community. Almost half of the organisers saw the festival as an important opportunity for celebration and excitement for older participants. Interviews confirm that Bealtaine is

valued by participants for this sense of celebration and identification with other older people involved in the arts in Ireland.

**“Its great to know that all the older people are celebrating the same thing, whatever group they’re in.”**  
(Interview with member of visual arts group)

Organisers (mainly libraries and older people's groups) said that the Bealtaine festival creates awareness of the service they provide. Another important aspect identified is that it provides organisers with a chance to showcase work produced during the year. This is further confirmed by a positive response by more than half of respondents to a specific question on showcasing. Finally, organisers (mainly local authority arts officers and librarians) say that the festival provides them with a reminder and incentive to come up with events and programmes for older people every year.

#### Satisfaction with operation of Bealtaine festival

Organisers were asked if they were satisfied with the way Bealtaine is currently being operated and gave the following responses (Figure 5.3).

These findings indicate a very high level of satisfaction among organisers with only 5% of respondents reporting dissatisfaction with the programme. This did not mean that respondents were happy with all aspects of the programme, as is evident from the following suggestions made to improve the operation of Bealtaine:

- Provide funding and/or information about where to get funding,
- Provide more local publicity,
- Provide a longer (year-round) series of events/programmes,
- Age & Opportunity should facilitate the sharing of ideas through regional meetings,
- Have more regional events/festivals as highlights of national programme,
- Provide contacts for/database of skilled facilitators,
- Contact organisers earlier – give more lead-in time,
- Age & Opportunity personnel should be present at regional events.

These issues and suggestions also arose in the interviews with organisers, artists and facilitators, particularly the issue of providing some mechanism for sharing ideas more directly. Some organisers wanted to be contacted earlier to have more time for planning and for funding and some organisers felt that Bealtaine was too Dublin-focussed<sup>7</sup> (Section 6.4 gives a more detailed breakdown of suggested improvements by organisation type).

7 In 2008, two significant events were held in locations outside of Dublin as part of the festival – a Magic Me event in Sligo and a Liz Lerman dance event in Portlaoise.

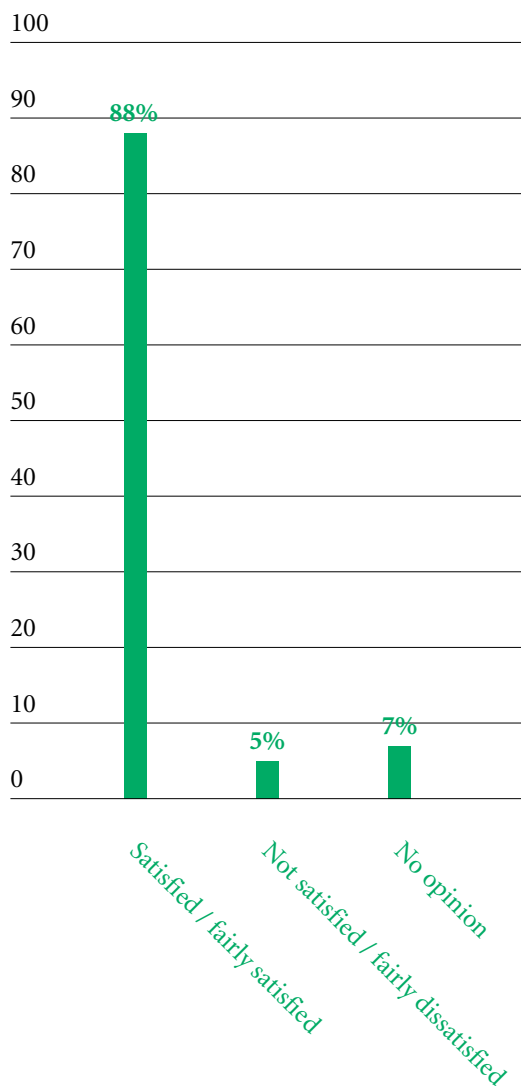
### Artistic quality of Bealtaine events and programmes

One of the aims of Bealtaine is to promote “meaningful participation” in the arts among older people. In order to assess the perceptions of the organisers in this regard, they were asked how they perceived the level of

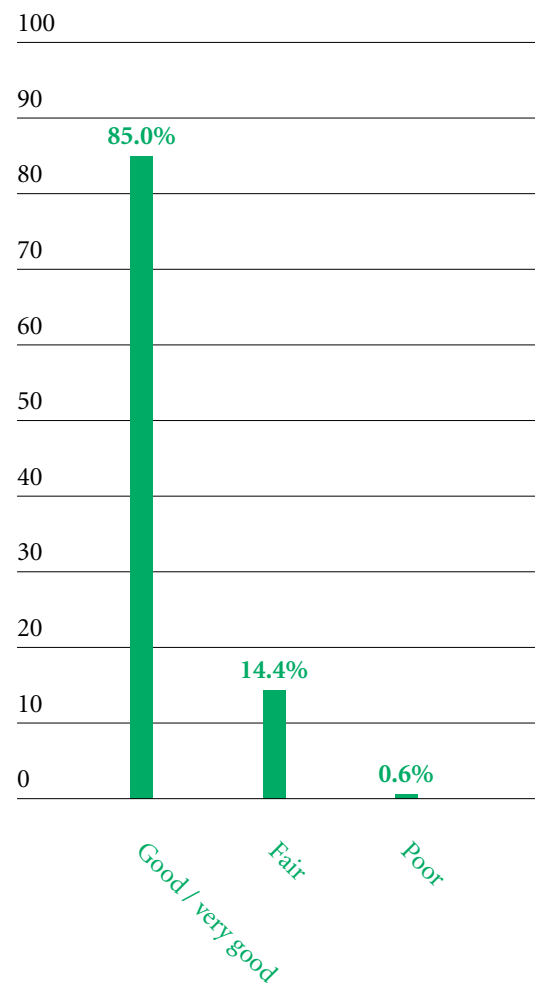
artistic quality of Bealtaine events/ programmes (Figure 5.4).

A large majority said the quality was good or very good; only one organisation said the quality was poor. Organisers who felt that the work produced was of high quality illustrated

**Figure 5.3:** Satisfaction with operation of Bealtaine



**Figure 5.4:** Artistic quality of Bealtaine events & programmes





this by giving examples of being asked to perform plays elsewhere, people asking to buy their work at art exhibitions, or being asked to provide writers' workshops by other groups as a result of performances during the Bealtaine festival. The availability of professional artists/facilitators seemed to matter for quality; a number of organisations said that quality suffered when it was difficult to find professional facilitators in their area. Some organisers said that the quality of events varied, but that the social aspect of the events/programmes was most important.

Some members of the Bealtaine Steering Committee expressed the view that the quality of events was variable. Events organised by some of the national cultural institutions, some of the public libraries, some local authorities, arts centres and arts groups were of very high quality, particularly where there was input from professional facilitators and in very well-resourced organisations. Even where there was not high artistic quality from an objective perspective, however, events were still valued by the participants because they provided social benefits and acted as a stepping stone to deeper engagement. It was generally recognised that many smaller organisations did not have the resources to employ professional facilitators. The need for deeper and more sustained linkages between smaller organisations

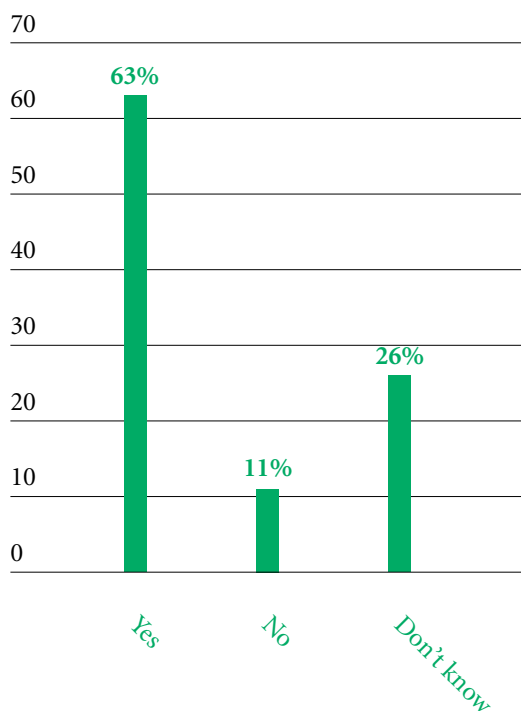
and local authorities and/or libraries was seen as necessary to improve the quality of events/programmes.

Artists and facilitators were asked for their views on the quality of events/programmes. One artist who worked with a visual arts programme for older people connected to IMMA (and who had previously worked with older people in the UK) felt that the quality of the IMMA programmes was extremely high. From her description of the programme, it involved a high degree of consultation with the older participants and explored specific themes from their life experiences. They worked with artists-in-residence and held shows and exhibitions. She also described working in a hospital where great care was taken with the process, allowing trust to be built up slowly. In general, the quality of events seemed to depend on the availability of resources and the degree of understanding among the organisers of the ethos of Age & Opportunity (See also Section 6.5).

### Access to Bealtaine for all sectors of older people

The views of the organisers were sought on the degree to which Bealtaine is perceived by them to be accessible to all older people (Figure 5.5). They were asked if they believed that any groups of older people did not have access to the festival. Their responses were as follows:

**Figure 5.5: Access to Bealtaine for all sectors of Older People**



They identified the following groups as excluded:

- People living in rural areas, and/or people who had no access to transport (27 respondents),
- Older people living alone, not members of groups (16 respondents),
- Housebound people (10 respondents),
- People in nursing homes (5 respondents),
- Local groups who were unaware of Bealtaine due to lack of advertising (3 respondents),
- Men (2 respondents).

Respondents made the following suggestions to promote greater inclusion:

- Provide transport (27 respondents),
- More local advertising (15 respondents),
- More funding (7 respondents),
- Create networking of groups with services/other groups (6 respondents),
- Provide a wider range of accessible activities (5 respondents),
- Provide programmes in post offices (3 respondents),
- Bring activities to nursing homes (1 respondent).

**Table 5.5:** Is Bealtaine successful in promoting positive attitudes to ageing in society?

All Organisations	Successful	Neutral	Unsuccessful	Don't know
Total	72%	12%	4%	12%

**Promoting positive attitudes to ageing**  
Almost three-quarters of organisers believe Bealtaine is successful in promoting positive attitudes to ageing in society (Table 5.5).

Those who see Bealtaine as successful in this regard suggest that the very existence and high visibility of Bealtaine itself promotes positive images of ageing. They commented as follows:

- “Bealtaine has made older people more aware of their skills/talents and led to increased self-esteem” (23%),
- “Visibly high level of participation in Bealtaine” (20%),
- Nationwide focus, publicity, (ambassadors, Billboards) (14%),
- “The month of May is associated with older people now” (10%),
- Inter-generational projects very good for this (4%).

The perception that Bealtaine promotes positive images of ageing was shared by many of the interviewees. The interviewee from the Arts Council

said: “They’ve had a clear impact in promoting artists – in the whole visibility and profile-raising of older artists and their entitlement to participate fully”. The Ambassadors programme and the Billboards project, where the work of older people in residential care was exhibited on billboards across the country, were thought to be particularly effective in this regard. Two of the interviewees, however, felt that ageist attitudes were still very prevalent in Ireland and that more of the type of advocacy that Bealtaine engages in, is required.

**Bealtaine encouraging social cohesion and social capital formation**  
Bealtaine has led to the establishment of new and additional networking, at local, national and international level. A question in the survey assesses the level of additional networking created by Bealtaine between organisations working with and for older people. Most (69%) of organisations said Bealtaine has led to greater links with other groups. Links were made with national institutions with whom they

Amy Conroy of  
Barrabas, with  
Jack Welsh and  
Elly McCrea,  
launch 2006  
(Bealtaine 2006)

**Photo**  
John Ohle



had co-operated in Bealtaine projects and with local and regional agencies and organisations. For example, the National Gallery reports that community groups and older people's networks have joined their programme after hearing about it through Bealtaine. The Irish Museum of Country Life states that local nursing homes have returned to participate in other heritage events at the museum, having first been introduced to it through Bealtaine.

Many links have been formed at local level. Several public libraries report having formed greater links with other organisations – such as Active Retirement Associations and day care

centres, arts officers and/or arts centres that they often invite to their events. Many Active Retirement Associations also said that Bealtaine led to greater links between themselves and other similar organisations both locally and further afield. They attended Bealtaine events such as art exhibitions, poetry readings, launches or inter-generational projects in other counties. Some groups say they have encountered new ideas and established lasting relationships with other groups from these visits. Organisers in hospitals and day care settings formed links with individuals and groups in the community who attended exhibitions and/or helped organise events; they invited attendees



of other day care centres to their events. Local authorities and arts centres reported forming links with many local organisations: day care centres, vocational education committees, schools, libraries and Active Retirement Associations.

It appears that Bealtaine has played a significant role in social capital formation and building links at local level. At national level, it has provided an opportunity for national cultural institutions to attract new audiences of older people, breaking down barriers and making them aware of their services.

The success of Bealtaine has led to international links also, with arts bodies in other countries contacting Age & Opportunity seeking to use the festival as a model for initiating similar programmes in their own countries. For example, the Gwanwyn festival (which celebrates creativity in older people in Wales) began in May 2007 and is co-ordinated by Age Concern, Wales. This event was developed with input from Age & Opportunity's festival team. The national cultural institutions and other Bealtaine partners have also hosted many international artists and organisations over the years and see Bealtaine as providing an important opportunity to share their local experience at an international level.

## Conclusion

There are increasing levels of participation in the Bealtaine festival and the amount of spending it generates has increased over the years. Bealtaine has spread to all counties in Ireland, although it is more deeply embedded in some counties than in others. Embeddedness depends on the availability of an individual who is committed to organising arts for older people and has the autonomy and resources to do so and where local organisations co-operate with each other. Very few of those involved plan to withdraw from the festival; for those who do, it is mainly for reasons outside of the control of Age & Opportunity, e.g. due to changes in the age profile of their membership or lack of resources. There is a very high level of satisfaction with the way in which Bealtaine is run among the organisers. Bealtaine has succeeded in attracting new and participatory audiences to the arts, although some groups remain excluded, especially people who lack transport, those who live alone and are not members of older people's groups, men and those who are housebound. Most respondents believe that Bealtaine has succeeded in promoting positive attitudes to ageing in society and say that it has helped them to form links with other organisations.

Work from West  
Cork Arts Centre's  
painting project on  
Cape Clear Island  
(Bealtaine 2006)

**Photo**  
Phil Pound







Journalists Deirdre Falvey and Mary Maher take part in a public conversation for Bealtaine  
(Bealtaine 2006)

**Photo**  
John Ohle



## 6 Impact of Bealtaine on Arts Policy and Practice

This chapter presents findings on the impact of Bealtaine on arts policy and practice at national and local levels. It draws upon data from Questionnaires 1 and 2, and from interviews.

### 6.1 Arts policy at National Arts/Cultural Institutions

As discussed already, there is no official national policy on older people and the arts in Ireland. There are eleven national cultural institutions that might be expected to provide a lead to other arts organisations in terms of policy and programming. The Education, Community, Outreach Working Group of the Council of National Cultural Institutions has published a policy framework document which includes and specifically refers to older people (Council of National Cultural Institutions 2004). Most of the individual national cultural institutions themselves do not have a written policy for older people (see Appendix 1). In practice, however, several of them have, or have had, extensive programmes for older people, both as part of Bealtaine and outside of it. Because the involvement of these institutions is not under-written by policy, there is

currently no guarantee that it will be sustained into the future.

### 6.2 Arts practice at national level

In terms of arts practice, many of the national cultural institutions have provided programmes for older people, some for many years. IMMA has, for a long time, been providing innovative high-quality programmes in the visual arts involving older people in the local community which have been extended to adults more generally in recent years. This work has been extended geographically through IMMA's national programme. The Abbey Theatre has also been involved in Bealtaine for a number of years and has provided a number of high-profile events and programmes over the years. However, the type of engagement that the Abbey had in the past is unlikely to be sustained into the future due to restructuring and the scaling back of its Education and Outreach Department. Any future involvement is likely to depend on Age & Opportunity (and partners) devising artistic ideas that fit in with the Abbey's mainstream programme rather than the Abbey specifically targeting older people as part of an Education and Outreach approach. The National Gallery has become increasingly involved in providing programmes for older people in recent years such as the 'Drawing

**There is no official national policy on older people and the arts in Ireland**





Charles Dance  
(pictured with Judi  
Dench) launches  
his film 'Ladies in  
Lavender' for Access  
Cinema/Irish Film  
Institute Bealtaine  
Film Tour  
(Bealtaine 2007)

**Table 6.1:** Impact of Bealtaine on profile of older people in national arts programmes

Organisers	Strong / very strong impact	Neutral impact	Weak / very weak impact	Don't know
Percentage	30%	15%	16%	39%

Day’. The Irish Film Institute (IFI) has also been extensively involved from the beginning with Bealtaine and (with Access Cinema) had a film tour in 32 venues around the country. It runs a very popular film club for older people called the ‘Wild Strawberries Club’ which screens a film once a month<sup>8</sup>. The IFI also runs a film festival in May as part of Bealtaine. Appendix 1 sets out some of the programmes of the national cultural institutions in 2007.

Just under a third of organisers felt that Bealtaine had a strong impact on arts practice at a national level (Table 6.1), citing events in specific national cultural institutions that involve older people (IMMA, Billboards, National Gallery, Irish Film Institute’s national programme). Others say that Bealtaine, by its very existence, has increased the profile of older people in the arts generally. Most of respondents answered “don’t know”. It appears that

many organisers (mainly those from older people’s groups or community groups, libraries and health institutions and mainly those from rural areas) are unaware of whether older people have a profile in national arts programmes or not. Those who thought there was a weak or neutral impact gave the following explanations:

“We live outside Dublin and national events would not apply to us. Rural people don’t have access to Dublin events.”  
(Quote from questionnaire)

Some suggested that there should be a stronger regional programme of events. One issue that emerged from these responses is that, for many organisers living in rural areas (particularly those in Active Retirement Associations), Bealtaine is perceived as a Dublin festival and they do not feel they have a connection with national events.

8     This event has become so popular that, by 2007, there were two screenings of the same film per month.

### 6.3 Impact on local arts policy and practice

#### Local policy

Most local authorities have an Arts Plan which sets out their aims and objectives for the duration of the plan. They also have action plans and initiatives to implement their aims. All local authorities have information about the arts in their area. Twenty (60%) of the local authorities either mention “older people” or “age” specifically in their Arts Plans, or say that they intend to increase access for older people as a target group. Three others state that they wish to provide increased access to the arts to all sectors of the community, but do not specifically mention older people. Eleven mention neither older people nor social inclusion. Only one-quarter of local authorities either mention Bealtaine directly on their websites or provide a link to Bealtaine. As is the case with the national cultural institutions, there is a degree of awareness of the needs and potential for older people and the arts at local level, but there is room for improvement. In the context of limited resources, the implications of the lack of a written national policy for older people and the arts may well be that the needs of older people take less priority at local authority level. The existence of a policy for young people means there are youth and community arts officers in many

counties. The development of written policy specifically for older people at both national and local authority level is desirable.

#### Local practice

Nine local authorities have an extensive programme of events for Bealtaine (ranging from 10 to 56 events); a further eleven have a medium-sized programme (between 5 and 10 events); five have either very small programmes or simply fund one or more Active Retirement Associations to provide their own events/programmes; the remaining nine either have no programme, or it is impossible to say whether they have one or not. In general, the trend has been for a steady increase in involvement of local authorities over the years, which suggests that Bealtaine is very well-embedded in some local authorities around the country. It is not always local authority arts offices who organise extensive programmes at local level. In some areas, it is arts centres and/or libraries who are the main co-ordinators of the programme for an area. In other areas, a number of these organisations work together. Evidence from the questionnaire to organisers suggests that Bealtaine has had a positive impact on the profile of older people in local arts programmes (Table 6.2). Over half of respondents (55%) think Bealtaine has had a strong/very strong impact on increasing the

**Table 6.2:** Impact of Bealtaine on profile of older people in local arts programmes

Organisers	Strong / very strong impact	Neutral impact	Weak / very weak impact	Don't know
Percentage	55%	12%	10%	23%

profile of older people in local arts programmes. Most of these said that the local arts office and library programmes involve a wide variety of courses and activities and that older people are visibly involved in a meaningful way in such programmes. For some local authorities, Bealtaine has become a regular feature of their programming. As one arts officer put it:

**“It is now a fixed feature of our annual programming, we would prioritise around it and work around it. May is given over to Bealtaine every year.”** (Interview with local authority arts officer)

Clearly, Bealtaine has had a major impact in some local authorities.

Less than a quarter of respondents (23%) said that they did not know; many of these were organisers of once-off events such as cinema screenings or events in day care centres and were not aware of other

events in their area. Ten per cent of respondents felt that the impact was weak or very weak. They said events need to be publicised more as some older people’s groups are not aware of them. This is perhaps because, in some counties, there is no central Bealtaine programme or co-ordinator (see Section 5.3).

**Factors associated with successful programmes**

The success of Bealtaine in some areas appears to be due to a combination of factors: motivated individuals in key positions with an interest in providing arts programmes for older people; good co-operation between local organisations; adequate resources and autonomy on the part of the arts officer/organiser (data from interviews with organisers, members of Age & Opportunity steering committee). While there have been very innovative and comprehensive programmes provided over the years in certain counties, there is no guarantee that these will be sustained without policy to underpin them.



**Table 6.3: Impact of Bealtaine as a stimulator of events**

Organisers	Yes	No	Don't know
<b>Total</b>	79%	15%	6%

#### Direct impact of Bealtaine as stimulator of arts events

The previous sections have established that there is a high level of provision and a high profile of older people in the arts at national and local level.

The important question is whether Bealtaine stimulated organisations to provide events that would otherwise not have taken place (Table 6.3). A very high proportion (79%) of those who responded (across most organisation types) said that Bealtaine did stimulate them to initiate events for and with older people that they would not otherwise have provided. The only exceptions to this were the national cultural institutions and arts centres where the proportions were slightly lower (around two-thirds). This indicates that Bealtaine has had a very direct tangible impact on the practice of all types of organisers. The types of events stimulated by Bealtaine were: collaborative events with other groups; social gatherings, e.g. inter-generational groups may present dramas together; participatory events which older people

may not have tried before, e.g. writers' workshops and drama workshops; art exhibitions and literary events.

Agencies and organisations learned from each other's successes and there was a good deal of replication of successful projects. Two-fifths (40%) of organisers say that they were inspired to organise similar events, either within or outside Bealtaine, from looking at and learning from the experiences of others. Of the 65 organisations who said they had been inspired to organise events and who gave further details:

- 32% said that they had been inspired by ideas they had come across in the Bealtaine programme (they did not specify what these were),
- 19% had been inspired to organise visual art classes and/or exhibitions,
- 39% had organised 'other' events including Billboards, creative photography, writing workshops and drama workshops,
- 5% had organised inter-generational projects,
- 5% not specified.

Interviews with facilitators and artists support these findings, with the dance workshops and the IMMA programme specifically mentioned by them as being inspirational.

#### 6.4 Impact of Bealtaine festival according to organisation type

The information in this section comes mainly from Questionnaire 1 together with some additional information from interviews with organisers.

##### National Cultural Institutions

All of the national cultural institutions (NCIs) who responded to the question on involvement had participated in Bealtaine in 2007. Three-quarters (75%) reported having ongoing annual Bealtaine events. The National Library became involved for the first time in 2007. All of the organisations are funded from their own budgets - most from Education and Outreach budgets and one from their Marketing/Promotion budget. Almost two-thirds (63%) intend to continue participating in Bealtaine; the other third said that they were unsure due to cutbacks, restructuring or staff changes, while one stated that they may not continue due to closure of the building for refurbishment.

The most useful aspects of Bealtaine cited by the national cultural institutions were as follows (listed in order of frequency):

- Stimulates older people to participate in the arts,
- Creates an awareness of our service/ programmes, creates new audience,
- Creates an incentive for us to organise events specifically for older people,
- Provides publicity and annual theme,
- Gives opportunity to interact and collaborate with other organisations,
- Allows dialogue and discourse across the generations,
- Creates collective moment of celebration.

Half of the NCIs stated that the festival fostered greater links between themselves and the wider community. Three of the NCIs said Bealtaine gives them an opportunity to showcase work produced in more long-term programmes. Most NCIs felt that Bealtaine had a strong impact on the profile of older people in national arts programmes through the publicity it generates. Similarly, the majority felt that Bealtaine was successful in promoting positive attitudes about ageing, particularly through inter-generational projects. One respondent said that “Bealtaine promoted ageing itself as being positive and had given a

Children from  
Cornanool National  
School during an  
intergenerational  
workshop at  
The Linenhall  
Arts Centre  
(Bealtaine 2008)



voice to older people”. Two NCIs did not know whether or not Bealtaine was successful (one felt research was needed to establish this) and one felt it had no impact, saying that they were not sure if Irish society as a whole was aware of Bealtaine. Finally, two of the NCIs felt Bealtaine had enabled dialogue across generations about the arts. Three-quarters of NCIs were satisfied with the operation of the festival in general although one organisation perceived that they had a problem with getting their event advertised in the Bealtaine programme.

One organisation (the Abbey Theatre) wanted a longer lead-in time (perhaps a few years) to organise events with Bealtaine and would be interested in future collaboration if Age & Opportunity came up with an exciting

artistic concept (such as Dance Exchange). The Abbey is restructuring its own organisation and moving away from having a large Education and Outreach Department. Future links between Bealtaine and the Abbey are more likely to be part of mainstream programming rather than the Abbey developing a specific set of events for older people. The Director said that Bealtaine programmes such as Dance Exchange and an interview he conducted with an older mentor had been important for his personal development and that it would probably bear fruit in the future. This change in policy in the Abbey suggests that Age & Opportunity may need to focus on supporting Bealtaine partners to become part of mainstream programming in the Abbey as well as coming up with ideas for its own central

programme. IMMA continues to have a strong programme and the National Gallery is keen to engage older people in their programmes as part of lifelong learning so this relationship might be strengthened. The National Library is also interested in engaging more with older people.

### Arts Officers

Local authority arts officers who currently participate in Bealtaine listed the following as the most useful aspects of the festival from their perspective (listed in order of frequency):

- Provides a national profile/focus on older people,
- Promotes social inclusiveness,
- Encourages older people to be involved in creative activities,
- Provides a stimulus to initiate programmes for older people every year,
- Fosters links with local organisations.

Five arts officers who were not actively involved in the Bealtaine festival in 2007 gave the following reasons for not participating:

### Lack of staff

Four of the local authority arts officers said that they were constrained by lack of staff. For example, one local authority had only one arts officer

and one administrator and had to organise a very busy countywide arts programme catering for all age groups each year. They had a favourable view of Bealtaine, but simply did not have the staff to co-ordinate with older people's groups. They indicated that they would be willing to provide grants to older people's groups under their awards scheme or to provide programmes/ events in partnership with other organisations if the latter could deal with the administration. One local authority had previously been involved and found it very demanding in terms of human resources and wanted the Active Retirement Associations to take an active role in organising their own programmes which the arts officer would be prepared to support with funding and information.

### Lack of funding

Some local authorities had quite a small overall budget for arts programming and said this was a constraint for them. They could not keep up with the demands of Active Retirement Associations for funding for creative programmes.

### Space

Space was a problem for some local authorities and they could not always meet the very high demand for exhibition space.



### Other priorities

One local authority had a focus on youth since their demographics meant they had a large proportion of young people. Another was prioritising the provision of a new arts centre and they had cut back on their entire community programme.

Arts officers not currently involved in Bealtaine said that they would like the following supports to encourage participation:

- Matching funding from the HSE,
- Own funding for Active Retirement Associations,
- Liaison with Active Retirement Associations (perhaps through national organisations such as Active Retirement Ireland),
- Regional meetings organised by Age & Opportunity to share ideas,
- Timing – earlier contact to give them more time to contact groups.

### Arts Centres/Regional Arts Organisations

All of those who responded participated in the Bealtaine festival in 2007 and most (81%) have an ongoing annual event programme and are likely to participate in future (86%). Most of their funding comes from arts offices (29%) and/or the Arts Council (36%). Those who were unsure about continuing with the festival said this

was due to uncertainty about the availability of funding and/or staff. For arts centres, the most useful aspects of Bealtaine, in order of importance, are:

- encouragement of social/community networking,
- stimulation of older people to participate in the arts,
- creation of an awareness of our service,
- provision of a national profile/focus on older people,
- provision of an opportunity for enjoyment/celebration.

Most (88%) were satisfied/fairly satisfied with the operation of the festival.

This group (arts centres) wanted the following supports from Age & Opportunity:

- More funding/information on sources of funding,
- Increased local publicity,
- More ideas for events,
- Information/contact numbers for facilitators/artists.

They suggested that greater participation for older people currently not involved could be facilitated by:

- Providing transport in rural areas and for people with poor mobility,
- Providing a wider range of accessible activities,
- Advertising locally,
- More funding.

Arts centres can and do play a key role in developing programmes for older people for Bealtaine and throughout the year. One arts centre which has a very active programme attributes this to a number of factors: the involvement of a number of key personalities/ organisations in the area – hospitals, day care centres, the County Council, the vocational education committees, the library service, older people's groups; the availability of a dedicated community and outreach officer; interest on the part of the Director who has experience of and commitment to developing programmes for older people; the central location of the arts centre. The presence of these elements together enables a vibrant and sustained Bealtaine programme.

### Libraries

Some libraries are very involved in Bealtaine. All of the libraries who responded (22) had participated in the festival in 2007. All have an ongoing annual Bealtaine event or programme. Twelve of the libraries have extensive Bealtaine programmes. For example, Cork County Libraries reported holding

140 events in 28 libraries for the festival in 2007. Most of the funding that the libraries use for events (amounts varying from zero to €20,000) comes from either arts offices or from their own library budget.

The aspects of Bealtaine that library organisers cited as most useful (listed in order of frequency) were:

- Stimulates older people to participate in the arts,
- Creates an awareness of our service,
- Generates national publicity for festival,
- Encourages social/community networking,
- Creates awareness of the abilities of older people,
- Stimulates us to organise programmes for older people every year.

All of the libraries said that they were satisfied/fairly satisfied with the festival. Suggestions for improvement were as follows:

- Database/contact numbers for facilitators/artists who work with older people,
- Increased local and national publicity/provide programmes in the post offices,
- More funding/information on sources of funding,

- More information/forum on ideas for events,
- Longer year round festival.

Greater participation in Bealtaine events in the library could be encouraged among older people by:

- Meeting transport needs of older people, especially those with poor mobility and/or those living in rural areas,
- Advertising locally, by distributing programmes in post offices,
- Fostering greater links with day care centres and nursing homes. Age & Opportunity could liaise with the Health Service Executive at national level and with national organisations representing older people.

Libraries who did not participate gave reasons such as lack of space and lack of funding and said that they would like Bealtaine to be more inclusive. Libraries are involved in providing health and education classes and would like these to be included in Bealtaine. Libraries have a policy on social inclusion and older people would fit into this remit.

In general, libraries have the potential to become more involved with Bealtaine, given their interest in social inclusion and Bealtaine's obvious contribution towards inclusion. In 2007, public libraries, together with the National

Library, held a national event "The Lost Art of Letter-writing" that all libraries could become involved in. This type of event could be organised in the future to give national cohesion and inspiration for library involvement. The library representative on the steering committee identified two major difficulties for libraries in becoming involved as follows: libraries have a very broad remit of which the arts forms only one part; and resources are limited. There is potential, however, for Bealtaine to develop the relationship with the libraries further than currently exists.

### Health-care facilities

With the exception of one, all of the health-care facilities who responded participated in Bealtaine in 2007. Most (82%) had an ongoing annual event and all but one planned to participate in future. Most of the funding is reported to have come from members' contributions/fundraising, local authority arts offices and the HSE. The one group who said that they may not continue to be part of the festival said this was due to cutbacks in their resources. Most (91%) health-care facilities stated that they were either fairly satisfied/satisfied with the operation of Bealtaine.

Health-care facilities reported the following (listed in order of frequency)

to be the most useful aspects:

- Stimulates older people to participate in the arts,
- Encourages social/community networking,
- Provides an opportunity for celebration/enjoyment,
- Gives national focus/creates awareness of the abilities of older people,
- Provides a showcase for ongoing work,
- Creates awareness of our service,
- Develops self-esteem/confidence.

Approximately two-thirds (63%) believed that there were categories of older people who do not have access to the festival, including housebound people, people with mental frailty and people not involved in community groups. In order to increase participation in the festival, transport is needed to bring some older people to events.

Suggestions to improve the festival included:

- More funding,
- Involving day care centres and nursing homes more,
- Increased local publicity,
- More support from HSE.

For non-participants contacted, the main barriers to participation were lack of funding from the HSE and lack of information on where to get funding. Two day care centres were aware of the festival, wanted to be involved, and wanted information from Age & Opportunity regarding funding opportunities. Another non-participant wanted to be contacted earlier by Age & Opportunity so that they could apply for funding. One day care centre knew very little about Bealtaine, but wanted information, while another did not participate in 2007 because of staff changes.

### Older people's groups/ community groups

Most (91%) of the older people's groups who responded had participated in Bealtaine 2007. Approximately three-quarters have an ongoing Bealtaine event. Half of the funding for the Bealtaine events for these groups came from members' contributions and/or fundraising. Other sources of funding for events included local authority arts offices, community development/partnership groups, vocational education committees, the HSE and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.



The main reason why some older people's groups may not continue to be involved is due to lack of funding. Others reported that there was lack of interest and energy for the organisational work involved due to the fact the age profile of their membership was becoming older.

- Gives a showcase for ongoing work,
- Having festival in May creates an incentive to organise events,
- Creates an awareness of our existence.

Over 86% said they were either satisfied/fairly satisfied with the festival.

The most useful aspects of Bealtaine, as reported by older people's groups, are as follows (listed in order of frequency):

- Encourages social and community networking,
- Stimulates older people to participate in the arts,
- Provides an opportunity for enjoyment/celebration,

Suggestions made to improve the festival from their perspective included the provision of designated funding, more information on where/how to get funding and the provision of a longer year-round festival. Some would like to have their event publicised in the programme. They also suggested that they would like Age & Opportunity to facilitate the sharing of ideas and

Bealtaine Artists in Residence for Mayo County Council Arts Office, John Fox and Sue Gill lead the 'New Ground' project, which involved working with Mayo Artsquad, local artists, the arts community, disability groups and the wider community

Bealtaine 2008

**Photo**

Dominic Campbell



provide contact numbers for artists/facilitators. Some rural groups see Bealtaine as a Dublin festival with little relevance to them.

Two-thirds of groups believe that there are categories of older people who are not currently involved in Bealtaine. These include people with no transport, especially those living in rural areas, and those with poor mobility; people who are not involved in Active Age groups who may not be aware such a festival exists; those unable to leave their home due to illness and those who are in care. Suggestions to increase participation included: providing transport and bringing activities to nursing homes/day care centres; providing more funding and more local publicity on local radio/post offices.

Four groups who did not participate in the festival in 2007 were contacted to see why they had not participated. Two of them had not heard of the festival while the remaining two responded that their members were growing too old and lacking in the energy required for organising.

### 6.5 Impact of Bealtaine on practice of organisers/artists/facilitators

Interviews with facilitators of programmes (artists, writers, drama and dance facilitators) and workshops revealed that Bealtaine had impacted on themselves personally and on their practice in various ways. For example, some facilitators said they had always been interested in working with older people and had done so prior to Bealtaine. Others said that working on Bealtaine-related programmes had a major impact on their own work and on their practice as facilitators.

Some of the artists commented on the impact that working on Bealtaine-related programmes had on their personal attitude towards older people, generally making them more aware of the diversity that exists among older people and of their potential for creativity. The following quote from a drama facilitator illustrates this:

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**“Before I worked with older people, I never thought it could be that much fun... The thing I learned most is how willing older people are to just have fun.... some of the most fun workshops I have ever done have been with older people... they enjoy stories and characters and creating new ideas....**

It makes you reflect on the fact that you think of older people as all being the same and obviously they are no more the same than any other group in society. It's reassuring to think that you can still be sort of creative and feisty and funny at 96." (Interview with drama facilitator on inter-generational project)

Some said that it provides them with the impetus to devise innovative programmes every year.

"The existence of the festival creates expectations and these expectations increase every year." (Interview with visual artist working with older people in day care centres and IMMA)

Some also valued the fact that it provided a collective moment of celebration (according to an interview with an organiser from a national cultural institution). A drama facilitator emphasises the creative, stimulating and liberating effect that having a yearly festival gives to her work with older participants:

"Because Bealtaine is a one-off event, older people are more willing to get involved in slightly more adventurous activities than they might normally do because it is seen as ...a time for older people... to really try something new and what I like about Bealtaine is, because it's a yearly event, people... generally become a little bit more creative because they're trying to do something better than last year. It tends to be more exciting than the kind of thing people tend to traditionally associate with older people and it tends to be a bit more experimental.... because there's a... little air of festival and excitement about it." (Interview with facilitator of inter-generational drama project)

Some facilitators said that the main benefit they perceived was the fact that Bealtaine provided a platform to publicise the work they and older participants were doing.

One artist stressed the role a festival plays in bringing the work of older participants into the public domain:

**“The fact that Bealtaine is a national festival is significant. It’s there for a month a year – it’s good to have a goal to work towards so that older people are involved in the whole process from expressing themselves creatively to actually seeing their work exhibited as part of a high-profile national event.”**

(Interview with visual artist – facilitator of programmes in day care centre and IMMA)

This artist had worked previously in the UK on similar programmes that did not have a national festival attached to them and felt that the public sharing of the work was important “because otherwise this type of work can just ‘quietly disappear’ if not connected to something larger than itself”.

She said of her experiences with Bealtaine:

**“Bealtaine provided a pivotal point – a deadline to use for planning and a national event that everyone could be part of.”** (Interview with facilitator of visual arts programmes in day care centre and IMMA)

She said she would now be more inclined to include older artists in a programme and that her work with older artists would influence her teaching of younger students and her forthcoming work on inter-generational projects. A visual artist who works in care settings said she is regularly inspired by ideas in the Bealtaine programme and that the networking and contact Bealtaine provides is very important. A dance facilitator who had worked abroad and is now involved (with others) in setting up a network of facilitators who work in the area of older people and dance in Ireland said that:

**“Bealtaine inspires and validates the work we’re doing. Dance is an aspect of the arts that’s new here in Ireland.”** (Interview with dance facilitator working with older participants and professional dance group in the community)

She commented that the personal encouragement provided by the Artistic Director had been important in endorsing and providing a platform for both her work and that of other dance facilitators:

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**“We’re doing a show as part of the Bealtaine festival in 2008. It helps focus attention on us. We welcomed the connection. It helps spread the news of what we’re doing among people on the ground.” (Interview with facilitator of dance programme)**

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Facilitators and artists believe that the effort and care devoted to ensuring that participants’ experience of the programme is empowering and potentially transformative is a very positive element of the professionally-led programmes. An artist who facilitated a programme in a hospital describes the initial reluctance and lack of confidence of some of the participants and how this was overcome by paying attention to process and gradually promoting empowerment. She outlines the care taken to build up the trust of the participants who had mainly negative experiences and perceptions of art in the past:

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**“Many people had left school at fourteen or earlier and had bad memories of being beaten at school for having a blot on their copy-book.... At first, we got them to sketch a memory. The only people who saw those sketches were myself and the artists and the staff. Paying attention to the process allowed the older people to build up trust in us. The pieces of artwork generally represented something important in their lives. Examples were working in the bog or at the hay, washing clothes or other kinds of work or play. We subsequently added pieces of text that the older people dictated relating to their pieces of work .... it contributed enormously to the richness of the exhibition and meant a lot to the artists and the community... By the end of the programme, they were very proud of what they had done and wanted to do more.” (Interview with visual artist, facilitator of programme in day care centre)**

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This initial reluctance to participate on the part of many of the participants was mentioned by several facilitators and was attributed by them to negative experiences and lack of exposure to the arts in participants’ formative years.



The work of drama facilitators interviewed also showed a concern for process and engagement of participants:

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“...it’s non-performance drama in that we are not working towards an end product as such.... We use drama as a way to create stories and characters and develop ideas, but it’s not about writing a play, putting on a play and learning lines.... We would improvise scenes and they’d [participants] be fantastic at improvising scenes and making up characters and stories that they just do spontaneously...”  
(Interview with drama facilitator on inter-generational project)

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Facilitators also felt that the care taken in ensuring that exhibitions and shows are executed to the highest professional standards demonstrates to older participants that their work is valuable and appreciated.

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“We got somebody from a gallery in X who has expertise in hanging art works to arrange the pieces of art in the gallery for exhibition. They were hung beautifully.” (Interview with visual artist, facilitator of programme in day care centre)

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They see this as an important feature of Bealtaine. One artist says an important achievement of the festival is:

“The awareness that older people can be creative and it’s important. It gets away from the notion of just taking classes in crafts, etc. Professional artists come in. Older people see how their work is valued with the festival launch, the time and the attention paid” (Interview with visual artist working on inter-generational project)

From the perspective of artists involved with Bealtaine, it appears that in the programmes they are involved with, they believe that the festival encourages a level of high quality, meaningful, potentially transformative participation in the arts. This is achieved through drawing on the experiences of participants, treating both themselves and their work with respect and being mindful of any barriers to be overcome.

Facilitators recommended that sustained funding be provided for these programmes and that they need to be continued and become embedded in the communities. They suggested that there is a need for more trained local facilitators. Others suggested that similar programmes should be made available more broadly across communities and that they be available all year.

One of the 'The Glen Road' sessions in full swing in Letterkenny, Donegal

Bealtaine 2008

**Photo**  
Simon Houston



Several artists felt that the quality and potential of inter-generational work was particularly energising for participants and that more of these programmes should be developed.

people. Overall, artists and facilitators see Bealtaine as important in providing a vehicle for showcasing and validating their work with older people and for highlighting the potential contribution of older people to the arts in Ireland.

### **Conclusion**

Bealtaine has a significant impact on arts policy and practice for older people in Ireland. It encourages participation in the arts among older people and provides opportunities for a shared artistic understanding of older people's issues. Bealtaine creates an awareness of the importance of creative activity in the lives of older people. It also provides an opportunity for enjoyment and celebration of the arts among older



Some of the seventy-strong 'Story Train', a carriage of storytellers and performers travelling, and performing, from Cork to Dublin (Bealtaine 1996)





## 7 Impact of Bealtaine on Participants

This chapter presents the views of organisers, facilitators and participants on the impact of Bealtaine on older participants in events/programmes. This data is drawn from Questionnaires 1 and 2 and from personal interviews. Previous research suggests that interventions that promote active social contact and encourage creativity are likely to positively affect health and well-being (Greaves 2006). The findings presented below suggest that Bealtaine has also enriched the lives of participants socially, has been transformative in terms of self-expression and personal development, has helped to combat social isolation and has enhanced psychological well-being.

### 7.1 Impact of Bealtaine on self-expression

A high proportion of organisers (68%) agreed that Bealtaine has a strong impact on facilitating self-expression among older people (Figure 7.1). Most participants (87%) agreed with the statement that participating in

Bealtaine programmes had enabled them to express themselves more easily. Some respondents said Bealtaine programmes in general facilitate self-expression while some specifically mention performance, dance workshops, visual art workshops and creative writing workshops. The main effects mentioned were that people discovered talents of which they had been unaware, and that they were able to nurture these talents in a safe environment.

Interviews with participants give further insight into the impact of Bealtaine on self-expression. A participant in a writers' group describes her experience in the group as being very empowering and giving her the confidence to write, to accept constructive criticism and to participate in other literature classes. A member of an art group who has participated in programmes organised by the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) for many years says that the experience has made him better able to express himself not only artistically but verbally, as a result of the discussions about art that form an integral part of the IMMA programmes<sup>9</sup>.

9 It should be noted that this group participated in IMMA's Education and Community programme prior to Bealtaine and, therefore, the outcomes may only be partly attributed to the festival. However, the group participates regularly in Bealtaine and at least some of the impetus of the group may be attributed to the festival.





‘Portraits in Pastel’  
workshop with  
John Philip Murray  
at Model Farm  
Road Library  
organised by Cork  
County Libraries  
and Arts Services  
(Bealtaine 2004)

**Photo**  
Cork County  
Libraries and  
Arts Services

**“I have to say I have found my voice since joining this group.”**

(Interview with member of writers’ group)

**“I think you look at the area around you differently as well... you look at it with an artist’s eye. You’re all the time saying, ‘I’d love to paint this or sketch that’”. (Interview with participant in inter-generational project)**

**“You’re used to talking and discussing within a group so it takes away the reservations that were there before.” (Interview with participant in visual arts programme)**

While these impacts appear to be most likely to take place in ongoing programmes (usually) run by professional facilitators, similar effects were discernible from ‘taster sessions’ provided by local authority arts officers and in a peer-led writers’ group.

These sessions often act as an introduction to the arts for people, enabling them to express themselves artistically for the first time, and this may lead them to seek out more ongoing involvement (see Section 7.2).

## 7.2 Impact of Bealtaine on personal development

A large proportion of organisers (59%) perceived the impact on personal development to be strong or very strong (Figure 7.1). They said participants discover hidden talents, that participation and learning new skills boosts participants’ confidence; attending classes increases their independence and opens them up to lifelong learning. Dancing, drama and visual art programmes were specifically mentioned as encouraging personal development.

A substantially higher proportion (89%) of participants agreed that participation in Bealtaine encouraged their personal development in terms of enhanced learning and organisational skills. One person explained that “becoming part of a craft can help you develop your ideas”, while another said that “being part of the committee organising Bealtaine events helped us form ideas as a group, and I enjoyed being part of the organisation committee”.

Another member said that they took part in discussions after an event. The interviews reveal that some participants gain confidence in their skills and go on to develop further, artistically and personally. One man who attended

Poet Dannie Abse, with Joan Mercer and Orla Moloney, in Galway for the International Writers' Residency, in partnership with Poetry Ireland, supported by NUI Galway and the Western Writers Centre (Bealtaine 2003)



a Bealtaine 'taster session' writers' workshop said he had written before but had always been reluctant to acknowledge this in public:

**"You would be kind of ashamed to say you were writing. I have heard this from other people who say the same."** (Interview with participant in writers' workshop)

After attending the workshop and receiving positive feedback on his writing both from the facilitator and from other participants, he gained the confidence to submit his work for a competition and joined a year-round writers' group; for this participant, Bealtaine was important in terms of his development, both personally and as a writer.

A participant in a long-term visual arts programme that regularly participates in Bealtaine highlights the way in which he has developed in terms of learning and becoming more open-minded about appreciating different art forms:

**"You learn a lot because, when I started, I knew practically nothing about modern art and it was a new subject to me....That's one thing that's good in art, it gives you an open mind, that you take a thing in and you don't say 'No' straight away, you look and examine."**  
(Interview with participant in visual arts programme)

A care-worker in a hospital described what he saw as a profound change in the residents as a result of the Bealtaine programme. They changed from being passive recipients of provided entertainment to setting the agenda for and participating in the Bealtaine programme. Their awareness of available activities in the community outside the hospital has grown; they now value their own creative potential and their knowledge of traditions. As a result, their interaction with the staff has changed and is now predicated more on the basis of equality; they now feel empowered to initiate and demand specific types of events for themselves.

### 7.3 Encouraging critical thinking among participants

The question of whether Bealtaine encourages critical thinking was endorsed by fewer of the organisers with only 31% perceiving a strong impact (Figure 7.1). Organisers mention the following as examples of the development of critical thinking:

- Improves skills – participants realise they have something to offer or are encouraged to discuss art,
- Encourages communication of participants' opinions and suggestions,
- Encourages participants to engage with constructive criticism.

Almost one-third said it had a neutral or weak effect; this depended on the nature and duration of the programme and the type of facilitation. They explained that one-off events with no continuity may have little effect on critical thinking.

A majority of participants (70%) agreed that participating in Bealtaine has encouraged them to think critically about the arts. More than a quarter have no opinion on this, probably because some of the events would not lend themselves to developing a critical perspective. Interviews with participants suggest that being part of in-depth professionally-led programmes

encouraged the development of a critical perspective. One participant in a weekly dance club said that her perspective on dance is different to the way she had seen it prior to participating. She now looks at how a dance piece is choreographed and constructed whereas previously, she did not engage in this kind of critical appraisal as she had never had the opportunity to be involved in this way before. She had gained this perspective in a relatively short period of time, having attended a Liz Lerman workshop and subsequently attended a weekly dance club run by a professional facilitator who also attended a dance workshop for facilitators.

A participant in a long-running visual arts programme explains how members of his group engage in developing a critical perspective:

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**“We go around the gallery for each exhibition and we have a chat about it and whether we like it or whether we don’t and we come up with why we don’t like it and if we like it, why we like it, so that keeps the brain active.”** (Interview with member of visual arts group)

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Members of a writers' group say they regularly receive critical appraisal of their work from their peers; this is given to them in a very supportive environment and they find it stimulating.

As might have been expected, in general fewer people report that Bealtaine has enabled them to develop critical appraisal. However, where this has happened, the impact appears to be quite striking. People do appear to develop a different way of comprehending the arts.

It does, however, appear to be occurring as an implicit part of taking part in many of the professionally-led Bealtaine programmes.

#### 7.4 Impact on quality of life

Over two-thirds (67%) of organisers believe that participating in Bealtaine has a strong impact on the quality of life of older participants (Figure 7.1). They specifically mention the following benefits:

- Psychological benefits – gives meaning, purpose, reduces loneliness, combats depression (37%),
- Increased social networking (27%),
- Pride in skills and achievements (20%).

Finally, 17% perceive it to have a weak or neutral effect. These are mainly organisers of one-off events who say the effects are limited due to lack of continuity or for other reasons.

A higher proportion of participants (86%) agree with the statement, "participation in Bealtaine has improved my quality of life". They mention physical, psychological and social benefits.

"I found a new hobby/interest"

"Good way to meet new people"

"Singing is very beneficial to health and it is energising"

"It encouraged me to be more outgoing – get out of the house"

"It's a brilliant day out for me – when we went on a tour"

"I meet different people"

(Quotes from questionnaires)



Evidence from the interviews stresses the positive psychological effects; Bealtaine gives people a purpose and helps combat loneliness. One woman emphasised the beneficial effects that having something to look forward to and being absorbed in creative activity had on her quality of life:

**“It gave me a new lease of life. I’m a widow and I live alone and it was marvellous to have something to get out for – to get involved in and then to forget your pains and aches and get completely immersed in the whole thing.”** (Interview with participant in inter-generational project)

A man in a visual arts programme regularly involved in Bealtaine echoes this and also mentions the sense of psychological well-being brought about by producing a work of art:

**“You’re getting out of the house and you’ve something always to look forward to. And then, in the evenings, I can paint away for a few hours. It makes life a lot easier to live, I think, if you have interests. I think what kills people is lack of interest ...**

**I’m happy in myself because being creative gives you so much satisfaction.... It gives you a sense of well-being if you do a good painting or if you do a good piece of sculpture with clay.”** (Interview with member of visual arts group)

He believed that focussing on art reduces his anxiety about his health:

**“I probably think about the art more that I think about my health. If you keep worrying about yourself, you’re going to get something anyway so that in itself is a good thing.”** (Interview with member of visual arts group)

Other participants emphasise that by providing a public forum to perform or display their talents, this has a positive effect on participants’ psychological well-being:

**“The festival allows older people to publicly share their talents, which is good for self-esteem.”** (Interview with member of writers’ group)

Overall, both organisers and participants perceive participation in the festival and in programmes associated with the festival to have very positive impacts on quality of life.

### 7.5 Impact on social networking

A majority of organisers (59%) see strong impacts in terms of social networking. Again, this is more likely to be the case where programmes are ongoing rather than for one-off events. Respondents report seeing the following effects:

- People form new friendships (28%),
- Bealtaine helps to broaden social inclusion (19%),
- Participants mix with participants in other groups (18%),
- Participants often join other groups for new activities (15%),
- Bealtaine means more interaction for patients in care (8%).

A very high proportion (95%) of participants agreed that “participating in Bealtaine means that I have got to know people I wouldn’t otherwise have met”. Those engaged in inter-generational projects mention that they have extended their social networks by getting to know local young people. People mention a range of positive social impacts.

“It’s nice to be part of a group”

“We got to know people in the same situation as ourselves”

“I’ve met lots of people and I am amazed at various talents people have”

“Bealtaine is a great opportunity to meet people”

“People who take part come from all sorts – different communities take part”

(Quotes from questionnaires)

Interviews confirm that participants extend their social networks through participating in Bealtaine in various ways, ranging from the formation of lasting friendships in their own groups to meeting other older people involved in similar activities locally and elsewhere.

One woman says:

**“My life would be very lonely without Bealtaine. I have Bealtaine friends – we meet every Friday – this group wouldn’t exist without Bealtaine.”** (Interview with member of writers’ group)

As well as forming lasting friendships, several participants said they benefit from networking with other groups (e.g. other writers’ groups or art groups around the country) both in terms of social interaction and in gaining inspiration from others engaged in similar artistic work. A member of a writers’ group says Bealtaine means she has “formed a big circle of friends who are interested in similar activities”. Thus, Bealtaine has helped people to form new communities of older people engaged in the arts around the country. A man from a Dublin-based visual arts group visited an art exhibition in a day care centre in Co. Clare. He enjoyed the social interaction, the discussion of art and the sharing of ideas:

**“I brought back an idea from one guy – he was doing a piece in clay and he did a beautiful, simple – just lines – expression of a ploughman and it was very good.”** (Participant in visual arts programmes)

Several organisers and participants suggested that they would like Age & Opportunity to facilitate (more) joint activities between groups, perhaps by organising regional festivals.

### 7.6 Impact on engagement with community

More than half of organisers (55%) who responded to the survey felt that Bealtaine encouraged engagement with the community (Figure 7.1). Those who saw a strong impact mentioned exhibitions and other events held in day care centres and hospitals to which community members were invited as likely to improve community involvement. Inter-generational and drama events also tended to draw the local community in. Participants mentioned getting to know younger people in their area for the first time as a benefit of the programmes. Organisers said that participants became more involved with volunteers, artists, schoolchildren and other community members through these events.

Again, there was a very high positive response (87%) among participants to the statement that participation in Bealtaine had increased their level of involvement in their community. Some people have joined community groups and residents’ committees and now fundraise more for the community.

Others say that they were always active in the community.

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**“I’m out and about more and meeting people. I’m also becoming more aware of people and their needs”**

**“I’m aware of what’s going on in the community”**

(Quotes from questionnaires completed by Active Retirement Association members)

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Some organisations say that Bealtaine has made the local community more aware of the activities of their members. The interviews also give examples of how Bealtaine has encouraged older participants to become more involved in their community and has helped break down barriers between old and young and between those in residential care and the wider community.

One member of a writers’ group says that being part of the group has encouraged her to teach a creative writers’ group in her local community centre. She says her work there is “stimulated and cross-fertilised by my involvement in Bealtaine” (interview with member of writers’ group). Organisers suggest that Bealtaine has

helped to break down barriers between groups that were previously isolated (such as those in long-term residential care) and their local community. Similar effects have been documented in a previous publication (O’Morain and Leahy 2007).

A care-worker, based in a hospital, who is a Bealtaine organiser indicated that being involved with the festival had a transformative effect on the lives of the hospital residents. The process is reciprocal; the community has become much more involved with the hospital and the residents have become much more aware of what is happening in the local area and now ask to attend arts events outside the hospital:

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**“I suppose it has broken down the walls of the hospital ... It has opened it up and it has involved everybody, especially the community ... if we ask them anyway they always come up trumps and, in fairness, the VEC partners in Bealtaine as well and they actually sent us over poets and dance facilitators and whatever.”** (Interview with Bealtaine organiser in a hospital)

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This hospital holds a Bealtaine celebration every year, inviting several

outside groups to give workshops and also involving organisations such as circuses, which tend to draw in the local community.

### 7.7 Engagement with the arts that would not otherwise have happened

Two-thirds of organisers believe Bealtaine encourages engagement with the arts that would not otherwise have happened. They perceive that:

- It stimulates involvement in the arts generally (35%),
- It introduces people to diverse events (24%),
- It motivates participants to produce art and share their talents (15%).

They mention specific events as being most likely to have these effects: creative writing and art workshops, drama and reminiscence workshops.

Interviews with arts officers, facilitators and artists indicate that Bealtaine has induced older people (some who have not been involved before) to engage in the arts as audiences and participants. At least one city arts office has introduced older people who have not previously visited art galleries and museums, in 2007, to such experiences by directly inviting them in and providing transport.

Interviews with members of a dance club suggest that, as a result of participating in the dance club, some members now attend different types of dance events as audience members and that they view such events in a more critical way. A drama facilitator noticed that many workshop attendees subsequently attended the local theatre for the first time.

There is evidence also that the taster workshops provided by local authority arts offices and arts centres succeed in introducing older people to different forms of creative activity and sometimes they go on to request more long-term programmes as a result of this. For example, a facilitator of taster drama workshops in Mayo said that local Active Retirement Associations have since requested longer drama courses. Similarly, a participant in a writers' workshop reported similar demand.

It appears that where the resources and commitment are present, Bealtaine does foster both new and deepening engagement with the arts among older participants. In fact, arts officers say that Bealtaine has created a demand for programmes and that there are currently not enough resources, in the form of trained facilitators and funding, to match this demand.



**Figure 7.1: Impact on participants**

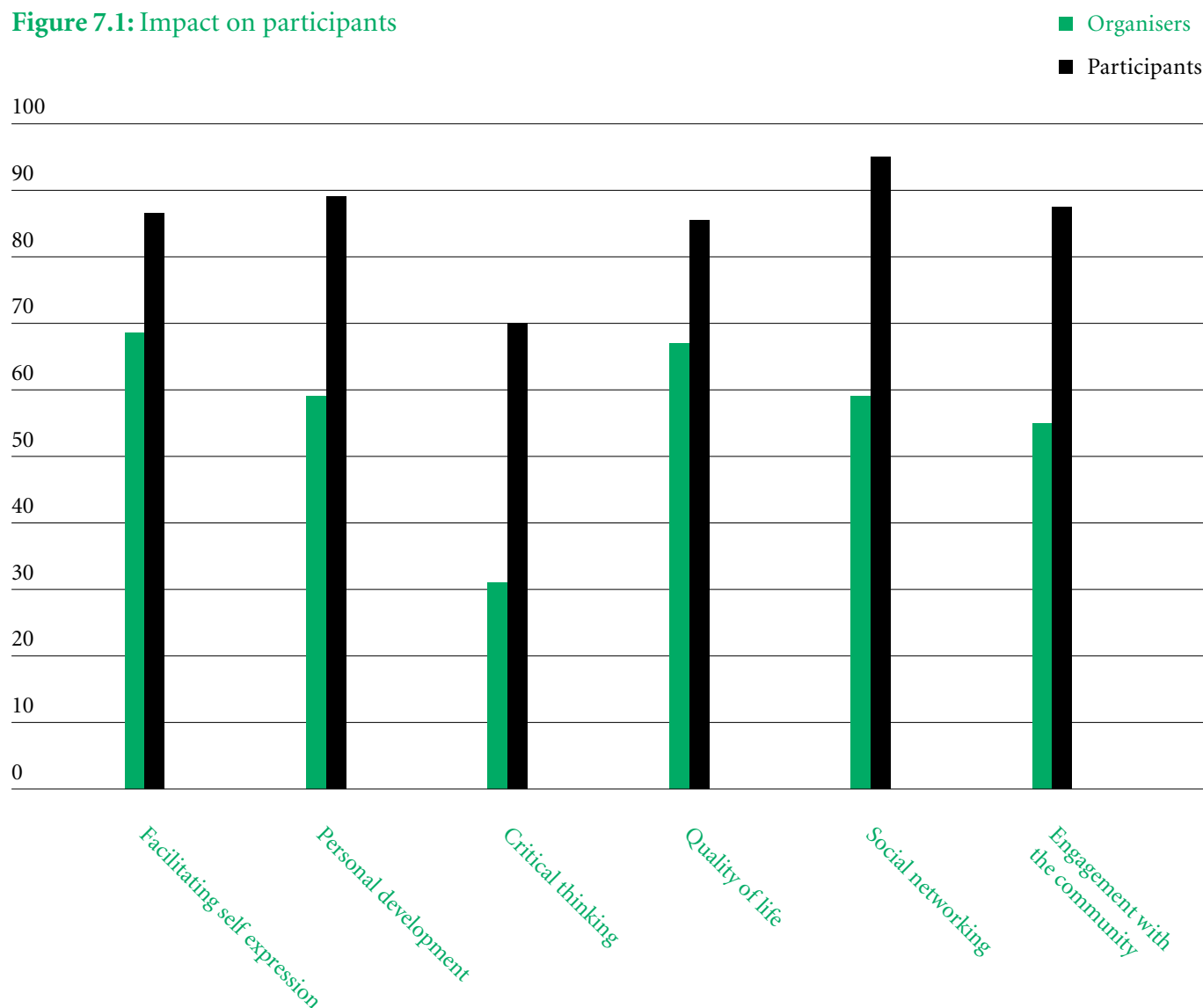


Figure 7.1 summarises organisers' and participants' views of the impact on participants in Bealtaine programmes. One of the most striking findings is that, in all cases, participants perceive stronger impacts than organisers; this is because many organisers are not directly involved with participants

and cannot always comment on the potential effects. The lowest perceived impact is on critical thinking and this perhaps reflects the scarcity of resources Age & Opportunity has to devote to developing this aspect of the festival.

### Attending arts events:

#### Wild Strawberries Film Club

The Wild Strawberries Film Club was set up by the Irish Film Institute (IFI) with the purpose of screening a film once or twice a month for older people. This club was set up as a direct result of the Irish Film Institute's participation in the Bealtaine festival. The IFI also runs a film festival during the month of May which shows films chosen specifically for the club and also runs a talk by someone such as a film director. The festival tends to have age as a thematic focus and/or features older actors. The 2007 festival included a documentary on the Young@Heart Chorus.

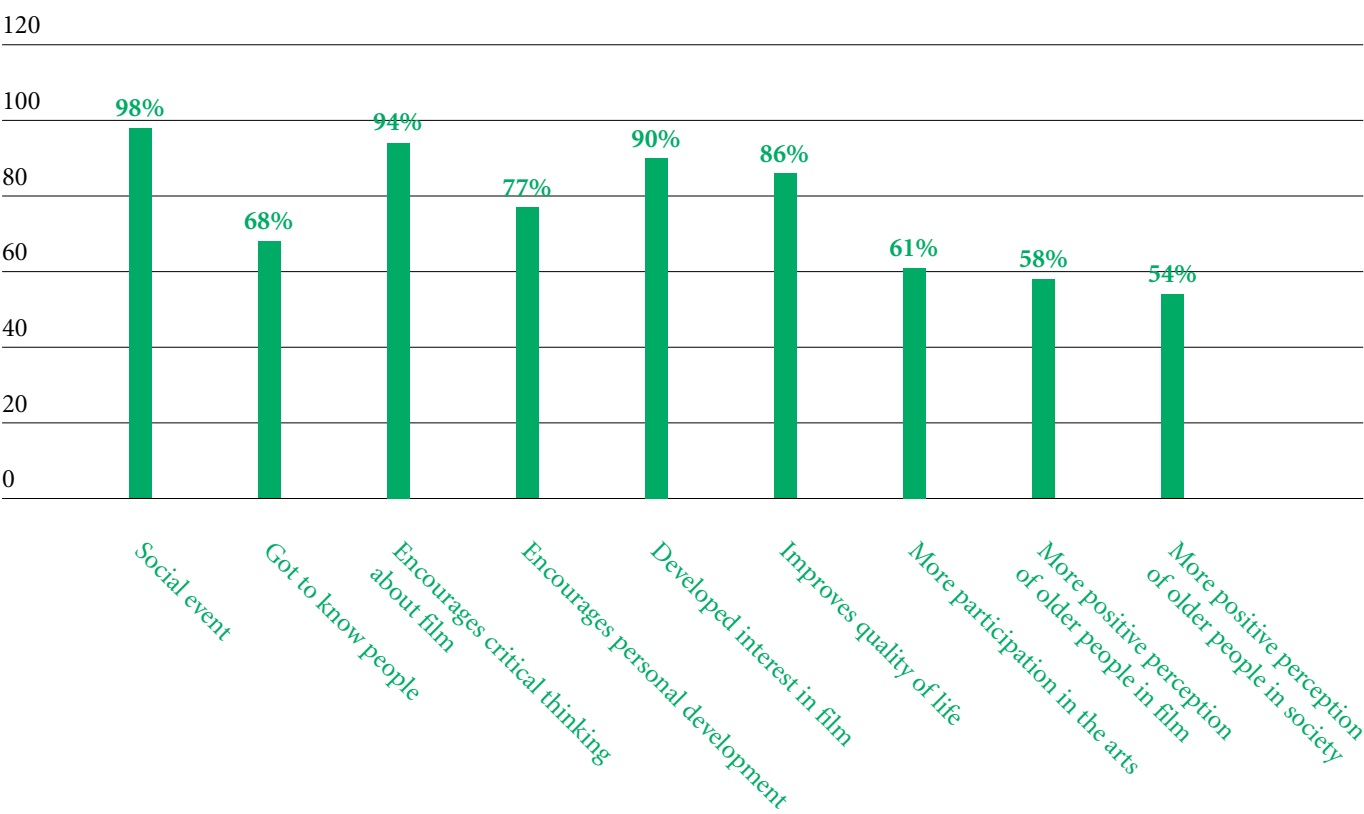
Respondents from the film club said that the best aspects of attending the club were as follows:

- Quality and choice of films available (87%),
- Social contact – meeting up with old and new friends (65%),
- A day out – good atmosphere, enjoyment, friendly staff (50%),
- Suitability and comfort of venue, time, location, etc. (44%),
- The fact that it is free (22%).

Almost all respondents agreed that it was a social event to which they looked forward and most (68%) said that they got to know people they

would not otherwise have met (some said they attended with friends or that they had re-met old friends through the club). Most (94%) agreed that attending the Wild Strawberries Club encourages them to think critically about and discuss film and sometimes led to their becoming interested in different films or areas of the media. Some said they found the films to be stimulating, while others said that they just enjoyed watching the films. Most (77%) of attendees agreed that attending the club contributed to their personal development. They now feel more comfortable giving their opinions about film in a group. Some said they had learned more about different lives and other cultures. The majority (90%) said they had become more interested in seeing different types of films than they would normally attend. Of the 86% who agreed that attending the club improved their quality of life, most people mentioned the social aspect of the club, while others said that the films were thought-provoking and helped them to understand life better. A smaller proportion (61%) agreed that being in the club encouraged them to participate more in the arts while some said they were already involved prior to this. One-third of respondents (32%) had attended the Bealtaine festival programme. All of these were satisfied or very satisfied with it. They liked the variety and quality of the films. Over

Figure 7.2: Impact on Film Club Members



half of respondents (58%) said that they had a more positive attitude to older people in film and to older people in society (54%) as a result of being a member of the club.

Conclusions

Bealtaine provides significant health and quality of life gains for participants. People feel better because of Bealtaine. The creative expression associated with Bealtaine fosters feelings of well-being that improve psychological outlook

and morale among participants and older audiences. Bealtaine also provides an outlet for social connections that enriches the experience of ageing and provides hope and expectation through enhanced social relationships with others. Taking part in local arts projects is a popular way of becoming involved in community activities. Self-confidence and self-esteem are enhanced; social cohesion and social capital are nurtured.



Boyle Active Age group work on a short film, 'On Hallowed Ground', in association with the Irish Film Institute (Bealtaine 2002)

**Photo**  
Derek Speirs









## 8 Conclusions and Recommendations

Bealtaine has had a profound and very visible impact on arts practice in Ireland at national and local level, despite having very limited resources. The festival provides opportunities for meaningful engagement in the arts among older people, both as artists and participants. This is particularly apparent in longer-term programmes that are facilitated by professional artists, but is also discernible in other short-term programmes. The artistic quality (in terms of opportunities provided for creative engagement, empowerment and personal transformation) of many of the programmes has been endorsed by artists, organisers, participants and other stakeholders, although the quality does remain variable on the whole.

Older people now have more opportunities to participate as organisers, as reflected in the growth

in the number of older people's and/or community groups involved in the programme. Quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates that older people are more involved in the arts as audiences and that there is now an expectation that arts events will be provided for older people. As one respondent said "the month of May belongs to older people now". There is somewhat less evidence of the development of older people as critics, although it does appear to happen as a natural outcome of participating in long-term and/or professionally led programmes.

Despite recent increases in resources from the Arts Council, the relative lack of funding for Bealtaine remains a problem. The success of the festival means there is more work involved in administration and organisation. Yet there has been no increase in statutory funding for staffing. This raises questions of sustainability in the long run, particularly if increases in expectations among the public are not met by the continued delivery of a high-quality programme.

In terms of impacting on national policy, while every effort has been made to influence and inform policy-makers, the achievements have been modest in that there is still no written national policy to underpin the valuable work

The festival provides opportunities for meaningful engagement in the arts among older people, both as artists and participants. This is particularly apparent in longer-term programmes that are facilitated by professional artists, but is also discernible in other short-term programmes

Mamo McDonald,  
Age & Opportunity  
with Bealtaine  
Ambassadors Liam  
Clancy, Eamon  
Morrissey and  
Mick Lally at the  
Abbey Theatre  
Bealtaine 2007

**Photo**  
John Ohle



being done and ensure that funding is sustained into the future. The policy focus of the Arts Council on children and younger people, and its exclusion of older people, is not encouraging. The lack of a written policy remains a serious problem and represents a failure to recognise the needs of older people in relation to participation in the arts. There has been somewhat more success in having older people specifically included in arts policy at local authority level but, at present, this is ad hoc and depends on the interest and resources of individual arts officers and/or county managers. If a national policy for older people were introduced, it is likely that this would have a trickle-down effect at local authority level. Currently, however, existing creativity programmes remain vulnerable in the event of spending restrictions or changes in personnel.

Bealtaine has become a visible and accepted part of the programmes of many of the national cultural institutions. The Arts Council is also supportive of Bealtaine in terms of funding for programming under its banner. There has been an obvious impact on arts practice throughout the country with increasing numbers of each type of organisation becoming involved annually. Bealtaine now is a regular feature in arts programmes in several local authorities and in many public libraries.

There is a high degree of satisfaction with Bealtaine among organisers and participants, but certain challenges have been identified. Some counties run a very small number of programmes; some run none at all, especially in rural parts of the country with no local authority-organised Bealtaine programmes. There is also a perception among some groups that Bealtaine is a Dublin-oriented festival. Feedback from day care centres suggests that some of these groups would like more information and support, particularly with regard to funding and contacts. Some older people remain excluded from Bealtaine, even when programmes exist in their area. Participation rates among older men and among very old women and men are particularly low.

In addition to achieving its stated aims, Bealtaine has had a positive impact on social cohesion through the building of social capital at local and national level. Older participants appear to be more involved in their communities. There is also more interaction between State agencies, non-governmental organisations and individuals as a result of Bealtaine. The festival has fostered solidarity among older people as a group. It has offered opportunities for organisations such as libraries to impact positively on social inclusion through programmes that reach out to hitherto marginalised groups of older people.

Poet Elaine Feinstein,  
with Mamo  
McDonald and  
Catherine Rose,  
Age & Opportunity,  
at her reading  
organised in  
association with  
Poetry Ireland  
(Bealtaine 2005)

**Photo**  
Tommy Clancy



There are also a number of psychological and health benefits associated with Bealtaine participation. There is compelling evidence that participation is empowering and transformative and that self-reported physical and psychological well-being is enhanced at an individual level. Bealtaine has proven itself to be a major positive force for the well-being of older people in Ireland. The programme should be widened and deepened through increased and sustained funding commitments from national and regional agencies. The final section makes a number of specific recommendations for the future in that regard.

### Recommendations

On the basis of the findings in this report, we recommend the following twenty-one actions, which we have assigned to an appropriate agency and divided into short-term (ST) and medium-term (MT) timeframes:

#### Office of the Minister for Older People

- Realise a vision for older people and the arts that recognises the need to provide equality of access to creative programmes for every older person in the country (MT),
- Incorporate a clear written policy for the arts and older people into the proposed National Positive Ageing Strategy for Older People that links to all relevant Government departments and agencies (MT),

- Provide a significant increase in Government funding for creative arts programmes for older people as part of the realisation of this vision. The funding should be made available for a range of organisations working with older people in the arts (MT).

#### Age & Opportunity

- Seek a significant increase in funding for Bealtaine on the basis of proven success on various indicators of health and social gain. It is reasonable to seek funding from the Office for Older People, the HSE and the Arts Council on the basis of the range of benefits outlined in this report (ST),
- Fund two additional staff to provide the support, liaison and consultation with partners across the country. This would facilitate greater efficiency and information-sharing, as well as facilitating further growth in the festival programme (MT),
- Apply to regional planning agencies and the European Union for financial support to develop equity-enhancing creativity programmes in particular regions (ST),
- Attract commercial sponsorship for large events and encourage local Active Retirement Associations and day care centres to apply to local businesses and banks in addition to the Arts Council, local authorities,

the HSE and vocational educational committees, for financial support for arts programmes for older people (ST),

- Develop an integrative and sustained relationship with the HSE at national and local level. Liaise more closely and more often with various national bodies, including the Local Authority Members Association, Library Association of Ireland, Council of National Cultural Institutions and Active Retirement Ireland (MT),
- Continue to hold more high-profile Bealtaine-related arts events in the regions, as well as in Dublin (ST),
- Produce funding guidelines/support material and evaluation criteria for Bealtaine projects (MT),
- Continue to develop and provide good practice guidelines for the development of new creative programmes for older people (ST),
- Reintroduce regional meetings for idea-sharing and dissemination of best practice among local organisers (ST).

#### Local Authorities

- Provide logistic support and information to local arts providers, including Active Retirement Associations engaged in creative activity (ST),



- Provide additional funding for Bealtaine on the basis of social inclusion criteria (MT),
- Develop a database of artists and facilitators with experience of working with older people (MT).

#### Health Service Executive

- Provide additional funding for Bealtaine on the basis of the health and social gains associated with creativity programmes for older people (MT).

#### Arts Council

- Develop an explicit written national policy around older people and the arts (ST),
- Provide funding opportunities to local authorities for Bealtaine programmes that have artistic potential and merit (MT),
- Provide funding and leadership for systematic training and accreditation of artists in working with older people (MT),
- Encourage all Arts Council-funded organisations, local and national, to fulfil their responsibility in relation to older people during Bealtaine and throughout the year (ST),
- Support innovative/experimental arts practice emanating from Bealtaine, involving older people.

#### Final Thoughts

Bealtaine is the major creative programme for older people in Ireland. Its impact is not confined to the month responsible for its name and origins; the programme resonates all year round for some people and in some places. Bealtaine is now part of the creative landscape for older people and their families and its effects are felt locally and nationally. Bealtaine yields considerable health and social gains for older people across a wide range of indicators, many of which were outlined in this report. Unfortunately, these gains have not yet been recognised by an official system that continues to view public support for older people in terms of an illness paradigm rather than a health-inducing paradigm. Older people are holistic beings with multiple needs that cannot be met solely through health and social care interventions. It is time, therefore, to recognise the importance of creativity in older age and to provide practical support to Bealtaine in terms of resources and funding. More generally, we need to acknowledge that creative programmes and artistic endeavour for older people can be genuinely transformative at both personal and social levels. Creativity in older age is a sustaining and sustainable concept that enriches all of society.

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## Appendix 1

### National Cultural Institutions as per Council for National Cultural Institutions website\*

	Policy on older people	Programmes for older people	Provision for older people
<b>Abbey Theatre**</b>	No	Yes; Liz Lerman Dance Exchange; Interview with Annie Proulx	Physical access; Matinees (cheap seats)
<b>Chester Beatty Library</b>	No	Participatory music event	Physical access
<b>Crawford Art Gallery, Cork</b>	No specific policy – equal access to all but many older members	Actively encourage events for older age group; Drawing Day in Bealtaine	Special attention paid to needs of older visitors; Health, safety and free access
<b>Irish Film Institute***</b>	No	Film Festival “A Punnet of Wild Strawberries”	Film Club for older people
<b>National Gallery of Ireland</b>	No	Week-long programme of lectures, tours workshops “Art for all Ages”	“Very conscious of older people”; Held symposium in November on museums and older people.
<b>The Irish Museum of Modern Art</b>	No	Gallery visits, Open studio, Public talks; Work in Raheen; Hospital through the National Programme.	Mission statement – to be inclusive. Programmes for or including older people. Mission statement – to be inclusive; Programmes for or including older people for 16 years

	<b>Policy on older people</b>	<b>Programmes for older people</b>	<b>Provision for older people</b>
<b>National Concert Hall</b>	No specific policy	Workshop in retirement home	Price concessions for older people
<b>National Library of Ireland</b>	No but is committed to education and outreach	“Lost Art of Letter writing” exhibition of letters.	Many attendees at library events are older – “Musical Reflection” series
<b>National Museum of Ireland</b>	No	Craft workshop, guided tours, living history display	Many education programmes targeted at older people
<b>Museum of Natural History</b>	No	Photographic competition; Special guided tours	Closed for refurbishment.
<b>Museum of Country Life</b>	No specific policy, but conscious of older people in programming	Lá Bealtaine workshop, demonstration, talks	Many education programmes targeted at older people

\* Not all of the National Cultural Institutions are listed here – only those who notified Age & Opportunity of their involvement in 2007.

\*\* No completed questionnaire received (Director interviewed).

\*\*\* Not on the official list of National Cultural Institutions (questionnaire in pilot study – interview with staff member).

**N.B.** The institutions listed above are those listed as NCI’s to whom Questionnaire 1 was sent. These are taken from the official list on the website of the Council of National Cultural Institutions. We also included the Irish Film Institute as an NCI since this has been the practice of Age & Opportunity in previous years.

Appendix 2

Title?

Counties that returned  
ARA Questionnaire 2

Kerry

Roscommon

Wexford

Laois

Sligo

Cork

Donegal

Offaly

Waterford

Galway

Kilkenny

Dublin

Tipperary

Mayo

Total: 14

Counties that did not return  
ARA Questionnaire 2

Clare

Wicklow

Monaghan

Carlow

Meath

Louth

Kildare

Leitrim

Cavan

Longford

Westmeath

Limerick

Total: 12

## Appendix 3

### Questionnaire 1

#### Section A

1 Organisation Name

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---

2 What is your role within your organisation?

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---

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3 Contact number

---

4 Email

---

5 Type of Organisation

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> National Arts Institution                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Arts Office/Arts Centre |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regional Arts Institution                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Culture/Heritage Body   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Library  | <input type="checkbox"/> Care Centre/Hospital    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Retired / Older People's Organisation / Community Group |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day Care Centre   | <input type="checkbox"/> Acute Hospital          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public HSE Long-Stay Facility                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Welfare Home            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private Nursing Home                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary Nursing Home  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please give details)                             |  |

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**Section B: Number and Type of Activities**

**6** Did your organisation participate in the Bealtaine Festival in 2007?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please give details

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**7a)** Does your organisation have ongoing annual events/programmes in connection with Bealtaine?

☐ Yes ☐ No

**b)** If yes, for how many years has your organisation participated in Bealtaine?

**c)** If no, please explain why not?

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**8a)** How much do you estimate your organisation spent on funding Bealtaine events/programmes in 2007:

**i)** in €

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**ii)** in other resources (staffing etc). (Please state broadly what other resources were used)

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**b)** From where does the funding come for the events/programmes organised through Bealtaine?

(If self-funding, please state the source of this funding)

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9 In the case of ongoing Bealtaine programmes for older people - are these programmes likely to continue into the future?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe Not

If **No** or **Maybe Not** explain why not

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10 Did your organisation provide artistic events for older people prior to your involvement with Bealtaine?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

If Yes, please give details

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11 Has the Bealtaine festival stimulated your organisation to initiate events during Bealtaine for and with older people that would not otherwise have taken place?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

If Yes, please give details

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12 Has the Bealtaine festival inspired your organisation to attract funding for creative programmes for older people from other sources?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

If Yes, please give details

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- 13** How would you describe the level of artistic quality of the Bealtaine-related events/programmes with which your organisation is involved? Please tick the relevant box:

☐ Very Good

☐ Good

☐ Fair

☐ Poor

☐ Very Poor

Please elaborate

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### Section C: Operation of the festival from the perspective of your organisation

- 14** What are the most useful aspects of the Bealtaine festival for your organisation?

Please list in order of importance:

i)

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ii)

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iii)

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iv)

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- 15** Does Bealtaine provide an opportunity to showcase the work produced in creative programmes that you are involved in for older people outside of the festival?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

If Yes, please give details

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**16 Does Bealtaine lead to greater links/co-operation between your organisation and other local organisations?**

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Don't know

If Yes, please give details

---

**17 Have innovative events organised through Bealtaine in other places inspired your organisation to organise similar events either within Bealtaine or outside?**

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Don't know

If Yes, please give details

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**18 Are you satisfied with the operation of the Bealtaine festival?**

☐ Satisfied      ☐ Fairly Satisfied      ☐ Not Satisfied

☐ Very Dissatisfied      ☐ No Opinion

**a) Are there ways in which the Bealtaine Festival might be improved from the perspective of your organisation?**

Please elaborate

---

- 19** Do you think that there are particular categories of older people who do not currently have access to/participate in the Bealtaine festival?

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Don't know

If yes, how do you think greater participation in the Bealtaine festival could be encouraged among these groups?

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#### Section D: Profile of older people in Arts Programmes

- 20** In your view, what has been the impact of the Bealtaine festival in increasing the profile of and engagement with older people within National arts programmes, e.g. programmes at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Abbey Theatre, the Irish Film Institute? Please tick the relevant box:

☐ Very                      ☐ Strong                      ☐ Weak

☐ Very weak              ☐ Don't know

Please give details

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- 21** In your view, what has been the impact of the Bealtaine festival in increasing the profile of, and engagement with older people within local arts programmes, e.g. those organised by county and city arts officers, in libraries, hospitals, care homes, day care centres, community groups, Active Retirement Associations? Please tick the relevant box.

☐ Very                      ☐ Strong                      ☐ Weak

☐ Very weak              ☐ Don't know

Please give details

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- 22** One of the aims of the Bealtaine festival is to promote more positive attitudes to ageing in Irish Society. Do you think it has been successful in doing so? Please tick the relevant box.

- ☐ Successful                      ☐ Quite Successful                      ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not Very Successful                      ☐ Unsuccessful                      ☐ Don't know

Please give details

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**Section E: Impact on older people (to be completed by organisers/artists)**

- 23** What has been the impact of the Bealtaine festival on older participants in arts programmes in terms of facilitating self-expression? Please tick the relevant box.

- ☐ Very                      ☐ Strong                      ☐ Weak
- ☐ Very weak                      ☐ Don't know

Please give details

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- 24 What has been the impact of the Bealtaine festival on older participants in arts programmes in terms of encouraging personal development? Please tick the relevant box.

☐ Very                      ☐ Strong                      ☐ Weak  
☐ Very weak                      ☐ Don't know

Please give details

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- 25 What has been the impact of the Bealtaine festival on older participants in arts programmes in terms of encouraging critical thinking? Please tick the relevant box.

☐ Very                      ☐ Strong                      ☐ Weak  
☐ Very weak                      ☐ Don't know

Please give details

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- 26 What has been the impact of the Bealtaine festival on older participants in arts programmes in terms of improving quality of life? Please tick the relevant box.

☐ Very                      ☐ Strong                      ☐ Weak  
☐ Very weak                      ☐ Don't know

Please give details

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27 What has been the impact of the Bealtaine festival on older participants in arts programme in terms of encouraging additional social networking? Please tick the relevant box.

☐ Very

☐ Strong

☐ Weak

☐ Very weak

☐ Don't know

Please give details

---

28 What has been the impact of the Bealtaine festival on older participants in arts programme in terms of facilitating increased community engagement among older participants? Please tick the relevant box.

☐ Very

☐ Strong

☐ Weak

☐ Very weak

☐ Don't know

Please give details

---

29 What has been the impact of the Bealtaine festival on older participants in arts programmes in terms of encouraging engagement with the arts that would not otherwise have happened? Please tick the relevant box.

☐ Very

☐ Strong

☐ Weak

☐ Very weak

☐ Don't know

Please give details

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**Thank you for your co-operation.**

## Appendix 4

### Impact on participants in Bealtaine events / programmes

To be completed by members of the Active Retirement Associations and other groups who have participated in or attended Bealtaine related events/programmes

Please tick one box:

1 ☐ Male ☐ Female

2 Age Group ☐ <50 ☐ 55-64 ☐ 65-74 ☐ 75+

3 Have you attended a Bealtaine event or programmes in 2007?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, please give details

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Please read the following statements and tick the box which most closely describes the effect that participating in a Bealtaine-related event/programme has had on you:

4 It has helped me to express myself more easily

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ No opinion

☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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**5 It has encouraged my personal development**

☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion

☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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**6 It has encouraged me to think critically about the arts**

☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion

☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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**7 It has fostered my spiritual exploration and development**

☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion

☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

---

**8 It has improved my quality of life**

☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion

☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

---

---

**9 It means I have got to know people I wouldn't otherwise have met**

☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion

☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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**10 It has increased my involvement with my local community**

☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion

☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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## Appendix 5

### Questionnaire for attendees of Irish Film Institute Bealtaine programme and/or members of the Wild Strawberries film club

To be completed by people who attend the Wild Strawberries film club

Please tick one box:

- 1 ☐ Male ☐ Female
- 2 Age Group ☐ <50 ☐ 50-60 ☐ 60-70 ☐ 60-70 ☐ 80+
- 3 Have you attended the Wild Strawberries film club fairly regularly (2-3 times or more) in 2007?  
☐ Yes ☐ No
- 4 How did you first hear of the Wild Strawberries film club?  
☐ Bealtaine Festival ☐ Advertising ☐ Irish Film Institute  
☐ Friends/Family ☐ Active Retirement/Older Persons Group  
☐ Other (please give details)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Are you a member of the:  
Irish Film Institute? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
Wild Strawberries club? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 6 What part of Ireland do you come from? (Please state which county or city)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 7 Do you think there are currently enough opportunities for older people in Ireland to engage in cultural activities?  
☐ Yes ☐ No

- 8 What do you enjoy most about attending the Wild Strawberries film club?  
Please list the three most important aspects in order of preference:

- i) \_\_\_\_\_  
ii) \_\_\_\_\_  
iii) \_\_\_\_\_

Please read the following statements and tick the box which most closely describes the effect that attending the Wild Strawberries film club has had on you:

- 9 It is a social event I look forward to:

- ☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion  
☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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- 10 It has encouraged me to think critically about the films I see:

- ☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion  
☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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**11 It has made me interested in seeing different types of films I wouldn't otherwise attend:**

- ☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion
- ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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---

**12 Attending the Wild Strawberries film club has improved my quality of life:**

- ☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion
- ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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---

**13 My participation in the Wild Strawberries club has encouraged me to be more involved in other Arts and Cultural Activities:**

- ☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion
- ☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

---

---

- 14 Attending the film club means I have got to know people I wouldn't otherwise have met:

☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion  
☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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- 15 Did you attend the Irish Film Institute's Bealtaine festival programme (showing of five films during the month of May, launched by Sir Charles Dance) in 2007?

☐ Yes      ☐ No

- 16 How satisfied were you with the Bealtaine festival programme?

☐ Strongly agree      ☐ Agree      ☐ No opinion  
☐ Disagree      ☐ Strongly disagree

Please give details

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- 17 In your view, what were the best aspects of the Irish Film Institute's 2007 Bealtaine festival programme?

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18 Has your participation in the Wild Strawberries club changed your perception of older people in:

Film ☐ Yes ☐ No

Society in General ☐ Yes ☐ No

If you answered Yes to any of the above, how have your perceptions changed:

☐ More Positive      ☐ More Negative

19 What kind of screenings would you like to see included in the Irish Film Institute's Bealtaine festival programme in 2008?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

**Thank you for your co-operation.**



