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**An Alternative Gathering: Public Space and Shared Agency in the
Lived Experience of Multicultural Ireland**

by

Anna King

A thesis submitted to the School of Political Science and Sociology.

**In conformity with the requirements for
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

National University of Ireland, Galway

(January, 2014)

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'I'd like to think that maybe some of the young people will tell this story to their children... it's about joint ownership...'

(Conal Kearney, Director of Youth Theatre Project)

'We brought life into the story...'

'Yeah, I feel like I've also made a little bit of history too.'

(Ammar Tahir and Nathan McPhilbin, young actors in *The Táin*.

Abstract

Within less than a decade the community of Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun (DRA) transformed from a semi-rural small Irish community to a city suburb with over 33 different nationalities. The urban development that took hold in a dramatically short period of time has led to a form of ‘landscaped identity crisis’, where the meaning people attach to their local environment is challenged and uprooted with an influx of newcomers and mass urbanisation. This research follows how older community members coped and responded to change, as well as how newcomers struggled to make homes in unfamiliar cultural landscapes. In so doing, it draws attention to *place* being a complex setting, where history, culture, politics, environment, social and personal life interact. This research uses creative methods to enable people to explore how a range of social patterns (often articulated through common narratives) either shape or constrain their experience. This four year ethnographic and action research provides empirical evidence that strongly indicates the power of *place* within social development. It also highlights how making dislocated *spaces* into meaningful *places* within the DRA was realized through a range of cultural and artistic gatherings (Church events, Ghanaian celebrations, the Polish, Come2gether Association, the GAA, World Café experience and the DRA Youth Theatre Project), as well as activities that elevate the role of nature in creating landscapes conducive to social and community dialogue. It was during these encounters that individuals participated in (re)negotiating their social and cultural landscapes, thus creating a sense of belonging. One of the more significant findings has been the positive role for diversity in creating meaningful change. Tentative though these findings are, they identify a desire and willingness on the part of diverse groups to develop relationships and to engage in the community-building puzzle, rather than ‘hunker down’. This is not to suggest that this is a process without challenges between individuals and groups, but the projects examined here provide valuable insight into how these may be overcome. In particular, they indicate that the primary feature for social dislocation, or lack of social development, is more to do with *context* rather than the issues of *diversity*.

Rather, diversity, at least for the residents in this study, is experienced as a creative prerequisite to building meaningful long-term relationships.

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I dedicate this PhD research to the DRA community. Without all the people mentioned (and many more) this piece of work would not exist. My personal, ethnical and emotional commitment was at all times to give justice, in the most integral way possible, to the people who invited me into their lives during my period of research. Here, it is important to be honest about these relationships. They are not ‘research subjects’; they are people with whom I have spent vast amounts of time and shared some extremely meaningful moments. I have a deep respect for them and have developed some very special bonds. Some, more than others, hold special significance. I am not a Catholic, or for that matter joined in any other institutional religion, and yet one of the most meaningful encounters was with Fr. Martin Glynn, who is a visionary and inspiration to many. Endless conversations with him gave shape to my thoughts, eased fractured emotions and provided an anchor point from which to discuss many issues from community interaction to philosophy and human nature. I am a better person from meeting this man and a much more refined researcher. He became for me a symbol of integrity and hope as he, alongside many others, strove to transform a barren social landscape into vibrant ‘alive’ spaces for cultural encounters that matter.

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Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that all of the work described within this thesis is the original work of the author.

Any published (or unpublished) ideas and/or techniques from the work of others are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices.

(Anna King)

(January, 2014)

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Chapter 1 Introduction

An Alternative Gathering: Public Space and Shared Agency in the Lived Experience of Multicultural Ireland.

If we are to understand why ‘alternative gatherings’ are important to the lived experience of multicultural Ireland, it is perhaps worth pausing to reflect upon

the significance of heeding multiple voices silenced over the years, of making them part of the on-going ‘conversation’ that distinguishes our culture. This entails an incorporation of visions seldom tapped before; it entails a recognition of exclusions and deficiencies long denied, a discovery of ways to fill the voids and in some fashion to repair. Finally, seeking a regard for distinctiveness as well as a reaching toward connectedness, I look for opportunities for concrete engagements, for imaginative efforts to cross the distances and look through diverse others’ eyes (Greene, 1993:13).



Figure 1 Nana Osei Bonsu, from a royal Ghanaian lineage, celebrates in traditional clothes at the Galway Ghana Independence Day Celebration. March 9th, 2013. Clayton Hotel, Doughiska.

Along with neighbouring Roscam and the Ardaun, Doughiska was a semi-rural community with a population of 200 people (from here on referred to as the DRA). Within less than a decade the DRA had become a suburb of Galway, with over 7,000 people; with plans to re-develop the Ardaun from 11 houses into a town for up to 13,000 residents.¹ The 2006 National Census, and the DRA 2009 Survey, reveals that there are over 33 different nationalities resident in the area, and its non-Irish population is three times higher than the national average, with an especially high percentage of Polish people (Geraghty, 2009).² This descriptive starting point captures the upheaval, but it does not portray how disturbing it was both to the landscape and traditional social practice.

An interesting, if polemical, starting point for a discussion about the challenges associated with this experience of change is Putnam's assertion that diverse communities tend to erode social life and provide little or no opportunity for collective action.

Putnam's bleak pronouncement is that

inhabitants of diverse communities tend to withdraw from collective life, to distrust their neighbours, regardless of the colour of their skin, to withdraw even from close friends, to expect the worst from their community and its leaders, to volunteer less, give less to charity and

¹ The 2005 – 2011 City Development Plan supported further growth within East Galway. A 2009 paper by the Galway City Council emphasised an extensive development of the Ardaun from a rural area of 11 houses to one of the largest planned future developments in Galway, potentially consisting of 18 thousand residents. The idea is that the Ardaun will become a self-sustaining corridor with dedicated public transport and 'community' facilities. In keeping with the National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020, this proposes Galway as a primary Gateway location (A 'community' in the making: Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun 'community' Profile Analysis, 2009). At present the Department of Environment and Heritage and Local Government and the Department of Finance have put this development on hold due to the recession. Up-dated versions of these plans will be forth-coming in the 2011 – 2017 Galway City Development Plan.

² A Community in the making: DRA Community profile and needs analysis, 2009. Recent figures compiled by ARD Family Resource Centre identified Doughiska as having 52% Irish, 47 % non-Irish (defined by the report as people having been born outside of Ireland) and the Arduan and Roscam as having 80% Irish and 20% non-Irish (Frecklington & Carney, 2013).

work on community projects less often, to register to vote less, to agitate for social reform *more*, but have less faith that they can actually make a difference, and to huddle unhappily in front of the television (Putnam, 2007: 151).

Putnam's work in the USA has had a significant influence internationally on community development literature where he has (1995 and 2000) provocatively declared that civic, social, associational and political life (described as social capital) has collapsed, with detrimental results. For Putnam, diversity is one of the factors associated with undermining trust in a community and is therefore problematic. He maintains that in more diverse communities there is an increased tendency to 'hunker down', where 'altruism and community co-operation' are rarer, and 'friends fewer' (Putnam, 2007:137-139):

Social trust and civic engagement are strongly correlated; the greater the density of associational membership in a society, the more trusting its citizens. Trust and engagement are two facets of the same underlying factor - social capital (Putnam, 1995:8).

Though Putnam suggests mechanisms to counter such trends, and create 'a new, broader sense of the 'we' (2007:139), his conclusion, nevertheless, is that 'diversity, at least in the short run, seems to bring out the turtle in all of us' (Putnam, 2007:151). He suggests that in contrast, homogenous communities have a tendency to open a 'hand to a stranger'.

1.1 Social Capital

From the 1990s onwards there has been considerable interest in the impact of globalisation and individualism, posing the prospect that communities no longer exist, and that it makes more sense to talk about societies. DeFilippis and Saegert, however, argue that while most communities have been subject to the significant and detrimental forces of capitalism, it remains, nonetheless, important to attempt to understand localised daily lives, even if they are hard to define (DeFilippis and Saegert, 2012: 2). Such a view informs attempts to understand community *life* in more depth; why relationships between people are important and the need to examine the role of social groups and networks in

enhancing community capacity. Within this literature tolerance, reciprocity or trust is important (Cohen, 1982, 1985; Putnam, 1995 Bang and Sørensen, 2001).

The concept of social capital became popular through Putnam (1993, 1995) Coleman (1988) and Woolcock (1998), and although such views are contested, these ideas still remain influential. Whereas physical capital refers to objects and human capital to the capacities of individuals, Putnam maintains that social capital refers to ‘social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness’. The social capital debate investigates how ‘participation in civic associations and social trust impacts on the larger political and social economic systems’, as well as everyday social life (Dekker and Uslaner, 2001:xvii). Social capital theorists also seek to address the issue of how individuals have access to resources that would otherwise be inaccessible (see Foley and Edwards, 1999). For individuals, the ability to engage in change is, ‘predicated to a large extent on their capacities to interact and collaborate’... and the ‘dynamic behind collaborative action at the local level is most often linked with the concept of social capital’ (Mahon, Fahy and Ó Cinnéide, 2012).

Putnam is concerned with whether there is a link between the performance of institutions and the general character of civic life. For Putnam, as Ulsaner and Dekker note, social capital is the ‘missing link’ in an explanation of why ‘some countries do better than others’, what makes ‘democracy work and how this is linked to the patterns of everyday life (Ulsaner and Dekker, 2001:177). Putnam’s research in Italy drew the conclusion that areas in which public affairs were more civic, were more successful.

Crucially, like other forms of capital, networks have value (Putnam, 2007:137). But Putnam concedes that not all networks are necessarily beneficial or, that they have the same effects. Nevertheless, he believes that research suggests that where levels of ‘social capital are higher, children grow up healthier, safer and better educated, people live longer, happier lives and the democracy and the economy work better’ (Putnam, 2007:138).

For Putnam, the problem is that in a range of identifiable areas civic engagement is in decline: less people are voting, participation in local associations is down and we are witnessing a growing disenchantment with public institutions. While Americans are more tolerant, they trust one another less, all of which he attributes to changing family structures, suburban sprawl, the time it takes to get to work, the privatisation of leisure and the growth of social media (Smith, 2001, 2007). However, a further theme, which is important to this thesis, is the emphasis he accords to diversity. Putnam believes that ethnic diversity will increase substantially in all societies and that this is not only inevitable but desirable. Such diversity is an important social asset, because creativity is enhanced and is associated positively with rapid economic growth (Putnam, 2007:140). Yet, he maintains also that, in the short to medium-term ‘immigration and ethnic diversity challenge social solidarity and inhibit social capital’ (Putnam, 2007:138). Diversity seems to ‘trigger...anomie or social isolation,’ and there is a tendency for people living in ethnically diverse settings to ‘hunker down’, that is to pull in like a turtle’ (Putnam, 2007:149).

Putnam’s arguments are based on a systematic use of General Social Surveys (GSS) and longitudinal national surveys. However laudable and historically grounded such accounts may be, it is plausible to suggest that they are isolated ‘snapshots’, statements disconnected from experience. When large amounts of these ‘results’ are conflated, a strong picture is formed. And yet, while such information may demonstrate important national and cross national trends, it is questionable whether such an approach can capture the subtle, complex changes that occur within social relations between people living in a ‘community’. Neither does it reveal the multiple (and often contradictory) ways in which humans relate and behave (Edmondson, 2003).

One of the problems with Putnam’s conclusions is that his research attempts to profile ‘attitudes, rather than behaviour’ (Sennett, 2012:4), which can be problematic because people often behave in complex and contradictory ways. For instance, they may assert that they are environmentally conscious, and yet due to economic constraints not

engage in sustainable practices. It is, therefore, important to be cautious when making assertions about individuals or group behaviour, devoid of context.

In contrast to Putnam, Bang and Sørensen concede that while democracy faces difficulty, they do not think this is due to a decline in civic engagement. They suggest that Putnam's view of a 'Great Decay' may be more to do with the model of social capital itself (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:149; See Bang and Sørensen, 1999) and, as a result, his evaluations may appear more 'gloomy than they need be (Bang and Sørensen, 1999). Rather, we need to recognize that there are new forms of interaction between 'political authorities and laypeople'. For Bang and Sørensen, the crucial problem stems from the level of political exclusion that is taking place, as we move from democratic government to democratic governance, which involves lay people being 'uncoupled' from the political system (Bang and Sørensen, 1999:326). They suggest alternatively that politics is in the social and that disengagement from state politics or conventional associations does not *necessarily* mean a lack of local civic engagement.

In these new forms of governance Bang and Sørensen identify two new political identities; *expert activists* and *everyday makers* that share characteristics, but differ in important ways. The expert activist tends to work full-time in a professional capacity and is more associated with voluntary organisations. As Li and Marsh identify:

To Expert Citizens, politics is a fusion between representation and participation in a new form of political participation where you use your knowledge, skills and strategic judgement to influence others. Expert Citizens build networks of negotiation and co-operation with politicians, administrators, interest groups and the media; they develop 'network consciousness'. As compared with when they were grassroots activists, they have a weakening antagonism to the system; their aim is to make it an effective partner. Consequently, Expert Citizens are also a resource or political capital for democracy. In particular, they have a fund of everyday experience about how to deal with problems of exclusion based on ethnicity, gender, class/poverty (Li and Marsh, 2008:250).

For the expert activist, the choice of activity 'depends on what irritates': behaviour springs from a negative view of, and mistrust in, centralised power; 'you can

block them – you can go against them in order to provoke a reaction. You can't use them positively as a resource. You don't get results by talking to the Mayor'. Crucially, however, and in contrast to Putnam, this should not be seen as seen as apathy, because the 'challenge is to get in there and get something done' (Bang and Sørensen, 2001: 150).

These activists are not interested in 'fighting the system', but establishing access to the bargaining process in public authorities or private and voluntary organizations. This is political activity that prioritises *performance* in policy-making circles, rather than the 'old emancipatory ideology'. As one interviewee said: 'You've got to be damned competent if you're going to make them budge. You've got to be damned good, and you've got to know what you're talking about before they're going to take the trouble to talk to you at all' (Bang and Sørensen, 2001: 151).

For Bang, everyday makers tend to be part-time and are fundamentally concerned with ordinary everyday life politics. They represent a new form of political engagement 'which attempts to combine individuality and commonality in new relations of self and co-governance (Bang and Sørensen 1999:325) in everyday life. Importantly, while Bang and Sørensen (1999) are sympathetic to the idea that there is a 'thinning of social relations, measured as membership in civil society associations', they advocate that the presence of the everyday maker suggests that the state of affairs does not pose a threat to the 'deepening and enhancement of political relations, with, and trust in, fellow laymen as capable and knowledgeable human beings (Bang and Sørensen, 1999: 326). This suggests that there is room for optimism in DRA, where the kind of conventional association's necessary for effective democracy, as advocated by Putnam, are weak.

A central feature to the day to day activity of everyday makers is neither 'bowling alone', nor 'bowling together'. They do not orient their civic engagement towards the state, but local institutions and networks that are concerned with everyday life problems. As one of their respondents puts it: 'Inner Norrebro (a local area in Copenhagen) is a story of engagement where you involve yourself politically in an unconventional manner for solving problems for your neighbourhood. It's always been like this' (Bang and

Sørensen, 2001: 150). Everyday makers do not distinguish themselves from the state, or from the masses, but from the new kind of expert activism (Bang and Sørensen, 2001: 149), where voluntary organisations are developing elite attitudes. This is an issue that has been raised in Ireland, where the professionalization of community development work has taken place (Meade, 2011; Meade and O'Donovan, 2002; Motherway, 2006; Mayo, 1998; Lee, 2003), with community workers involved in complex, ‘consultative exercises’. As a result, intervention has become more technical, with strategic planning, policy analysis and evaluation that presents community representatives with the difficulty of ‘managing’ the language and working style of these committees (Lee, 2003:52; Meade and O'Donovan 2002:7). Representatives rarely originate from socially excluded communities, as professionalization leads to the displacement of activists or volunteers by paid staff, expanding the community work profession. In line with this professionalization has been a move toward financial investment programmes (Motherway, 2006:i), that have resulted in ‘disquiet among local development organizations’ that government’s ‘preferred’ representative is the funding body, rather than the representations of the marginalized (Lee, 2003:53).

On this matter the partnership agreements at both the national and local level have been supported by a narrative that promotes a ‘supportive state’, engaged in a willing and inclusive partnership with local organisations and was promoted as a new policy-making paradigm. However, Meade and O'Donovan (2002) remain sceptical, and critical about the level of genuine influence and whether this amounts to little more than institutionalised ‘self-censorship’. As community organizations become more accountable to state-led policy the ‘seamless line of co-ordination and control across the disparate strands of the community sector’ result in a loss of autonomy and identity as they became heavily reliant on the ‘benevolence of central government’ (Meade and O'Donovan 2002:4). Meade is cautious about partnership and warns that it can become a managerial project in which sectorial interests have no place, and that it is more likely to support participation by groups and interest groups ‘favoured’ by the government

(Meade, 2005:357). Vast numbers of participants in the voluntary sector have gained prominence through the Irish partnership process in its various forms, but many of these programmes have been narrow and short-lived and, while the ‘community and voluntary sector has been granted a voice at the policy making table, it lacks the credibility, the resources and the menace to use that voice persuasively’ (Meade, 2005:362).

For Bang and Sørensen, everyday makers respond to this challenge by creating ‘small narratives’ about how to make a difference at the local level. As one activist points out, the

way you engage yourself and the way in which you show your solidarity are different. I’ve seen how young people over the course of the last decade organise and involve themselves differently. ...the thing is they are engaged in ways that the older generation consider unconventional. It’s often a matter of getting involved in a concrete project and then getting involved 100 per cent for a short-period, and then they stop. They don’t participate in the long-term...I believe this is why they have a problem with the labour unions; they can’t activate the young because the opportunities that they provide are on-going...they last forever (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:152).

Everyday makers are critical of ‘organizational life in political parties,’ which tends to ‘praise dogmas rather than ideas’ (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:153). While their political involvement takes place at the most local level possible, as one interviewee, involved in arranging small events to soften tensions between Danes and immigrants said; ‘...of course it’s something to do with politics, because the problems emerging here are highly political ...’ (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:154).

However, everyday makers and expert activists remain pessimistic about whether democracy can be ‘rescued’. They may vote, but do not gain their identity from high politics, because they are much more interested in ‘their personal and common capacities for self and co-governance’. Little attention is given to forms of solidarity associated with the ‘old left’ or social movements (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:156). However, Bang and Sørensen also note that this does not mean that ‘a political culture of trust’ is bereft of political disagreements and / or struggle (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:157).

On this matter, Bang and Sørensen draw attention to Putnam's argument that a strong civic community requires 'a commitment to the common good' otherwise, 'life will degenerate to the pursuit of individual interests, undermining the building of social capital'. Bang and Sørensen's work provides insight into how the everyday makers' and expert citizens' view of the world suggests a move from hierarchy and centralism to be found in the interventionist state to dialogue and cooperation between public, private and voluntary managers (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:159). It is this issue of 'dialogue and cooperation' in a contested social setting that is of particular interest in this thesis as it seeks to understand the tension between individual and community identities. It is a matter upon which Bang and Sørensen point to a profound shift in practice, where there is a 'presence in social imaginary of a common destiny which links people together rather than to a notion of a common good' (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:160).

1.2 Cultural Encounters that Matter

Other approaches regard diversity as a creative element of the community-building puzzle, and a prerequisite to building meaningful long-term relationships. In other words

the more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusion, my opinion (Arendt, 1993:241, cited in Harwood, 2010:358).

This is because sustainable communities are supported by bringing representative thinking (Parekh, 2008) into new forms of social narrative; exercises in creative inquiry and collective social action. Such endeavours are more than just social activities that encourage 'bonding' or 'bridging', and therefore lead to civic engagement (Putnam, 1993). Neither are they merely 'patterns of interaction in everyday life', and therefore do not require people to behave any differently from normal (Ulsaner and Dekker, 2001:178). They are forms of agency that shape the cultural and social landscape in

which we dwell, that (re)negotiate an individual's lived experience through shared encounters that embrace diversity and regard contestation as opportunity for critical reflection and knowledge creation.

For a moment it is important to pause and consider the meaning of multiculturalism in the context of this research. This thesis follows Parekh's (2000) definition: multiculturalism is about 'cultural diversity or culturally embedded differences'. Parekh (2000) argues that when grappling with issues of sameness and difference there is often an additional desire to be accepted and to find equal representation within all domains of public and private life, but not at the expense of losing their a sense of identity: 'in their own different ways they [individuals] want society to recognize the legitimacy of their differences, especially those that in their view are not incidental and trivial but spring from and constitute their identities' (Parekh 2000: 1). In reference to the various movements and groups representing the interests of minority groups, such as ethnic minorities or new immigrants or gay men and lesbians, Parekh states that

although identity is something inflated to cover almost everything that characterizes an individual or a group, most advocates of these movements use it to refer to those chosen or inherited characteristics that define them as certain kinds of persons or groups and form an integral part of their self-understanding. These movements thus form part of the wider struggle for recognition of identity and difference or, more accurately, of identity-related differences (Parekh, 2000:1).

Parekh identifies a number of ways in which various groups work towards acceptance, respect and public affirmation of difference: the demand for equality and, therefore, not to be discriminated against, the changing of law, as well as a change in attitude and behaviours from the dominant groups within society. It is important to acknowledge that these issues of diversity are extremely contentious and complex and relate to

a struggle for freedom, self-determination and dignity and against contingent, ideologically biased and oppressive views and practices claiming false objectivity and universal validity. For their critics the demands represent moral cultural laissez-faire, a relativist rejection of

all norms and concern for truth, a shallow, self-indulgent and ultimately self-defeating celebration of difference for its own sake; in short, the ethic and politics of the unregulated will. The debate between the two in their extreme as well as moderate forms constitutes the substance of the discourse surrounding the politics of recognition (Parekh, 2000:2).

Here, issues concerned with difference, diversity and multiculturalism are fundamentally related to wider political, ideological and economic structures. As Parekh (2000) notes:

Identities are valued or devalued because of the place of their bearers in the prevailing structure of power, and their revaluation entails corresponding changes in the later ... (Parekh, 2000:3).

While acknowledging the controversial nature of the multicultural debate (see Parekh, 2000; Murphy, 2011; literature specific to Ireland: Fanning, 2007, 2011), it is important to consider also how issues concerned with power are refracted through the lived experience and change over time. How context and culture shape experience is a matter highlighted by Parekh:

Multiculturalism is not about difference and identity *per se* but about those that are embedded in and sustained by culture; that is, a body of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of people understand themselves and the world and organize their individual and collective lives. Unlike differences that spring from individual choices, culturally derived differences carry a measure of authority and are patterned and structured by virtue of being embedded in a shared and historically inherited system of meaning and significance (Parekh, 2000:3).

It is important, therefore, that space is created to understand and hear cultural voices when constructing and deconstructing the community-building puzzle.

When listening to the challenges associated with a diverse social setting it is important to appreciate the difficulties encountered in ‘social dynamics between strangers’, or ‘culture shock’: experiences that sometimes involve a level of uncertainty

and anxiety.³ Often in cross-cultural encounters, an individual or group's familiar frames of reference, customs and norms may be challenged. While this may present difficulties, it is possible to argue that during these encounters something positive can occur also.

This is a conversation continued by Montuori and Fahim (2004) who explore the work of Adler (1975). Adler suggests that cross-cultural experiences can also be an opportunity for personal growth. He emphasised that our cultural patterns are more often than not unconscious, reproduced with (out) thought (Adler 1975:14, cited in Montuori and Fahim, 2004:246). Furthermore, encounters with members of a group who are different can reveal these hidden dimensions to social life and offer opportunities to understand ourselves and others better. Adler, Montuori and Fahim suggest that when we engage with others, we can, through dialogue and observation, become aware of how we are 'products' of our cultural heritage. Becoming aware, as Adler points out, provides an opportunity for growth and development:

Although culture shock is most often associated with negative consequences, it can be an important aspect of cultural learning, self-development, and personal growth. The problems and frustrations encountered in the culture shock process are important to an understanding of change and movement experience ... Implicit in the conflict and tension posed by the transitional experience lies the potential for authentic growth and development (Adler 1975:15, cited in Montuori and Fahim, 2004: 246).

Adler's arguments align closely with those of Hall (1959), relevant because he notes that when we reflect on the differences and contrasts between our own culture and others, we uncover the deeper influences and meanings that motivate behaviour (Hall, 1959). In other words, the elements of culture that are unconsciously reproduced. As Block argues, it is also 'a set of beliefs, at times, ones that we are unaware of, that dictate how we think, how we frame the world, what we pay attention to, and consequently how we behave'

³ The term 'culture shock' was first coined by Oberg in the 1950s. He defined culture shock as: 'precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse' (Oberg, K. 1960, cited in Davidson, 2009).

(Block, 2008:29). Coming into contact with people who are different from us has the benefit of bringing these other dimensions of our lived experience to the fore. Not only do we learn something about others during such encounters, but importantly, we learn about ourselves as well.

1.3 Creativity and Place in the Community-Building Puzzle

Understanding the hidden dimensions to social life is a challenging task. Moving to a more positive experience of cross-cultural encounters requires a deeper knowledge of what it means to be, or relate to, a ‘stranger’. Issues of interpretation are central to understanding social dynamics within such settings. How we interpret the processes in which we are involved is important because our interpretations bring meaning into our lives (Bruner, 2002: xi). Moreover, interpretations are not constructed in isolation from our social, historical, economic and political context. The meaning we attach to specific encounters is therefore shaped by *shared understandings* that have developed over time. It follows, therefore, that gathering in shared spaces for dialogue and knowledge creation is a critical component to the community-building puzzle, because it is in these spaces that we make sense of our lives, as we (de) construct the meaning we attach to experiences such as *cultural shock*. It is in these shared spaces that community can be experienced.

The term ‘community’ is highly contested, with multiple meanings and expressions such as ‘locality, solidarity, shared beliefs and moral perspectives, common traditions and allied interests. It is possible to argue that community can also be understood in terms of reflexive spaces of social interaction and that it is in such transient, fluid and contested ‘spaces’ that community can be envisioned and built, or broken down and destroyed. Such interactions are social, and occur *in place*; they cannot be disassociated experiences and are therefore symbiotic experiences that integrate physical places, people and community (shared encounters).

Community here is a statement that acts as an invitation to explore how we can put places to work (Basso, 1996) and draws our attention to how spaces can become

representative places. These ideas focus attention upon the use of physical spaces, how tangible artefacts and objects, symbolize the potential to transform social encounters. Here, it is possible to consider the *element of the built and natural environment* in social development, in a way that is different from conventional thought.ⁱ Discussions about the nature of community have more often than not emphasised the role of place as either determining social life or as a socially constructed locality (Mahon, Fahy, and Ó Cinnéide, 2012). The observations that people may not actually have much to do with each other, even though they live in close proximity (Lee and Newby 1983:57), has led to less of a focus upon *place* in community studies, to one concerned with quality of local networks; whether they are strong or weak (Allan, 1996) and how they can be encouraged (see Gilchrist, 2009). While much of this kind of literature is useful, other aspects of the community-building puzzle are important, such as what takes place during such interactions as ‘networking’, or ‘bonding’, what it means to live together in community, and how people make homes in (un)familiar cultural landscapes. Pausing on these concerns draws attention to place being a complex setting, where history, culture, politics, environment, social and personal life either collide or interact.

In order to do this it became important to consider what takes ‘*place*’ within shared spaces; to consider what ‘space’ means in everyday life and how it is experienced. This involves considering how space and place are related. For Tuan, (1977) ‘space and place are basic components of the lived world, we take them for granted. When we think about them, however, they may assume unexpected meanings and raise question we have not thought to ask (Tuan, 1977:3). For him, ‘place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other’ (Tuan, 1977:3). What Tuan implies is that space and place are related through human experience. Spaces tend to be more general, non-specific; an empty canvas or an invitation to enter into a creative activity, whereas a place has been shaped by humans and therefore has definition, assumptions, culture, norms and associations. Furthermore, Tuan (1977) notes,

from the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Sometimes places are

spaces that feel constricted, limiting our imagination or creativity. On occasions we may long for the sense of freedom and potential that large spaces conjure, such as the Grand Canyon, or the open Atlantic sea stretching the imagination all the ways to the shores of the East Coast of America (Tuan, 1977:5).

There is, therefore, a dynamic interplay between the two. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is a pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place (Tuan, 1977:6). This led me to consider how creative ‘spaces’ could become something tangible and lasting. The journey through context, therefore, moved from place (with all its cultural and social associations) to space (creative opportunity for change) and back again to place (long-term development).

In order to understand more fully this set of ideas my research turned to the literature in the field of architecture to explore how the physical landscape shapes human experience (Alexander, 1979, 2002, 2005), how reclaiming and remaking public space increases participation and democracy (see Mattson, 1999). Reading literature on architecture did not result in a focus on urban design. Thinking about Alexander’s ideas, in particular, stimulated new insights into the role of the arts in social development. Alexander’s designs involve creating ‘living structures’ that enable ‘life to unfold’. He believes that architecture has the potential to ‘preserve and enhance wholeness’ through a process of ‘sequencing’ and ‘becoming’ (Alexander, 1979, 2002). Form thus emerges through an organic process of an unfolding relationship between the natural landscape and the ‘creator’, who perceives, feels and shapes design. By sequencing, Alexander means that each step in the process of bringing structures alive involves ‘one step emerging out of another’, and that it is the job of the architect to *discover* these sequences. What is important here is that the architect allows the patterns to emerge, rather than enforcing a preconceived design onto the landscape. These creative ideas very much influenced the literature that I subsequently became interested in, because I was able to relate these ideas, irrespective of how abstract they initially appeared, to what

was unfolding in the DRA. That people could creatively engage in shaping both their cultural, social and physical landscapes, but in a way that gives ‘voice’ to and responds sensitively to stories inherent in the land and its local history became a central focus. I was particularly interested in the symbiotic nature of this process and how such ‘acts’ can influence future sustainable development and maybe even affect the past, through processes of (re)enactment or public theatre.

Alexander appreciates the value of diversity, because ‘every living structure’ goes through a process that ‘is devoted, through adaptation, to making every part unique’ (Alexander, 2002:335). The idea that allowing shape to emerge through a process that inspires adaptation involves the recognition that all parts are connected (Alexander, 2002:338) and therefore one element of the evolving puzzle is not favoured over another. For me, these ideas resonated with the ethnographic research that was unfolding in the DRA, which had revealed the inherent potential in diversity. Furthermore, bringing what is sometimes regarded as opposites into form, through creative fusion, is something Alexander regards as essential to the process of creating ‘alive structures’. Here, he notes:

the creative work is to illuminate, to reveal what is already there... but this takes depth of perception and love... certainly profound knowledge of the nature of space and its structure. To do it, successfully, we are called upon to make another crucial revision in our views about the nature of things: We have always assumed that the process of creation is a process which somehow inserts entirely new structure into the world... in the form of inventions, creations, and so on. Living process teaches us that wholeness is always formed by a special process in which new structure emerges directly out of existing structure, in a way which preserves the old structure, and therefore makes the new whole harmonious (Alexander, 2002:339).

That the old and the new can create a living structured environment that is life enhancing is hugely exciting when considering the DRA’s changing landscapes. Furthermore, other insights are also useful:

The enigma is that something new, unique, previously unseen – even innovative and astonishing – arises from the extent to which we are able

to attend to what is there... and will lead to astonishing surprises (Alexander, 2002:340).

Moreover, it was possible that older traditional cultures and newcomers to the area could create something together, which made more sense when I combined Alexander's creativity with Block, who puts an emphasis upon the importance of creating the future in the present (Block, 2008:75). This allowed me to (re)conceptualise ideas concerned with social encounters being more than random opportunities for personal engagement and entertainment. They became a form of agency. Thus, I considered ideas about how both present and future experiences could be shaped by how we gather (method) and the quality of the space in which we gather. Quality is here defined as the 'process' of 'becoming', where each step allows the next to unfold, inspiring 'openness', dialogue and exploration of new and old experiences.

1.4 The Central Themes of the Thesis

Coupling Alexander's artistic concepts with literature that grounds such encounters in 'place', offered a rich and exciting focus for long-term development in a culturally diverse social setting. It was during research for chapters six, seven and eight that I turned to literature concerned with space and place. More significantly, the relationship between spaces, places and our lived experience (Tuan, 1977; Basso, 1996, Feld and Basso, 1996, Casey, 1996). It later also included the field of site-based performance (McAuley, 2006, 2007, 2008; Lewis, 2006; Birch and Tompkins, 2012), performance and site-based memory (Wilkie, 2007) and the role of theatre in eco-activism (Brown and Rose Crittenden, 2007).

While place is often used as a metaphorical or physical term (Tompkins, 2012:4), debate about place usually occurs in relation to the concept of space. Scholarship on place and space is immense, ranging across disciplines. Most notably it occurs in

anthropology (Feld and Basso, 1996; Gregory 1994), sociology⁴ (Gieryn, 2000; Gustafson, 2012; Mueller Worster and Abrams, 2005), geography (Harvey, 1993), philosophy (Malpas, 1999) and even in relation to cyberspace (Green, Harvey and Knox, 2005; Lemley, 2003). Important work in the field of gerontology is also relevant. Here, the practice of making sense of place and how ‘being in place’ evolves and changes over a life course (Rowles and Bernard, 2013:3-20; Rowles and Chaudhury, 2005; Rowles 2000) is pertinent to understanding aspects of the community-building puzzle in a contested setting.

Following the literature above, there are a number of interrelated areas of interest for the study concerned with public space, creativity and social development in a diverse social and cultural setting, the DRA. This thesis seeks to complement research into the value of private spaces and places such as the home and the meanings we attach to them (Rowles, 2000). However, rather than addressing change within private spaces, it focuses on the experience in public places, understood as ‘the world beyond the threshold’ (Peace, 2013:25). On these matters, Rowles and Bernard , for example, have argued that

Public and shared spaces are critical environments shaping the conduct of everyday life. Our use and identification with public spaces is an essential component of an overall sense of being in place. There are public places in which we feel safe, welcomed, and within which we can experience a sense of belonging and identification. Other public spaces are dangerous, hostile, and alienating. The design and ambiance of these spaces is a critical element in determining our ability or willingness to venture forth from the relative security our of residence (Rowles and Bernard, 2013:4).

This ethnographic work indicates that the fundamental reasons for social dislocation are crucially to do with development policies that diminish public spaces that are conducive to ‘gathering’. The focus here is upon how humans shape their public environment, transforming ‘undifferentiated spaces’ into meaningful places to live ‘as we

⁴ Most of the literature in sociology is concerned with debates on the conditions that either bring people together or estrange them (see Sennett, 1994; for a review of this literature see Choldin, 1978, Fischer, 1975).

get to know it and endow it with value' (Tuan, 1977:6). Moreover, this thesis contends that if people develop a sense of place and connectedness to their local environment, it may be possible to find meaningful ways to overcome challenging social circumstances, such as those identified by Putnam.

Development within the DRA took place without the necessary public amenities to service new demographically diverse settlements. This research follows attempts by community members to cope and respond to changes influenced by major urban development from 2000- 2009. It provides a range of experiences over a four-year period that, in turn, highlights the necessity of government policy to support development narratives that put *public spaces conducive to community gathering centre stage*. It draws on local experiences that indicate it is possible to (re)shape a sense of place within social dislocated environments through the use of creativity, diversity and difference that transform spaces into alive, conducive places for community gathering.⁵

Of import is the way in which public places shape individual and social change, stimulate agency and create meaningful encounters that matter. From such place-based gatherings, more positive possibilities and a better quality of life can be inspired. Importantly, the thesis is concerned also with how public spaces can provide opportunities for new forms of identify formation, potentially reconciling tensions that may exist between individuals and groups. It draws on local experiences that suggest it is possible to (re)shape a sense of place in a socially dislocated environment by engaging socially in creative, cultural and natural landscapes. It draws our attention to a radical need to *reclaim nature and culture within places for community gathering in future development models*.

In particular, two kinds of public spaces are important to social life: artistic 'alive' spaces, which inspire dialogue, personal development and shared experiences, as well as physical spaces that are wild, open and natural ('unfinished') that are vital within a

⁵ Clearly the familiar features of work, employment, money and opportunity are crucial, but this research is largely concerned with the above.

community. This relates to the idea that unfinished spaces invite *possibility*, and are not *constrained*, such as those that are ‘finished’, ‘manicured’, closed or ‘tamed’. Both symbolically and literally, these spaces offer all members of a community the opportunity to feel part of the environment within which they dwell. Within these spaces, individuals meet as equals; they can communicate and share moments. Importantly, through shared interaction these spaces become places where the future can be built.

Tentative though the findings in this research are, they nevertheless identify a desire and willingness among diverse groups to develop relationships, to engage in the community-building puzzle, rather than ‘hunker down’. While building social capital is a valuable asset, social settings where there are a range of disparate groups and individuals attempting to build homes in an unfamiliar landscape (such as the DRA), requires a more complex understanding of social action, one that appreciates that gathering together to build shared futures, also involves conducive spaces for individual expression and cultural recognition. While this thesis does not seek to explore in depth the debates about social capital, there are a number of interesting points to consider. Bang and Sørensen’s critique of social capital provides important insight into how newly emerging forms of social action between multiple actors, as well as ‘lay actors, pursue a variety of different tactics’ (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:159). This suggests that social action is multifaceted, not necessarily reliant on similarity; it gives space for difference, and is accepting of contestation. Importantly, the effectiveness of much of the social action that has unfolded in the DRA, may indicate newly emerging forms of social action that are similar to Bang and Sørensen’s everyday makers, particularly given their emphasis upon the gathering of ordinary citizens in spaces where diversity and difference are ‘respected, exalted, given expression, and listened to’ (Bang and Sørensen, 1999:339).

This research has a fundamentally different starting point to that of Putnam: ethnographic and participatory research has uncovered that many people in the DRA regard diversity as a creative element of the community-building puzzle and a prerequisite to building meaningful long-term relationships. In other words

the more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusion, my opinion (Arendt, 1993:241, cited n Harwood, 2010:358).

Drawing upon these ideas this study follows a group of people in the DRA revealing how they were open to new experiences, willing to learn from 'others' and, in so doing, how they shape a representative place-based community that values the creative potential inherent in diversity.

However, key to much of the work undertaken in the DRA is the concept of sustainable development, understood here as practices in the present that take into consideration the past, as well as appreciating future generations. In so doing, this research highlights a point downplayed in Bangs and Sørensen's research; it highlights another dimension to the community-building puzzle: that development takes time and requires a creative method of inquiry that supports new forms of gathering in public places. Importantly, it highlights that it is not just about getting projects done (hit and run), but also about the *process*. Social activism, therefore, offers an extremely valuable opportunity for understanding ourselves in relation to others; it provides context for representative thinking and spaces for critical dialogue.

In contrast to Putnam's pessimism about 'spending times with strangers', this research reveals grounds for optimism that such relations can form the basis from which to forge community relationships and reduce social dislocation: specifically, this research highlights that *diversity* and *difference* should not act necessarily as a barrier to community-building. But in order to investigate this we need from the outset to detail a different approach, one that seeks to explore the lived experience of people living in a multicultural community. This is not to suggest that this is a process without challenges between individuals and groups from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, but the projects examined here provide valuable insight into how these may be overcome.

1.5 Overarching Aim

The overarching aim of this thesis is to understand the palette of complex ways in which a diverse community in Ireland responds to its challenges. This research, therefore, offers important insights into novel approaches to the challenges presented in the DRA's changing social and cultural landscape. This is an exploration of change itself, how individuals responded and, in turn, shape *further change*, especially in relation to experiences of social dislocation. This work is not based on a large sample of multiple accounts, but explores how a few groups of people came together to explore *diversity* and *difference*. In so doing, extremely important insights are gained that may be relevant within a larger context.

Apart from elevating the role of public places in the community-building puzzle, the important insights that grew out of this research are concerned with methods for critical inquiry and practice. It explores novel approaches to community gathering that utilise the power of group methodologies to create psychological and emotional spaces for dialogue, and echoes Block's (Block 2008:75) argument, that every gathering needs to be an example of the future we want to create. Furthermore, this research explores creative methods for action research. A form of ethnography that uses the craft of performance, is place-based (utilising local historical narratives) and uses various creative methods for cultural exchange and dialogue (group methodologies) is developed. This approach challenged social constructions that constrain expression and provided space for the renegotiation of values, attitudes and conventions through critical education and creative dialogue. Key to the success of such an approach is the use of the imagination (not least visioning, role playing, story-telling and performance) to both understand our sense of place and develop new cultural landscapes that reflect present day circumstances and needs. This process involves being engaged with the sequencing of community life over an extended period, while at the same time working creatively to discover new ways for change and potential to be realized.

An Alternative Gathering: Public Space and Shared Agency in Multicultural Ireland, is divided into eight chapters. Chapter two, *The Case for Artful Sociology*, focuses on the methodology adopted. It outlines how a creative turn evolved in the social development projects in the DRA which required a novel approach to research that combined creative patterns of inquiry and a form of action research called performance ethnography. It identifies the approaches undertaken and the kind of projects participated in over the four year research duration.

Chapter three, *Shifting Landscapes*, provides a brief backdrop to the impact of change and how the community coped and responded. It details the transformation of the physical and social landscape, the emergence of urban sprawl and the associated social fragmentation. The chapter is a glimpse into the past, as it pauses for a while on the experiences of people who have been living in the area for a long time, in order to provide flavour of what Irish life was like before development in 2000.

Chapter four: *The Setting for the ‘Gathering’: Public Policy in Ireland*, briefly outlines public policy developments, with some of the material and ideational forces that have been refracted through the DRA lived experience. The chapter seeks to fully appreciate the social dimension to public policy. Here, we need to recognize that social processes do not only have their genesis in individual or shared experience, but in underlying forces that shape the predicaments people face. The DRA provides a case study of how a group of residents struggle to lobby local government to resolve infrastructural issues such as drainage, sewage problems, inadequate roads, lighting and the blight of a ‘ghost estate’. As well as highlighting the kind of adversity experienced by residents, the chapter demonstrates that development projects take time to evolve, can meander, ‘go up cul-de-sacs’ that are not successful, but nevertheless involve engagements that ‘matter’ to people, sustaining experiences that are positive for the future.

Chapter five, *New Forms of Gathering*, details aspects of the community-building puzzle often downplayed: the cultural dimension to social development. This chapter

follows how residents reacted to change, pointing to emerging practices that reflect novel ways of understanding the residents' lived experience in a diverse social setting. The ethnographic work in the DRA revealed that much of this social action followed a pathway that shifted from a focus upon material needs, such as services and infrastructure, to one concerned with new forms of social gathering that reframes negative challenges into opportunities, allowing for creative dialogue. Here, I attempt to understand the incredible work achieved to create new landscapes of belonging in the DRA through the creation of a school, community centre and a park. By briefly outlining how public space was reclaimed from development practices that left large areas of 'wasteland' in the DRA landscape, I explore how barren neglected spaces were transformed into these meaningful places for community gathering. This overview provides the backdrop for a more detailed consideration of the concept of creative community spaces and ideas of 'being in place', explored in chapter six, seven and eight.

Chapter six, *The World Café Experience*, demonstrates the use of abstract 'space' for developing a shared understanding of long-term development. Within a group context World Café is more than just a meeting place. The approach uses creative methods to enable people to explore how a range of social patterns (often articulated through common narratives) either shape or constrain their experience. In other words, it is a creative approach that appreciates how habitual thinking (problems) or pre-conceptions (norms, customs, opinions, and notions) can hinder our engagement with the future. World Café is a socio-psychological process that challenges a world view (social context), rather than just an opportunity to address and document challenges individuals may experience. Our approach was a critical, reflexive invitation to change, which places value on agency through shared experience, while situating these engagements within the context of social, economic and political contexts. We explored these concerns within a practical format with a view to bringing about real life-enhancing change.

Chapter seven, '*Getting Back into Place': The Experience of Friends of Merlin Woods*', addresses the relationship people have with place and, in particular, one type of

public place: a natural space, known locally as Merlin Woods, where I want to explore the complex interaction between space, place, agency and change. The principal focus of this chapter is the way in which residents of DRA have attempted to create a convivial place in which to build the daily routines of life that make community. Following Marsh and Furlong (2002) it recognizes that people are reflexive agents: that they interpret structure, reflect upon it and, in so doing, engage in the process of change. What is important here is how ideas are reproduced, and how they play a role in stability and change (lived experience) within the DRA. This research reveals that the relationship individuals have with their local environments is also a reflexive practice. It examines how physical landscapes and environments shape experience, as well as how individuals can, in turn, shape their environment to affect experience. In particular an argument is presented for proliferating ‘a-live’ public spaces, conducive to community gathering as well as contexts for exploring new future possibilities for community building. Physical public spaces alone do not build social relationships; what are required are processes to inspire engagement within such spaces.

Chapter eight, is entitled *Public Space Theatre as a Form of Gathering: the Role of the Arts in the Community Building Puzzle*. This chapter suggests that public theatre offers a social ‘space’ that is more than a creative form of expression or performance; it can offer individuals, and communities, including people with different values, invaluable and constructive opportunity to encounter one another. The World Café experience was a participatory project that employed creative group methodologies to explore shared views about living in a community, identifying both a need for increased services for young people in the area and for structured social events that encourage cross-cultural encounters. Three related issues were prioritised: the importance of how we gather (method), the quality of the experience and the need for social development projects that provide uplifting, rewarding energetic exchanges (June, 19th 2012). Importantly, it illuminated the need for further research to discover a structured way to

embrace diversity and difference. This chapter explores how public theatre can provide the symbolic and physical space from which the World Café findings can be realized.

Through an exploration of place-based performance and story-telling, the chapter combines both the creative element of ‘*space*’ and the enduring aspect of ‘*place*’. In so doing, it sheds light also on other interesting insights: the importance of creativity in the community-building puzzle, the role of the imagination in stimulating agency and change. Importantly, it follows a group of teenagers as they attempt to make sense out of unfamiliar social and cultural landscapes and how they develop a sense of belonging in a socially dislocated setting. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part provides the narratives from which the Youth theatre project evolved. The second part is an overview of the group’s main performance: *An Táin*. Part three is an analysis of the contribution ‘making theatre’ has had for the community.

Chapter 2

The Case for Artful Sociology and its Methods

This research is not an exhaustive account of development in the DRA. Nor do I seek to elevate any particular person's interpretation of their lived experience over any other: the contrasting difficulties of unemployment, living with a disability or being an asylum seeker, for example. My task is to explore the social engagements of a number of people over a four year period who sought to address the challenges associated with building relationships in a socially diverse context. The first part of the thesis provides a sample of local interpretations of a changing social and physical landscape in the DRA and the policy context that shaped change. This is followed by an outline of a range of responses to change by the Fearann Ri, Fionnusce, Caistlean Thorlaigh Residents Association, the Good Shepherd Parish, the DRA Development Company Ltd., and Merlin Woods Primary School.

The second part of the thesis draws upon the creative element to social life. This includes events organised by the Connect Festival and the Ghana Union, the World Café experience, the role of public theatre in community life and the importance of crafting public spaces for meaningful encounters (*Friends of Merlin Woods*). From the outset, it is important to recognise that these responses are not presented as a panacea to all of life's problems; rather they are examples from which we may learn something about life in a complex social setting. The projects bring to the fore the more abstract elements to social life, not because they are necessarily more important, but because they are sometimes less palpable. Nonetheless, in my view, they are central to how and why people gather and the quality of the futures they create. They bring to our attention 'what matters' to people (Sayer, 2011), which can often be lost in a development narrative in which people become statistics, a category or problem to be solved. This work takes an altogether different slant, giving space to the local experience, and reveals new patterns

of inquiry that give a voice to the imaginative social element in sustainable development (the craft of performance and the arts).

This thesis therefore has a crucial subjective element, and following Geertz concedes that

the artist works with his audience's capacities – capacities to see, or hear, or touch, sometimes even to taste and smell, with understanding. And although elements of these capacities are indeed innate – it usually helps not to be colour-blind- they are brought into actual existence by the experience of living in the midst of things to look at, listen to, handle, think about, cope with, and react to... art and the equipment to grasp it are made in the same shop (Geertz, 1993:118).

Here, Geertz explores the role of signs and symbols ('how signs signify') within our social and physical landscape and how they 'play a role in the life of a society, or some part of a society' (Geertz, 1993:118). Geertz references art as being a part of a social and cultural system, acknowledging that it is often difficult to understand art without being culturally equipped. As such, he raises the importance of local knowledge systems.

If we follow this line of thought an important question arises: to what extent is this thesis shaped by *my* own interests and experiences? Where do we draw the academic line of inquiry? Why didn't I spend more time exploring other kinds of very important issues, such as unemployment or class? So, how was I culturally equipped to recognise the signs and symbols that enabled me to 'grasp' development in the DRA? How much did I develop my own sense of 'belonging', as I became increasingly involved in 'local knowledge, and therefore, at what point did I become a participant rather than a 'researcher'?

In order to understand whether I am 'culturally equipped' to recognise the shift in development processes towards the role of the arts in understanding the community-building puzzle, it is important to provide a brief explanation of my own past. From the outset I should declare my interest. I was a fine art painter immersed in the love of landscape and nature at Bristol Art College, where I started a life-long passion for the

abstract and, in particular, a love of searching for moments of inspiration in unusual places. My practice as an artist was such that I developed a particular outlook in the world based on my experience of painting. I was particularly concerned with the space in between objects and things. These forms were the topic of my work, rather than the object themselves. Certainly, as a concept this idea stayed with me, and has very much influenced my approach in many walks of life. I am profoundly interested in what ‘goes on’ at the margins, on the edges, how the spaces *in-between* things are the key to sustaining relationships. My interests are moved by the fluid, transient nature of life and the processes that sustain a mirage of stability. Not surprisingly, I recognised a theme developing in the DRA that is documented here: creative spaces and places emerge as transformational contexts in which stability is experienced, even if it is fleeting.

When pressed further, it seems a natural progression for my thesis to embrace ideas of displacement and migration, given that I travelled a lot when younger. Of note was my trip from Atlanta City to New Mexico, up then to New York, through Connecticut to a small East coast island called Block Island. It was here that I helped organise a festival to pay tribute to ‘fallen Native American warriors’ who had died during colonisation. The power of this event to unify the different nations (Native American) in attendance was tremendous. That dance, music, poetry, storytelling and socialising could be used as a way of changing the past and reconnecting the future highlighted the enormous social significance of the performing arts. In addition, my travel companions during this trip were of a Native bloodline; they taught me indelible lessons in perception, the importance of culture, heritage and how to live wisely with the land.

All of these experiences (and more) may have made me more sympathetic to the social processes that unfolded within the DRA. Other researchers may have identified alternative themes. I followed a more artistic line of inquiry. However, sometimes we learn more about a person by what they leave out of these descriptions (that I have been a single parent for 21 years, that I was adopted, that I have worked in many different

socially disadvantaged contexts and so on) rather than what we put in. I also, therefore, have experiences outside of the artistic.

Being aware of the interconnectedness of communicative inquiry required me to approach the ethnographic task as a *craft*. This involved being in a shared experience, while at the same time keeping an ‘eye’ on the patterns that emerged from such a social and symbolic collaborative exercise. Importantly, I also had to be cautious of my personal interests and actions. My previous experience of working as a freelance journalist writing a weekly column for a local newspaper for nearly five years (as well as a number of feature items for the *Irish Times*), helped in this process. The topics I wrote were wide and varied, but all were concerned with the health and well-being of individuals within a community. This experience is important, for it brought me in contact every week with individuals whom I interviewed sometimes for hours at a time. For me, the task of capturing another’s experience was key to the success of my ‘story’. These interactions I believe provided a training ground. However, one incident is of particular import. On some occasions I recorded the interview, on others I wrote only notes. I always gave a copy to interviewees to read before it was published. Of utmost importance was that they felt that they had been represented fairly. One day I got a very distressed phone call from a woman who was outraged that I had ‘mis-quoted’ her. I was distraught with guilt. I was also surprised, as I felt sure that the topic to which she was referring I understood. Fortunately, I went back to a recording and found that my interpretation was fair. When I discussed this further with the woman, she broke down and said, ‘I may have said thatbut that is not what I meant...’. My ability as a writer, to capture what she was ‘saying’, was intact – but, clearly I had failed to catch the essence of what she had really *wanted* to say.

Such experiences affected this research in two profound ways: first, there was always going to be a risk in presenting someone else’s experience, words or aspirations. Indeed, one has to be brave even to attempt it, and most certainly there has to be a awareness that most of the time you will fail to catch the nuances at play when engaged

in the communicative process. Nevertheless, it is still, for me, both as a writer and artist, one of the most exciting and rewarding pursuits in life. Certainly, the experience revealed the complexities inherent, not just in the art of journalism, but in the art of life itself.

My experience of writing others' stories demonstrates that the eclectic fusion of writing through interpretation is complex, but potentially rewarding. Some tools for communicative inquiry are more expressively liberating than others. Poetry, for instance, may reveal more over five stanzas than can be assembled in a full academic thesis. Equally, it may be completely opaque to those unfamiliar with a particular genre of verse. Mixed mediums are therefore used throughout this research (narrative, photography, story-telling, film-making, performance, workshops), to help overcome a one-dimensional understanding of the social world.

These trips into my past are key to understanding the methodological process that I undertook in the DRA, as they emphasise my second point, that while I hope to give justice to the academic project, it is important to acknowledge that I was engaged in a creatively inspired process of enquiry that puts people first. Our projects were not just about producing 'good' art, or even exceptional research for that matter. Our priority was for the community to benefit in some meaningful way, captured in Finley's suggestion that, 'we should keep at the forefront that we serve the dual purpose of unveiling oppression and transforming praxis' (Finley, 2011:441).

Our project used a combination of skills, from in-depth local knowledge to professional expertise such as those offered by Conal Kearney, a fully qualified drama therapist, director and actor and Chris Taylor, a World Café trainer (to name but a few). The use of professionally trained individuals helped overcome the accusation that arts-based research may appear 'amateurish' (Blumenfield-Jones 2008). Although a sense of 'professionalism' was aspired to, the priority was that the people involved would benefit from the 'crafting' of the projects experience. The term professional, therefore, referred to taking a 'caring', holistic approach, rather than 'expert' or 'authority led'.

Taking an ethnographic approach at the beginning of the project was important. Initially I gave space for all kinds of encounters to take shape on my research pages. I took considerable time detailing work being done in the area, such as the Fearann Ri, Fionnusisce, Caistlean Thorlaigh (FFC) Residents Association and the important contribution made by members of the DRA Development Company Ltd, to secure key services and infrastructural projects (such as a community centre, parks and schools). Now that these structural projects are in place, what has evolved is the role of creativity in the long-term community-building puzzle. The themes that I concentrate upon look to the future, but with a deep appreciation of the past.

Taking an arts-based approach to resolve some of the challenges associated with change in the DRA was set in motion by larger community activities. It was not *my* inspiration. It was initially generated through events at the Good Shepherd Parish that later continued through the Friends of Merlin Woods, Connect Festival, Ghanaian Union and The Family Resource Centre cultural activities. These activities occurred outside of the projects in which I was directly involved (World Café experience and Youth Theatre project). I believe that this is testament to a *creative turn* to community-building in the DRA. I was lucky that these local endeavors reflected my own interests, as it gave me valuable time to consider a subject matter that I am passionate about.

In sum, there are two things that this trip into my past highlights: first, that although it is possible to argue that my own artistic interests brought experience and a degree of creativity to the projects studied here, I would like to emphasise how the ethnographic work evolved over a four year period as an organic social process driven initially by *the residents encountered*. My ‘active’ input into these creative processes occurred from 2011 onwards, when I became a key mentor and facilitator for Project 2022 and the World Café experience, sharing my skills and knowledge with members of the community. I became the person who ‘held’ the projects together as the people used this space to explore novel ways of communicating and building community.

This leads me to a further essential point: understanding ourselves takes time, quite apart from the task of trying to understand another. Building lives together also takes time for there are no quick answers to long-term development. There is only the sweat and tears of trial and error, the recovery and the lessons learnt. I have learnt to cherish these experiences as building blocks to a more rewarding future. I attempted to move between both worlds of the ‘academic’ project and of social creator (participant) both to support the work being undertaken by the community, and contribute to a deeper understanding of how the familiar intersects with the unfamiliar, how contradictions can become aligned and how perceptions, such as problems, when explored in conducive shared spaces, can become meaningful opportunities. In so doing, the art of ethnography found shape in my work.

2.1 Why Ethnography?

The task of describing the social world is immense. My work was interested in how the future was being built in a shifting social and economic landscape. Writing about such a setting is problematic because it is often difficult to provide an overview that is ‘representative’. Having worked on a voluntary basis in the area before I started my PhD (from 2008), I was familiar both with a number of people that were instrumental in the development process and how this was being addressed (namely individuals involved in the DRA Development Company, Ltd; The Good Shepherd Parish; Family Resource Centre; Afro-Renaissance; Castlegar Hurling Club; as well as residents who were involved in setting up the new Parish centre and petitioning for a local school in the area).

The starting point was to watch, listen and learn as these individuals went about their day to day business, which meant that I had to be sensitive and non-invasive. I was struck by the passion and commitment of these individuals. At the same time, being an inquisitive soul, I was aware that there was also a need to be ‘risky’ enough to discover some of the less obvious jewels hidden beneath these day to day encounters. My first task was to plot the actions of these individuals and place their work as corner stones to

my interpretation of events. Within this setting what unfolded was a form of action ethnography, rooted firmly in a form of creative participant inquiry.

One of the key commitments I made early on in the research was that the people whom I was studying should benefit from the process. This involved more than just reporting and evaluating, it drew upon forms of ethnographic social engagement and involved what has been termed ‘participatory action research’.

Ethnography is part of an interpretative tradition. The interpretative tradition is concerned with *understanding*. Ethnographers focus on the *meaning* that actions have for agents; they tend to use qualitative evidence and offer their results as one *interpretation* of the relationship between the social phenomena studied (Marsh and Furlong, 2002:21). Interpretivists challenge the notion that the world can be understood independently from experience. They emphasize the need to study social constructions; how people understand, interpret and act in their world (the lived experience). Interpretivists focus on the meaning behind behaviour, on understanding. Importantly, interpretation takes place within a theoretical context, a dominant world-view and the observer’s interpretation of reality (their views) affects the study. How these dynamics affect social relations, as well as the researcher, is important to interpretivists, who stress the ways in which dynamics are multifaceted in both time and space. The methodological tools used include case studies, in-depth interviews, narrative inquiry, historical analysis, documentary work and the collection of personal constructs. In contrast to quantitative methods that study large samples, qualitative research often focuses on a single (or a few) example (s) with a view to obtaining a more in-depth understanding of the subject or topic. Qualitative methods will often look for contradictions and differences as a way of understanding a given phenomenon. Researchers are interested in conflicting realities and qualitative data often reflects the myriad different expressions of social experience; they examine connections, inter-relationships and patterns between relationships and influences.

Much of the criticism directed toward qualitative methods can be understood more easily in the context of a debate with quantitative methods, where it is the ability to

replicate and compare data from which generalisations can be established (Devine, 1995:141). Here, qualitative methods are viewed as ‘soft’ and depicted as unreliable. The emphasis in quantitative research is placed firmly on the sampling design. Qualitative samples, however, tend to be more ‘loosely defined’ and fewer in number. Critics of this approach argue that qualitative research is unstructured and, due to the ‘participatory’ nature of the methodology, results and interpretation of data are influenced by the subjectivity of the researcher. Thus, they argue that it is difficult to replicate and make generalisations from qualitative studies (Bryman, 2008:392).

Another line of criticism is the subjective nature of many of the methodological tools used by qualitative researchers. They argue that interviewers clearly perform an active role in the interview process. Subjects, for instance, may often wish to please, offering responses perceived to be what the interviewer is looking for. As Devine notes, this may involve ‘shows of bravado’ or attempts to impress (Devine, 1995:143). Furthermore, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note that experiments and survey interviews are social occasions, subject to processes of symbolic interpretation and social interaction. Qualitative approaches are also criticised on the role of interpretation and for lack of transparency and validity. Many forms of ethnographic research, for instance, rarely produce transcripts in full. Critics argue that it is extremely difficult to work out how or why a researcher arrived at a particular interpretation (Devine, 1995:145). Fielding argues that poor qualitative methodology is unreflective and simply amounts to descriptions without a particular ‘line of inquiry’ (cited in Devine, 1995:145).

This thesis argues the case that both traditional ethnography and performance ethnography are valuable methods for research in a contested social setting. This is because they involve the study of people’s behaviour, beliefs, culture and interactions within their natural settings. Because time is spent in the field, ethnography is an ideal research method for understanding the ‘way a culture or group of people live and engage’ and it tends to be holistic, rather than mechanistic (Mathews and Sutton, 2004:103). It considers relationships between influences, rather than one element in isolation. It also

immerses the researcher in the social life being studied. Thus, Brewer (cited in Mathews and Sutton, 2004:103) points out that

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting if not also in the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed’(Brewer, 2000:6).

Terms such as participant observation, ethnography, and fieldwork are phrases often used interchangeably. In each case an extended period of time is taken to watch and talk with people with a view to understanding what is being done and said within a specific context. Research data is gathered in natural settings. Informal, non-invasive and sometimes interactive observation and research methods are used. It prioritises in-depth research, rather than large quantities of different case studies and proffers descriptive accounts (Seale, Gobo, Gubrum, Silverman, 2004; Matthews, Sutton, 2004).

Ethnography uses both participant and non-participant observation. Participant observation refers to a mixture of observation and interviewing techniques. The aim is to understand how people feel, what they believe and to try to make sense of the complex social relationships at play within a social setting. Participant observation does not mean simply ‘participating’ (for instance fishing with fishermen), but refers to the interactions and observations made with the people being studied as they participate in their activities (Seale, Gobo, Gubrum, Silverman, 2004). Not all ethnographic work involves observation. It may also involve structured or semi-structured interviews, or the use of documentary sources. Ethnography is used to explore many aspects of social life, including cultural knowledge, the detailed investigation of patterns of social interaction or holistic analysis of societies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983:1). Ethnography also bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life. Some see this as its strength - others see it as a weakness. However, proponents of this form of research argue that only through ethnography can the meanings that give form and content to social processes be understood.

From 2009, I was engaged in more traditional forms of ethnographic inquiry, such as the method of participant observation developed in Edmondson's (2012) research. This entailed an intensive, on-going four-year engagement with the community, during which I developed long-term relationships with a number of people. This enabled me to develop a more detailed account of the complex connections between people, and the shared nature of meaning (contested codes and representations) in ordinary lives. These aspects of day to day life are not something easily observed or identified, and therefore it is imperative to develop a 'sense' of such practices over a long period of time.

Spending large amounts of time in 'the field' also allows for a cross-referencing of experience, by making comparisons, returning to the scene, and by being immersed in a particular activity over a number of months. All of this amounts to a more in-depth picture of social life being painted. It also enables for periods of reflection upon contradictions, not as something negative, but more as an inherent feature of life. By not being forced by time, contradictions can become something to explore, rather than resist in the pursuit of clarity. This approach was central to all research activity conducted throughout this research.

Ethnography is particularly useful as a research method when studying complex social processes such as power dynamics and competing interpretations of reality. How to study practically and write about this is something to which Edmondson (2012) has drawn our attention. While she argues that an ethnographer has to 'learn to live in a society', she maintains that it is impossible to see it entirely 'through the eyes of the inhabitants'. Ethnographers are, for Edmondson, attempting to understand and map social interactions that people living in a society are under obligation to enact spontaneously. She argues that a discussion of such ordinary encounters ethnographically offers 'a partial translation of how people in a setting live' (Edmondson, 2012:80; see also Asad, 1986). This partial view is not insignificant, for there is no such thing as a 'whole truth'. We may work toward an understanding of the truth, but it can never be completely achieved because it is always contested. As truth breaks down, and

is (re)constructed in the ‘eye of the beholder’, it is therefore the ethnographer’s job to slip inside this space and ‘sense’ what is happening. In this manner, Back’s work is useful for this is a kind ‘live sociology’, one that is

able to attend to the fleeting, distributed, multiple and sensory aspects of sociality through research techniques that are mobile, sensuous and operate from multiple vantage points. If researchers enact reality, rather than simply reflect it, there is an opportunity to create sociological forms of representation that are more knowing and innovative than their antecedents (Back, 2012:18).

During 2011 a shift occurred and this research became more aligned to a form of action research called ‘performance ethnography’. Whereas previously I had concentrated on more traditional forms of ethnographic work, such as working alongside key drivers for change and participating in a number of projects and events organized by the Good Shepherd Parish, Merlin Woods School and the Castlegar Hurling Club, what then evolved was a more creative approach to social development in the area, which allowed me to become more directly involved. In turn this provided a rich opportunity to use arts-based research methods. This approach evolved out of action research methods that were being used in the community.

Action research is multidisciplinary and seeks to ‘bring together action and reflection, theory and practice’. It is conducted in participation with others in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people and, more generally, the improvement of individual persons and their communities (Reason and Bradley, 2001:1). The common feature of action research is the notion of knowledge being socially constructed ‘...and, recognizing that all research is embedded within a system of values and promotes some model of human interaction, we commit ourselves to a form of research which challenges unjust and undemocratic economic, social and political systems and practices’ (Brydon-Miller et al, 2003:11). For the history, theory and practice of action research see: Greenwood and Levin (2007); Stringer (2007) and Reason and Bradbury (2008).

This type of research seeks to empower participants in positive change where the guiding principles are: ‘(a) sharing power in the inquiry and learning process; (b) combining “expert” and “local” knowledge to meet goals; (c) centralizing co-researcher values in the goals process, and use of produced knowledge; (d) raising consciousness through the inquiry process that, in turn, informs action; and (e) embedding sustainability via the individual development of participants and community improvements’ (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Reardon, 1998 cited in McDowell and Fang, 2007:560).

I drew upon a number of action research methods through activities such as: fund-raising, the formation of resident associations and a community website called oscail.org, workshops, training, mentoring and organising community meetings. These endeavours had the following aspirations: involving community members collaboratively in the inquiry process, reflexive personal development that involved constant reflection of my bias and the positioning of power dynamics in the project’s life-course (McDowell and Fang (2007), and a commitment to long-term development in the area. Central to all of these approaches was a commitment to build trust, which involved considerable time developing meaningful working relationships with as many community members as possible. This required spending time in casual conversations, ‘passing the time of day’, being aware of other people’s personal challenges and being ‘open and inviting’. This cannot be forced or contrived and often demands time in which ‘nothing is achieved’, just being present. This is the ordinary life of the DRA. I began to hear phrases such as ‘Oh, yes we know Anna, she is one of us at this stage’, though I acknowledge that we never really fully belong, I accept that such narratives are often used as a form of welcoming and acceptance. I realized then that something had shifted from me being perceived as researcher, to becoming a participant in the creative exercise of community life. This took many years and herein lays one of the biggest lessons I learnt: this kind of research cannot be rushed, squeezed into an academic calendar, and involves a great deal of care.

2.2 Performance Ethnography

I prefer a form of action research called *performance ethnography* for two important reasons.⁶ First, what is different about performance ethnography to other forms of action research is that artistic forms are central to the method; they are used for exploration and discovery, as well as for stimulating change (Brown and Crittenden, 2007). Second, this approach develops over a long period of immersion in the social context being studied, and draws upon traditional ethnographic activities. In the approach developed here, there is a commitment to ‘create’ or change circumstances for the benefit of those participating. During this research I developed a form of ethnography that uses the craft of performance, is place-based (utilizing local historical narratives) and uses various creative methods for cultural exchange and dialogue (group methodologies). This approach challenged social constructions that constrain expression and provides space for the renegotiation of values, attitudes and conventions through critical education and creative dialogue (see Alexander, 2005 and Denzin, 2003).

Performance ethnography can draw on many different artistic forms including theatre, dance, art, storytelling, poetry and music. Engaging people in these activities is central. This method is an emerging qualitative method of inquiry that uses theatre as an active ingredient, not just as a form of performative entertainment or cultural form. I am particularly interested in theatre as a craft, a space for research and as a venue for participatory action research and social change (Alexander, 2005; Finley, 2005).

Performance ethnography is perfectly suited to develop methods of research that reflect the place that it is being enacted, while at the same time offering critical moments for growth and change. This is because ‘making performances in sites marked by their own histories of occupation and use means that artists and spectators experience these

⁶ This approach developed organically throughout the period of study. However, since I have engaged in this process I have discovered a really exciting field of study emerging across many different disciplines: performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003; Alexander, 2005; Finley, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) and site-based performance (See Birch, 2006, Tompkins, 2012; McAuley, 2006; Dwyer, 2006 and Lewis, 2006).

places in new ways' (McAuley, 2006:17). Site-based performance researchers emphasise that places

raise questions about memory and about group and individual identity: who we are is intimately bound up with where we are, and where we come from. Performing in place brings to the fore the nature of inhabitation: what it means to live in / with a place, and what it means to be inhabited by a place (McAuley, 2006:17).

These kinds of insights are useful when trying to understand change in the DRA's shifting economic and social landscapes. It is important to acknowledge that the performance ethnography that I have developed is situated in an economic and social context that appreciates the struggles of place-based narrative and power interests. As a method, it is a form of social activism that regards respect, equality and environmental conservation as key drivers for change. While performances may challenge us to (re) think and develop new ways of understanding such aspirations, they underpin many of the ethical dimensions of the work.

Key to the success of such an approach is the use of the imagination (visioning, role playing, story-telling and performance) to both understand our sense of place and develop new cultural landscapes that reflect present day circumstances and needs. This process involves engagement with the sequencing of community life over an extended period, while at the same time working creatively to discover new ways for change to emerge and potential to be realized. Here, the words of Mills are relevant when he observes that

the craft is a way of thinking that brings into view relations between the individual and the social that have previously gone unnoticed, and does so by exercising an imagination that is often successfully invited by putting together hitherto isolated items and finding unsuspected connections (Mills, 1959:221).

Crucially, the performance ethnography that developed throughout this research is fundamentally about social change. In this sense, 'arts based inquiry became a mode of inquiry and a methodology for performing social activism (Finley, 2011:436). It offers

an avenue of inquiry that enabled a (re) negotiation of the social landscape through dialogue and meaningful exchanges (see theatre chapter). In this sense it is what Finley describes as ‘arts-based inquiry at the heart of a people’s pedagogy’ (Finley, 2011:443).

We need also to acknowledge Garoian’s (1999) view that ‘performance art is particularly well-suited to researchers who anticipate experiences of cultural resistance and positive social change through inclusive and emotional understandings created among communities of learner/participant/researchers’(cited in Finley, 2011:437). This is because as a method it is fluid, dynamic and responsive to the different needs of participants as it uses abstract methods of group discovery. One of the appealing features of performance ethnography is that it lends itself to participatory forms of research that appreciate the evolutionary dimension to social life.

During 2012 I worked with a group of people on a youth theatre project that gave me an exceptionally valuable opportunity to enact performance ethnography. As a researcher this offered the opportunity to understand social relations through the lens of public theatre. This role enabled me to become a direct participant rather than an observer in the community. It was an ‘organic process’, one that reflected the dynamics of ‘real life’ (as my role was alive within the process, rather than removed and detached). This research does not seek to take a ‘snap shot’ of a community, rather it offers an explanation of how social relations *unfolded* in the DRA during a certain, key period. It therefore offers a way of understanding change as something dynamic, with patterns of potential and multiple possible outcomes. It adopts an unconventional approach to research, in that it immerses the reader intentionally within a creative process. The rationale for this is two-fold: if the observation gained via this research, that creativity is a valuable tool for understanding human encounters and building long-term sustainable relationships is valid, this may translate to the people reading these texts. As an observer in the ‘field’, the act of creativity brought me closer to the experience of others. Ironically, it also enabled an abstraction from ‘reality’, as well as the ‘subjective’, to take place, so that new, fresh visions of the future could be experienced and given expression.

This creative process held within it freedom and boundary, concept and form and (arguably) a key to understanding human dynamics within the community-building puzzle.

The approach taken throughout this thesis was to share this *experience*, not just the evidence (as understood within this research context) gained. If this ‘experiment’ does not make the impact anticipated, then the second intention, of presenting the valuable insights explored within the project itself, may still remain intact for the reader, via the descriptive texts concerned with experiences (and perceptions) of the people involved in the project.

I did not wish just to ‘tell’ what happened, but to try and bring the reader ‘into’ the experience. The following chapters attempt this in a number of ways. In chapter seven the full narrative of a theatre group’s first production (*An Táin*) is introduced before any analysis of the group’s experiences during rehearsals and a field trip. This is an attempt to help readers understand what the young people refer to when they comment upon their roles. It is also a way of offering an opportunity for the reader to explore the imaginative potential throughout the story-telling process. It uses imagery as process to engage the reader. For readers, it is possible that this endeavour may experientially illuminate the creative processes the young people went through in the practice of ‘making theatre’. In short, the theatre chapter explores the use of storytelling, narrative and theatre in building social relations within community. So what better way of starting the chapter than attempting to build a relationship between the reader and the research through a story?

Other attempts to share experience with the readers include: the use of photography to provide glimpse of events and to demonstrate visually social processes such as making friends and changing landscapes. For instance, it is possible to argue that the picture below demonstrates that many close bonds between different young people were forged through the theatre process: the body language and expressions of the young people are self-evident. It is also possible, if the reader pauses visually for a couple of

minutes on the photograph, to see that a sense of the excitement and enjoyment was displayed the day of the performance; this may be more effective than attempting to describe it in words.



Figure 2 - Young Actors in the Stations of the Cross performance, Doughiska Park, Easter, 2013.

2.3 Reflexivity

Studying in a contested social setting, in which different cultures, social and age groups attempt to live together, has been challenging. Reading Bourdieu's work on reflexivity helped to clarify some of the challenges associated with this endeavour. Performance ethnography is about engaging fully in the process of everyday life research. This is potentially problematic. Bourdieu's writing on reflexivity is a useful reminder of the difficulties associated with ethnographic encounters, highlighting the need to be fully aware of the implications associated with how knowledge is gathered. As researchers we cannot divorce ourselves from the historically situated structures that we represent (university) and occupy (my lived experience). Words need to be expressed and experiences require interpretation, both of which exist in a historically situated context full of rules and expectations. Furthermore, because my work took a more 'action-

orientated' stance, I needed to be careful not to get 'fully lost' in the local experience, or remain too aloof from personal engagement. Bourdieu was fascinated not only with social practice as it was lived out in daily life and understood by actors, but also by the research practice; how his position, approach and activity as a researcher affected and shaped both research methods and outcome. According to Jenkins, (2002), one of Bourdieu's most important contributions was that he never 'lost sight of the practicality of epistemological issues', such as: 'What should I do in order to know x? How should I do it? What are the implications for my knowledge of x of adopting one research procedure rather than another' (Jenkins, 2002:46).

Bourdieu formulated his models and theories after immersing himself for prolonged periods in field work. Thus, in many ways, his most influential work, which he constantly drew upon throughout his life, consisted of ethnographic studies in areas with which he was exceptionally familiar. This was, therefore, 'bottom up theorising' (Grenfell, 2010). His observations in Kabylia, Algeria and the Bearn studies in France where he had grown up, all formed the foundation for the development of his theory of practice. But, it is not just for the purpose of familiarity or for traditional ethnographic purposes that he immersed himself within these communities. There was a grander intention: his passionate interest in the concept of reflexivity.⁷

⁷ From the outset, Bourdieu seeks to extend classical Marxist interpretations of capital to include the social, cultural and symbolic. His work explores the dynamics of power within social life, where these different forms of capital are used to exclude certain groups and reproduce privileged interests. He developed a 'relational' vision of the social world, which he applied to various sorts of problems and objects (Lamont, 2010:143). It was a position that eventually resulted in the formation of concepts for which he is best known: social practice, habitus and social reproduction.

Bourdieu's reflexive research experiment involved what he called taking an objective observational stance: this involves a process of 'stepping back' and creating some distance from the situation or object of study in order to assess what is 'really' going on. This would be followed by a second 'stepping back', observing the observer and the observational methods. As Bourdieu points out, this results in the '*objectification of the act of objectification*'. This, he believed, was the only way to appreciate sociological and anthropological accounts of social life. For Bourdieu, adopting only the first step (which

My research required a reflexive form of research that enabled me to participate fully in day to day activities, while pausing every now and then to take a sideways glance that could shed light on that which remains in shadow. It is a form of conscious unconsciousness (being awake while in a dream). We are participating genuinely in an artistic endeavour, but using our skills as researchers to create spaces for critical reflection on the process, thus reminding participants of the original intention of the project (including ourselves). This form of research takes enormous time and effort and it involves challenges. For instance, the Youth Theatre project took nearly a year to develop. It required great patience, time and reflection to bring a number of different people together to explore a novel approach to community-building that was often unstable and contested. Many of these people had not worked together before, and there was a significant difference in their respective backgrounds and culture. An inclusive approach was, therefore, essential.

I became aware of the need both to be engaged, but also remain, somehow, on the edge, not to be overly ‘pulled in’ to the social dynamics in which I was involved. Over time, it became apparent that the process of research was not necessarily about occupying some kind of abstract space between two separate worlds (the world of research and the world of the people being researched) but a patterned set of inquiries, whereby both elements of life as a researcher (associated and disassociated) were related to each other; it became impossible to know one experience without knowing the other.

would be the traditional method adopted by structuralists) without the second step was an entirely inadequate way of ‘knowing’ the world. This is because the first account would provide only a degree of ‘authority’, as it focuses more on theoretical posturing. According to Bourdieu this was an important process to go through, though not sufficient, because strictly speaking, the aim lies outside the world and in that sense is impractical (Jenkins, 2002: 47). Bourdieu’s motive was to overcome the disadvantages he ascribed to the conventional ‘scientific approach’, by integrating these conventions within a more experiential experiment (See Bourdieu, 1979, for the empirical work that led to the evolution of these ideas).

This experience I call ‘spaces in-between,’ not because I am placed in-between two separate worlds, but because this is a space where new things are created; it is space for exploration and a moment to pause, where norms and associations make room for new understandings of the world to emerge. It is an on-going process, not a static ‘place’. The challenge undertaken, to study social dynamics in a diverse context, was enriched when I realized that the act of research was a process that did not have to have a single outcome. Within this process, all the trips, turns, mistakes and contradictions inherent within life itself became equally important to the research process. An approach evolved that could be described as a *creative pattern of inquiry and practice*, resulting in an action research project that used performance ethnography.

This project faced a number of challenges: the role of participation and impartiality in social research. As my role as a researcher became more engaged, the idea of *becoming* became a feature of this PhD. It recognises that the practice of *becoming* involves a constant unfolding, that we never arrive at *becoming*. *Becoming* comes to an ‘end’ only when we abandon the task at hand. Italicising ‘end’ is done here to emphasize that this is never certain and that all events in life are built upon by the past, present and future. What has gone on before lives on into the future, even if not in the same form. There is no social experience that is expressed in temporal isolation. Thus, for Deleuze:

Becoming isn’t part of history; history amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to ‘become’, that is, to create something new (Deleuze, 1995:170-171).

Here, the concept of *becoming* is relevant, for it raises the question of whether it is possible to decide when social life *becomes* ‘reality’ if social life is a constant flux of *becoming*. This research offered a way through such pitfalls by using creativity through public theatre, to suspend parameters of ‘reality’, at least for a period of time (for example, during rehearsals and performance). It achieved this through the use of story-telling and enactment. In other words, public theatre allowed for certain aspects of life to

be ‘suspended’ (norms, everyday values and dispositions), in order to explore new forms of *becoming*, as well as drawing research parameters in the sand, in order to be able to reflect on social encounters with some degree of credibility (within a semi-contained space). Public theatre produced conducive conditions (for both participants and researcher for the purposes of research) from which the future could grow and continue to *become*. It held the potential to abstract aspects of real life (inquiry) and, in turn, (re)interpret them (through practice), providing further sociological insight. Public theatre provided a microcosm of real-life encounters, an opportunity to understand how ordinary people engage with and relate to other cultures, traditions, groups.

At the beginning of the theatre project there were a number of features that offered the potential for success, as well as conflict. These included challenges associated with the ‘sharing of difference’, which can be understood in terms of ‘occupying space with strangers’, as well as the openness to explore new experiences in a potentially unpredictable cultural environment. In this context, the theatre project undoubtedly carried a significant level of risk, one that had no precedent in the community and contained no guarantees of success. Attempting to create a play out of many separate identities (individuals with an array of different backgrounds, personalities, cultural experiences and expectations) was a challenging task, one that required a significant level of ‘quality engagement’. If it was to ‘work’, it would require dedication, commitment and skills, something not easily achieved with youngsters and groups of people who do not know each other. This ‘insecurity’ was compounded by the fact that people managing the project were volunteering their time; there was no financial remuneration providing a lever to encourage tolerance and commitment.

In addition, it was critical that consideration was given to the possibility that involving participants in this manner could result in difficulties for the young people involved. Using performance as a form of social development, as a well as a research method has pitfalls. It may be poorly received by the audience or parents, the young

peoples roles may be misunderstood leading to stigmatisation or considerable time may be invested into something that is ultimately ‘unsuccessful’.

2.4 The Arts as a Form of Social Development

A further feature unique to this project was that it held a larger, more experiential task; an explicit commitment to use the arts as a platform for social development. For all the participants this was an innovative form of engagement. While these challenges existed, they were overcome through patience and constant communication and can be seen in chapter eight, which highlights the role of the Director, Conal Kearney, who acknowledged throughout the project that a delicate balance would have to be found between achieving an artistic and professional performance, while reproducing experiences beneficial to the young people involved and wider community. At any point, one or other of these objectives might have been compromised. As such, though artistic decisions remained largely in the hands of Conal Kearney, consultation with the wider community took place. This ‘facilitative role’ was undertaken both by Nuala Keady (local resident) and myself (see chapter eight for details). We concentrated on keeping communicative channels open, as well as ‘holding’ the artistic space.

To create such conducive spaces in which this form of research can take place requires an appreciation of the ‘unanticipated’ and ‘inconsistent’ ways that humans express both their ‘frailties’ as well as their ‘ingenious’ responses to the local experience of global influence (Hall, 2012:14). On this matter, Hall discusses the way in which people ‘improvise’ and ‘innovate’ in social settings that are culturally defined in ‘peculiarly insular ways’ (Hall, 2012:15). For instance, how the ‘old’ and ‘new’ fuse, and reform, is important in the DRA social landscape, where older Irish communities are adjusting to newcomers as they, in turn, seek to put down roots in an unfamiliar land. Arts-based research, in particular performance ethnography, is suited to exploring these inconsistencies. This is because art often uses contradiction, storytelling, myth or exaggerated behaviour to discover the meaning behind perceived norms or specific behaviour.

To understand such approaches in an academic context, Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan's (2012) work is valuable. Back and Nirmal Puwar (2012) research supports a level of *immersed* engagement with the locality, where the researcher needs to take time so that ideas and perspectives can grow into something meaningful (Back and Puwar, 2012: 13). It also demonstrates how arts-based research can uncover some interesting insights.

The politics of belonging can be appreciated in Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan's (2012:143-152) discussion of a poem written by a young woman called Charlynne Bryan, called '*On the Inside*'. In this poem Charlynne, originally from Dominica, is writing about an experience she had with a black British immigration officer:

She looked at me
Eyes piercing through my skin;
It was as though she knew
That this was the first time I have ever been.

I registered the contempt
Plastered on her face,
Her rigid posture screamed
'foreigner know your place!'

(Extract from a poem by Charlynne Bryan, cited in Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan's (2012:147).

Charlynne's insight about her poem is that her experience was due to the fact the officer still experienced herself as an 'outsider', which resulted in her adopting the 'colonizer's lens' instead of offering sympathy. In other words, the officer was higher on the hierarchical ladder of 'belonging'. The authors of this research suggest that there is another twist:

We also have recorded incidents where migrants, faced with a choice in the 'immigration line', have opted to encounter a white immigration official rather than a black one, as they felt that they had a chance of better treatment from a white official. The key to this new racial landscape is that 'racism no longer dares to appear without disguise'

(Fanon, 1980b:36). The white immigration officer is licensed to appear tolerant and understanding to the migrant who comes before them as proof that neither they, nor the system itself, is not racist, while the black immigration officer is expected to be tough and hostile as proof of their real and ultimate allegiance to the state and nation (Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan's (2012:148).

For these authors it is an example of how judgments about ‘who belongs’ are made routinely in the ‘spaces of everyday life’ … and reach ‘into the most intimate social encounters’ (Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan’s, 2012:149). What is really interesting about all these observations is that Charlynne later describes herself as being intolerant toward people who could not speak English: ‘I have known myself to feel contempt towards people who have come after me, who are outsiders themselves. So I am writing a double perspective’ (Charlynne, cited in Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan’s, 2012:149).

These extracts are referred to not only to reveal the ‘insidious damage that these hierarchies of belonging do to social life’, but to highlight the complexity inherent in interpreting narratives taken in isolation (we might have not realised how deeply embedded institutional racism can become without Charlynne’s secondary revelations). It also highlights how a more integrated, creative methodology can help us to enter meaningful dialogue with participants, scratching beneath the surface to reveal the contradictions endemic to social life. On this, Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan’s (2012) note:

that putting others down, one elevates oneself, but it is a psychological balancing act. The very act of putting someone down reveals a need for status and /or respect that otherwise is not satisfied and which may be inwardly damaging. For migrants tension exists constantly because their footing on the ladder of inclusion is neither stable nor clear but contingent and always subject to scrutiny (Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan’s, 2012:149).

This is portrayed powerfully in Charlynne’s comment about her own poem: ‘And then I think the last bit [of the poem] just shows that I know, I as well should have more

tolerance towards them, because I myself am somebody who just came and people looked at me that way when I first came' (Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan's 2012:149).⁸

This extract from Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan's (2012) research demonstrates the complexity of belonging and cautions a researcher to consider how emotions, concepts and experiences, such as belonging, can be appropriated and transformed into power struggles that are laden with political significance. The method that they used was a form of arts-based inquiry that is 'emergent and egalitarian, local, and based in communal reflective dialogue' (Finley, 2011:435).⁹ What is attractive about this method is not just that they provide space for exploring the hidden dimensions to life, but that they aspire to give people an equal (as far as that is possible in the complex arrangement of what we call 'present' experience) opportunity to engage in knowledge creation. It also provides new choices and offers potential pathways for building the future. Interestingly, that Back and Bryan include Charlynne as joint author. This is a simple, but profound act of participatory research.

Charlynne's words were what Finley describes as 'performances of knowledge creation, taking shape in the context of complex conditions and in which art provided mechanisms and forms with which to see and hear each other's views on local socioeconomic systems, racial and cultural divides, and potential to develop common meeting spaces' (Finley, 2011:435). The concept of 'knowledge creation' is crucial.

⁸ This research forms part of the EUMARGINS Project which is a three-year study of the life narratives of young migrants. It is concerned with recording the consequences of these shifts from the perspective of the migrants. The UK part of the project is in London as part of an international comparative study involving six partner institutions in Estonia, France, Italy, Norway, Spain and Sweden. A full summary of the project can be found at: www.iss.uio.no/forskning/eumargin (Back , Shamser, Sinha and Bryan's, 2012:152).

⁹ Finley (2011) argues that this form was developed by sociologists and anthropologists who 'struggled with new ways to represent new wave research that was local in nature and based in an ethics of care (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Geertz, 1988; Guba, 1967; Hammersley, 1992, cited in Finley, 2011:436). These approaches have included interest in the use of poetry as a form of research in the social sciences (see Gurevitch, 2002). Hamera (2011) describes a more 'performative turn', that uses creativity, communication and activism to bring about change (see Hamera, 2011).

How Charlynne came about the awareness of her own evolving prejudice was discovered during a creative exercise of writing a poem. This is a powerful exercise in agency, because Charlynne's awareness led not only to knowledge discovery and sharing but, importantly, may have affected her own behaviour, and that of others, in the future.

2.5 Ethnographic Activities from 2009 – 2014

I have explained above the ethnographic approach undertaken and how and why it developed. The following provides more detail. The role of arts-based social development has been explored throughout this research through socials (Chapter five), workshops and a World Café event (Chapter six), as a form of social activism through social media (Chapter seven) a theatre performance and festival, and the making of a community documentary (Chapter eight).

Over a period of over four years I visited the DRA three afternoons a week and attended numerous meetings in the evening, particularly during 2011-2014. Evening meetings to set up World Café and the youth theatre group occurred on average twice a month during 2012 for eight months. I facilitated three pre-World Café workshops with Chris Taylor to provide training with leaders representing the Polish, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Irish, the Muslim community, as well as people with disabilities.

Outside of the events organised above, I have been involved over a four year period in a number of semi-structured interviews. However, in 2010 I decided that this approach was too formal. I was gathering large amounts of material, but I found that I was interviewing people without a clearly defined research topic. From 2009-2011, I was still exploring what people were doing in the community, following the lines of inquiry that unfolded as well as attempting to ascertain certain patterns that were emerging. I decided that instead of interviews I would focus my attention on much more casual conversations. Some were brief; others lasted more or less sporadically, over a number of hours. Most of the conversations were picked up again and refined over a period of two years. In 2012-2014, I revisited more formal interviews after the thesis had taken shape with clear themes and intentions.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews took place with the following people. Each interview was approximately two hours long, conducted on three occasions. I have had on-going relationships with all of these individuals from 2009-present, except Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirostaw Kuzenko to whom I was introduced in 2011. All the names of adults in this thesis are real, except for three people. The reason for this is that people in the community are very proud of the work that they have achieved, and many of them identifiable through their work. I have release forms from them stating that they are happy for me to use their interviews and their names.

- Fr. Martin Glynn, Parish Priest, from Ireland.
- Bridget Oyelola, from Nigeria.
- George Dolo, from Liberia.
- Nuala Keady, from Ireland.
- Elzbieta Nikiel, from Poland.
- Mirostaw Kuzenko, from Poland.
- Dan Hurly from Ireland.
- Two members of the Boineam Bheall Residents Association, Roscam, both from Ireland.

The following interviews lasted for about two hours and occurred only once formally, but I have continually engaged with all the individuals except Jenny Reilly, Theresa and Gerry Burke and the King family whom I only acknowledge in passing. Everyone else I have on-going in-depth working relationships with since 2009 (except those identified in brackets, whom I met later on, but nevertheless still work with or encounter in social situations).

- Theresa and Gerry Burke, from Ireland.
- Jenny Reilly, from Ireland.
- Paddy and Martin King from Ireland.

- Breda McNicolas, from Ireland.
- John Joe McDonagh, lives in Roscam Cheshire Home, from Ireland.
- Joby and Sindu Vargheese from Southern India (moved from the DRA in 2012).
- Brice Robert and Eodie Kiki, from Benin Republic, Western Africa.
- Godwin Enaiho from Nigeria (January, 2012)
- Randy Asante from Ghana.
- Chris Taylor, from Ireland (January, 2012).
- Magnus Ohakwe from Nigeria (met in January, 2012)
- Paul Frecklington Chairperson for Sean Bhaile Residence Association, from England.
- Conal Kearney from Ireland.
- Michael Connolly, Chairperson of Castlegar Juvenile Hurling Club, from Ireland.
- Colin Stanley, from England (introduced to in July, 2013).
- Caroline Stanley, from Ireland (introduced to in July, 2013).
- Magdalena Kudzia, from Poland (introduced to in July, 2013).
- Peter Butler, from Ireland (introduced to November, 2013).
- Owner of an Estate Management Company, from Ireland.
- Oluinashola Steven Adequunloye, from Nigeria, founder and chairperson of the Galway Foundation Football Club, Doughiska.

The following individuals were not formally interviewed, but I had numerous on-going conversations with them through either workshops (World Café and Leader Trainings) and social settings.

- Sister Bernadette Joyce, from Ireland.
- Anna Murphy, from Ireland.

- Krzysztof Krik, from Poland.
- Kasia Szanca, from Poland.
- Dick O'Halloran.
- Simeera Malik, parents from U.K and Pakistan.
- Magret Adebayo.
- Sanober Jaffry, from Pakistan.
- Damien Tummon, from Ireland.
- Imam Khalid Sallabi, from Libya.
- Millie and Michael Forde, from Ireland.
- Lana Svetlan, from Lithuania.
- Caroline Keane, Quinlivan, from Ireland.
- Maura Mulroe, from Ireland.
- Paul O'Grady.
- Michael Nolan, from Ireland, chairperson for the Fearann Ri, Fionnusce, Caistlean Thorlaigh (FFC) Residents Association.
- Siobhan Bradly, from Ireland, Good Shepherd Parish Youth Worker.

Interviews with community and public sector employees

- Paula O'Connor, Principal of the Merlin Woods Primary School (three interviews).
- Group meeting at ARD Family Resource Centre (10th May): Family Resource Centre committee. Fr. Martin Glynn and Chris Taylor. Bernie Kerin, Chanel Canny, Sandra Gardan, Sheila Coen, Bridget Oyeloa, Noreena McSweeney, George Dolo.

- Meeting at City Hall (1st December, 2012) with Maura Mulroe (FFC Residents Association), Ceila Keane (FFC Residents Association), Anna King (FFC Residents Association), and two council officials.
- Eoin Dolan, (number of visits to Foroige House from March to December, 2010).
- Meeting with Andrew Byrne from the Traveller Youth Integration Project (TYIP) and Pearse O'Toole (9th July, 2010) from the Ballybane Adventure Project (BAP).
- Galway City Partnership Board, Maeve Murry (Community Development Co-ordinator).
- Meeting with GAA Inclusion Office and committee at Pearse Stadium, Galway (23rd May, 2012): Tony Watene, Christy Tyrrell, Mattie Kilroy.
- Meeting in Dublin (23rd February, 2012) with Ken McCue, International SARI co-ordinator (Sports against Racism, Ireland). Triona Nic Giolla from Galway Refugee Support Group.
- Anthony Cunniffe, (18th March, 2012) Soccer Integration Project & Garda Youth Project.

In addition, I attended regular meetings with the (Fearann Ri, Fionnusce, Caistlean Thorlaigh) Residents Association, and I am now involved with the *Friends of Merlin Woods* campaign to prevent a road from being built through Merlin Woods. I was involved with the DRA Outreach Group, which set up of a Sean Bhaile Resident's Association. Alongside Julius Daree, Joe Debonnet, Fr. Martin Glynn and Bridget Oyelola, I set up the community website Oscail.org. In order to acquaint myself with people in the area, and to establish the kind of work being conducted, I attended the following groups: Roscam Mothers and Toddlers Group, Active Retirement Group, Merlin Woods School, Boineam Bheall Resident's Association, and visited many local organisations, businesses, and the Cheshire Home in Roscam.

Other community ethnographic activities

- 1st May, 2012, at the Galway Film Centre, Cluian Mhuire, Monivea Road. Presented our community project proposal to a three people from Galway City Council Arts Office and the Galway Film Centre. We were successful with this

presentation and won an award out of 200 applications, to make a documentary out of our theatre project.

- Attended three Merlin School Festive events, the opening of the Merlin College Secondary School by Taoiseach Enda Kenny, and numerous events in the area including Connect Festival, Good Shepherd Parish social events (such as Christmas parties), Ghanaian Union events (meetings, as well as Ghana Independence Day celebrations) and Castlegar Hurling Club events. I attended the Good Shepherd Parish Mass in the Castlegar Complex on special occasions. I would like to emphasize that while I am not a Catholic, I attended mass to support certain projects, such as opening of the new Church in the newly acquired community centre, and as a way of developing relationships and supporting community leaders in their work.
- 2nd May, 2012. Invited young people from the area to ARD Family Resource Centre to talk with Conal Kearney and other volunteers about the theatre project.
- 16th May, 2012, I gave a talk to the Active Retirement Group, Castlegar Complex about my research, the World Café and youth theatre projects.
- 17th May, 2012, gave short talk to the English Class for newcomers to the area at the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska.
- 17th May, 2012, went to meet parents of children from Merlin Woods School.
- General meetings with Liz Moroney, the administrator for the DRA Family Resource Centre, Ciran Scully, Co-ordinator GAA Chairperson, Connect Festival organisers, and the ARD story-telling group.
- I supported the community in applying for funding to Pobal, VEC, City Council, Galway Film Centre, Galway City Arts Office, Galway City Partnership, all of which were successful.
- I supported Fr. Martin Glynn in meetings with FAS to acquire a Community Employment Scheme for the area. We obtained five places for members of the community including a place for the community website.
- I took Temi Oyelola and Linda Osayemi to the Goldern Egg Fashion Awards in the Radisson Hotel, Galway on 10th March, 2010, as part of a creative group that I

organised with Foroige to encourage young people to write material for the new community website.

- 23rd February, 2012: Dublin College University, Sociology Department. Seminar by Emmanuel Okigbo – African integration and civic participation.
- 13th March, 2012, Menlo Hotel: Participated in workshop with Galway City Partnership Board and Galway Chamber of Commerce. Issue: diversity in the workplace.

In addition, I undertook pre-World Café and youth theatre networking with Polish people living in the area facilitated by Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirostaw Kuzenko in Galway. Relationships were also developed with individuals from the African Renaissance, Ghanaian Union, and Travelling community. Sanober Jaffry helped develop contacts with the Muslim and Indian community and Randy Asante with the Ghanaian community.

I worked with the following people from January 1st, 2012 to organise three workshops in preparation of the World Café experience.

24th May World Café Leader Training Workshop. Attendees:

Godwin Enaiho, Fr. Martin Glynn, Chris Taylor, Caroline Keane Quinlivan, Sanober Jaffry, Krzysztof Krik, Nuala Keady, George Dolo, Bernadette Joyce, Kasia Szanca, Anna Murphy, Dan Hurley.

12th May, 2012 – 11am – 1pm. World Café Leader Training Workshop. Attendees:

Paul Shelley, Chris Taylor, Nuala Keady, Dan Hurley, Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Keane Quinlivan, Lisa Duignan, Anna Murphy, Godwin Enaiho, Anna King, Elizbieta Nikiel, Mirostaw Kuzenko, Sister Bernadette Joyce. Simeera Malik (Simmy).

World Café Event, 19th May, 2012.

In attendance at World Café were more than 60 people from over 11 different nationalities (Pakistani, Nigerian, Liberian, Irish, English, Polish, Ukrainian and Libyan and Yemen, Indian, Ghanaian) and three different faiths: Catholic, Muslim Pentecostal).

World Café Evaluation, 13th June, 2012, Clayton Hotel.

Meeting with approximately 20 people from the community about some of the issues that came out of World Café.

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NEWS

East-side residents asked to help draw up plan for future

More than 7,000 people living in the Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun area

BY DARA BRADLEY

PLANS to draw-up a vision and roadmap for the future development of Galway's fastest growing and most diverse suburbs on the east side of the city will commence this Saturday.

The Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun Development Company has invited members of the local residents to come together to discuss what they want for their community over the next decade.

Project 2022 is a community-driven initiative "that will project the minds and imagination of all the DRA community into 2022", according to the organisers.

The idea to draw up a development plan stems from an NUI Galway research study that revealed startling information about the Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun areas is made up of people who were born outside of Ireland and there are 53 different nationalities living in the area, with Polish and Nigerians the most prevalent after Irish. More than 56% of the households live in rented homes.

The survey also found that there are three times the national average number of professionals living in the area; and the proportion of people educated to degree level is more than four times the national average.

The research found that there are an estimated 7,279 residents in the areas, up from just 200 people in the year 2000. The average age of the population is 25, compared with the national average of 33; a quarter is under the age of 15; and just 0.05% of the population are pensioners, compared with 11% nationally.

Participants will be asked: "What do we want our community to look like in 2022, and how will we make it happen?"

The opinions and answers of the participants will be collated and feed into a 10-year development framework plan, known as Project 2022.

"World Café is an opportunity to meet your neighbours, have some fun and chat about our future. It is an interactive method of engagement between people, groups and communities. World Café will help people identify personal and group challenges, share experiences and envision constructive and realistic ways of achieving new possibilities and shared future goals," a spokesperson said.

This project aims to reflect the widest and most diverse range of views of the community. A total of 20 leaders from the community have worked with different groups in the lead-up to this Saturday's World Café workshop; the leaders are Irish, Polish, Nigerian, Liberian, English, Ukrainian, Pakistani and Indian.

The leaders and the development group represent all people whatever their nationality, culture, religion, age, gender or sexuality. It has representatives for people with disabilities or mental health issues, families, children and people parenting alone.

"Project 2022 is an opportunity for everyone to get involved in deciding our community's future together. We want the community to have a voice, to share with us what is important to you. It may be issues to do with community safety, or the quality of housing and the physical environment.

"It may be lack of social facilities for families and children, or issues concerned with employment and welfare. It may quite simply be that you feel isolated and want to get involved in building a strong, vibrant, safe and enjoyable community to live in," a spokesperson added.

The World Café event is Saturday between 11am and 1pm at the Castlegar clubhouse. DRA Development Company's Anna King can be contacted on (086) 3952831 for further information.

Figure 3 The Galway City Tribune, 18th June, 2013.

2.6 Background to the World Café experience methods

On the 11th January, 2012, in the Clayton Hotel, Doughiska Fr. Martin Glynn and I met with Godwin Enaiho, Magret Adebayo, Magnus Ohakwe and Paul Shelly (a number of other people could not attend) to discuss how we might galvanise as many people as possible to discuss the future of the community. We explored creative ways in which the community together could 'envision' their future, to provide a shared voice and

vision for social and economic development’, and how to ‘develop from within’. We tentatively called this project ‘Project 2022’.

Project 2022 evolved as a community driven initiative where the focus of discussion was upon “*What do we want our community to look like in 2022 and how will we make it happen?*” Within two months the Project 2022 team was joined by Dan Hurley, Chris Taylor, Nuala Keady, Bernadette Joyce, Anna Murphy, Sanober Jaffry, Damien Tummon, Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirostow Kuzenko, Anne Jurga, Claire McCole and many other people unable to attend all meetings, but had nevertheless demonstrated a commitment to the project.

On the 18th January, 2012, we deliberated upon the importance of ‘how we gather’, convinced that we had to include as many people as possible in any process of envisioning the community’s future. We also discussed the character of Project 2022, with attention given to whether we would have separate group meetings, such as a sports group or youth group, or whether it would be more rewarding to have a single workshop. Would this generate better information and/or enhance the quality of social engagement between different groups of people and nationalities?

On this matter, Paul Shelly suggested that we meet with a colleague of his, Chris Taylor, who was the organiser of World Café events. The World Café approach used a large meeting, but utilised smaller group interaction. Finally, a discussion took place about how small group gatherings held in preparation before one large session, would tease out some of the issues pertinent to certain groups and interests. It would also inform the process.

Paul Shelley set up a meeting with World Café facilitator, Chris Taylor, who had worked with business organizations, youth groups and community organizations throughout Ireland. His professional background is in psychology and organizational coaching. In addition, he has travelled extensively and lived for three years in Zambia, where he had the opportunity to work in a prison teaching English, where he explored the personal and community experiences of men imprisoned for theft.

In our first meeting on 24th January, 2012, 11am, Galway Bay Hotel, we discussed how we might work together on Project 2022. From January 2012 to present, Chris Taylor and I met on numerous occasions.¹⁰ Initially, meetings took place between us to discuss ideas about ‘visioning’, the World Café and the potential benefits for the community project. These ideas were shared with the larger Project 2022 group. The reasoning behind this approach was that we wanted the whole group to be involved in the design (and methodological approach) of the project.

These processes drew upon a method developed using Chris Taylor’s format of Appreciative Inquiry, World Café and Presencing. Chris Taylor brought the format and I shared with him the experiences that I had in the community over a number of years and, together, we teased out some of the challenges that related to the associations of community and to design a method that was reflective of the DRA community’s needs. We wanted to acknowledge the challenges, but not be constrained by them. Both Chris and I felt that the kind of language used throughout the day was important to this aspiration. For instance, we talked about how some people might find ideas of community challenging, feeling that it might have connotations of repression or prejudice, therefore limiting potential and opportunity.

Chris Taylors’s work has been primarily influenced by David Bohm’s *Theory of Dialogue*, Otto Scharmer’s and Peter Senge’s *Theory U* and *Presencing*, and David Cooperrider’s model of *Appreciative Inquiry*. These theories of practice are integrated into the creative, interactive World Café workshops. World Café was developed in the

¹⁰ The most important individual sessions were: 24th January, 2012, 11am. In the Salthill Hotel, Galway; 13th February 2012, 3pm in Salthill Hotel, Galway; 27th February, 2012, 11am, Salthill Hotel, Galway; March 9th 2012, 10am, Salthill Hotel, Galway; 15th March, 2012, 5.15, Salthill Hotel, Galway; 30th April, 2012, 1pm, Salthill Hotel; Galway; 15th May, 2012, Salthill Hotel, Galway, 10.30am, Chris Taylor’s residence, Salthill, Galway. Feedback sessions to the Project 2022 group: 30th January, 10am, Good Shepherd Parish. Meeting with Chris Taylor, Fr. Martin Glynn, Julius Daree, Bridget Oyelola, 8th February, 7.30pm, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska, Galway with Project 2022 group; 25th April , 7.30pm, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska, Galway with Project 2022 group; 13th June, 7.30pm, 2012, World Café feedback session with leaders of project.

1990s by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (see Brown and Isaacs, 2005) as an interactive method of engagement between people, groups, communities or organizations to identify personal and group challenges, share experiences and collectively envision, construct and identify ways of achieving new possibilities and shared future goals. Crucially, it is a means of re-shaping experience through shared encounters that matter. What is important to these approaches is the idea that change must involve the whole ‘system’. It is, therefore, a participatory model of development. This is important, because much of the work conducted by residents concentrated on methods and means that are representative and inclusive of as many individuals and groups as possible.

Indeed, participation has also been a very prominent feature of government policy. As Varley and O’Cearbhaill observe, the ideas of participation and empowerment were very much enduring features of community development in Ireland throughout the 1980s, and were reinforced further by a succession of national partnership agreements that by 2000 had formally involved local development and the voluntary sector (Varley and O’Cearbhaill, 2002:54). Indeed, the term ‘partnership’ has become integral to community development, largely because of a series of area-based partnership programmes sponsored by the EU (Varley and O’Cearbhaill, 2002:54; Meade, 2012).

From the 1990s onwards, community development theory and practice focused on whether it is a positive or negative feature of policy. While for some authors there is a tendency, as Varley and O Cearbhaill point out, to see ‘ulterior motives’ behind these programmes; to assume that they are about social control or using community participation to reduce the costs of welfare or local development (Varley and O’Cearbhaill, 2002:58). For others, however, it was seen as a prerequisite to sustainable development. Hence, much of the literature on community development in both the UK and Ireland explored, ‘at least at a rhetorical level, some commitment to the redistribution of power’ (Curtin, 1996:265). It is a debate that focuses on *who* participates and *what* is the nature of that participation. As such, it attempted to draw connections with issues in

the wider society: social exclusion, or whether groups were empowered or not and whether development was characterised by conflict or consensus.

Much of the voluntary sector activity during this period was committed to achieving development with community empowerment. In this view, there is an ‘official willingness’ to contemplate power sharing, where politicians are enablers or facilitators (Varley and O’Cearbhaill, 2002:56). A number of issues are important to consider in connection with issues of participation. For instance, the extent to which partners are not only equal and representative, but also active in the decision making process. In order for this to occur the state has to be committed to a genuine ‘devolution of power’ (Varley and O’Cearbhaill, 2002:57). In addition, these authors are cautious of whether this is possible given the extent to which the Irish State ‘is historically heavily centralised’ with a deeply ‘clientelist political culture’ (Varley and O’Cearbhaill, 2002:57).

The approach we undertook differed from such approaches, World Café is fundamentally different, in that it used creative methods to provide an opportunity for local people to work *together* to (re)negotiate complex social and cultural landscapes, to co-create new experiences and explore a form of individual and social development that is contextual and relevant to place-based lived experience. It provided space for people to discover themselves, as well as others, in a new way, to challenge preconceptions, ideas, norms and values in a shared environment (discussion between Chris Taylor and author of this research, 24th January, 2012 and 13th February, 2012).

For Brown and Issacs (2005), World Café is also an innovative means for hosting conversations about questions that (really) matter. The approach undertaken for Project 2022’s World Café event was tailored specifically to inspire ‘authentic’ change. That is, it desires organic change, inspired by the people participating in the process and not as change defined by organizers, leaders or powerful interests (as far as this is achievable). It needs to be acknowledged that convenors have an influence on the experience. This was clearly important, and one that demanded a detailed discussion of the ways in which the design and method of the event would provide the ‘best possible’ space for genuine

and meaningful exploration (this included the question of how the physical space should be organized).

The approach adopted during the World Café experience aligns itself with methods that have become increasingly popular in the field of sustainability and planning. Similar to World Café, the act of ‘visioning’ is understood as a method that provides researchers with ‘potential pathways toward more sustainable practices (Davis, Doyle and Pape, 2011:54), through the technique of imagining the future and then working out practical steps for implementation (De Gues, 2002). Some researchers call this method backcasting. Backcasting ‘literally means looking back from the future; it is a normative approach to foresight using desirable or alternative futures’ (Quist, Thessen, Vergragt, 2011:884). According to Dreborg (1996), this is particularly suitable when attempting to build alternative futures from a complex set of present circumstances (Quist, Thessen, Vergragt, 2011:884).

There are a number of key features to such methods of inquiry: they are participatory, involving representative stakeholders in the decision-making process and combine imaginative capacity with practical suggestions to achieve desirable outcomes. For Quist, Thessen, Vergragt, the type of project that uses these techniques vary considerably depending on

whether and how stakeholder participation has been organized, in the number of steps in which the methodology has been split, the methods that are used, the kinds of topics being addressed, the nature and scale of the systems addressed (e.g. local, regional, national, consumption systems, or societal domains), the number of visions developed and how the visions have been developed, and if the focus is on learning and raising awareness among stakeholders, or on realizing follow-up and implementation. In addition, the term backcasting can refer to a conceptual approach or to a more operational methodology, though it is also possible that it only refers to the step in which the backwards-looking analysis is conducted. Furthermore, other approaches like transition management, road mapping and several others also use normative future visions and pathways how to get there, sometimes

without explicitly referring to the term backcasting, which makes the variety even larger (Quist, Thessen, Vergragt, 2011:884. See Quist, 2007).

Quist *et al* (2011) identify some of the challenges associated with this method, and in particular suggest the process may not result in practices that are in line with the ‘follow-up agenda’ due to external factors that may or may not constrain the ‘vision’ (Quist *et al*, 2001) and the extent and quality of stakeholder engagement. Other considerations include funding and ‘additional capacity’, the extent to which the vision provides adequate ‘guidance and orientation’ and ‘institutional protection’. In addition, ‘the emergence of vision champions, a strong focus on follow-up and spin-off activities, learning at group level among stakeholders and a high level of influence from key stakeholders’ are critical factors (Quist *et al*, 2011:894).

What is important to highlight is that these processes are more than traditional ‘brainstorming’ exercises that attempt to find ‘solutions’ to problems. Thus, Davis, Doyle and Pape, emphasize the spatial dimension to these *learning processes* and that it is from these spaces that ‘innovative approaches to sustainability’ emerge (Davis, Doyle and Pape (2011:54). They argue that the ‘physical space of the workshop then becomes an agent of change, opening up imaginative or reflective intellectual spaces where knowledge can be exchanged, created and challenged’ (Davis, Doyle and Pape, 2011:57). As with the World Café, there is a need to consider how such experiences are ‘embodied’, and the extent to which novel ways of thinking are developed, which affects future behavior and attitude. There are, in the opinion of these authors, three important themes to the visioning process: futurity (opportunity to imagine a more positive future or outcome), collaboration (diverse shared encounters) and the creation of reflective spaces for inquiry (Davis, Dolye and Pape, 2011:57).

The World Café experience brings another dimension to the visioning process: it outlines the creative component in building relationships in a diverse social setting. Based on the idea that all people perform different roles in community-building puzzle,

World Café was an opportunity for people to express their own contribution to the ‘whole’. Within a group context, World Café is more than just a meeting place (Brown and Issacs, 2005). The approach uses creative methods to enable people to explore how a range of social patterns (often articulated through common narratives) either shape or constrain their experience. In other words, it is a creative approach that appreciates how habitual thinking or pre-conceptions (norms, customs, opinions and notions) can sometimes hinder our engagement with the future and how, in turn, they influence our potential to engage and bring about change (Chris Taylor and author of research, 15th March, 2012; 30th April, 2012). For instance, negative thinking may prevent change within a community even when opportunities present themselves, or old habits inherited from the past may prevent us from exploring new ideas, new friendships and associations.

World Café is a socio-psychological process that challenges a world view (social context), rather than just an opportunity to address and document challenges individuals may experience. Our approach was a critical, reflexive invitation to change, which places value on agency through shared experience, while situating these engagements within the context of social, economic and political contexts. We explored these concerns within a practical format with a view to bringing about real life-enhancing change.

The World Café experience was, therefore, not just a fact finding exercise with a list produced at the end. It was an organic, fluid process, where the *quality* of engagement was important, not just the fact that it occurred and produced a result. The World Café experience illuminated three important aspects to this argument: the importance of how we gather, the quality of the experience, and the need for social development projects that are uplifting, rewarding energetic exchanges. Importantly, it illuminated the need for further research to discover a structured way to continue the good work achieved. In other words, how such experiences can be sustained. The project that subsequently developed was intended to give the space and structure from

which the World Café experiences could become realized more fully: the Youth Theatre Project.

2.7 Background to the Youth Theatre Project

I worked closely with the following group of people from January, 2012 to present, on the youth theatre and documentary making project: Nuala Keady, Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Caroline Keane Quinlivan, Paul O'Grady, Randy Asante (Theatre and Film documentary), Elżbieta Nikiel and Mirostaw Kuzenko (hall decoration and art), Fr. Martin Glynn (general), Gloria Bennin (Ghanian dancing), Claire McCole from School of Irish Dance, Esther Okeke (Nigerian dancing); Joan Opoku Ware, Adrienne Mc Partland (food,) Conal Kearney, Director of the theatre group, Louise O'Grady, Karen Glynn, young people involved in the filming of the documentary.¹¹

We met every Saturday from 2pm - 4.30pm, 9th June – November, 3rd, 2012 in the Castlegar Complex, as well as in a number of other locations, most notably the Roscam archaeological site. There were approximately 26 young people aged between 10 and 16. After the first month was there was a core group of 16 young people. Every now and again someone who had not committed to the project would call in to have a chat with adults, or have a ‘nose’ around at what the others were doing. This culminated in An Táin, theatre production and festival on 3rd November, 2012. The week before the event we had three extra rehearsals.

¹¹ Savita Halappanava (Yalagi) was due to represent the Indian community by training a young Indian dancer for the theatre production. The whole community was shocked and devastated when Savita passed away on 28th November, 2012.



Figure 4 The Connacht Sentinel, November, 6th, 2012

From November 3rd 2013, to present the youth theatre project has continued:

Our group also performed the story of the Stations of the Cross, Easter, 2013. We had both Catholics and non-Catholics (including Muslim and Pentecostal) performing the story in the local park. Although our group was non-denominational, encouraging all traditions and none, we performed the Stations of the Cross for the local Parish Priest, Fr. Martin Glynn, who is actively engaged in pursuing as many positive avenues for integration as possible in the DRA community.



Figure 5 Actors performing in Stations of the Cross, Easter, 2013, in Merlin Woods Park, Doughiska. Photo taken by Anna King.

Third Production: Our Town, by Thornton Wilder.

This year's (2014) production celebrates the famous play, *Our Town*, the everyday universal experience of life. It shows the value of social relations and the how important it is to appreciate every moment. It is also a portrayal of how our identities are shaped not just by the enduring aspects of life that are reproduced throughout daily practice, but also our ability to relate to things in a new and fresh way. In other words, the integration of the old and new. These themes are very pertinent to the DRA because of the extent of change experienced both physically and culturally over the last ten years; how the older, traditional community coped with these changes and how newcomers co-constructed lives for both themselves and families. The minimalist theatrical style of this play provided an opportunity for Director, Conal Kearney, to explore the practical and

symbolic potential of improvisation and mime with the young actors, developing their skills in expression and composure for both drama and real life.

In addition, Conal Kearney and I took a group of 13 young people from the DRA Youth Theatre Project on July, 27th 2013 to the Galway Arts Festival to a production by the Galway Community Theatre and Galway Youth Theatre: *The Adventures Of Shay Mouse*, a stage musical for adults and children by Pat McCabe. Nuns Island Theatre House. Galway.

2.8 Community Documentary

It is important to summarise the role of film-making in this process. In May, 2012, we gained funding (one of four awards out of 200 applicants) to make a community DVD of our Youth Theatre Project, showcasing the importance of myths and legends in social and community life and demonstrating the role of theatre in social change and cultural production. Filming took place between June 9th until November, 3rd, 2012 at a number of community locations. The objective was for the community to drive the content, while the Galway Film Centre provided the technical training and my research supported the process. Together we spent five months producing the documentary.

This 15 minute documentary is on YouTube:

<http://youtu.be/7aHIqg682Ts>

This film was shown in the Town Hall Theatre, Galway, 18th November, 2012 and covered in local newspapers. The production was also shown as part of Galway Film Centre community screenings at the Galway Film Fleadh, on July 10th, 2013.

Interviews for documentary and filming

- Film-making training at ARD Family Resource Centre, 9th June. Sanober Jaffry, Nuala Keady, Randy Asanti, Niamh Heery, Louise O'Grady, Karen Glynn.
- On-going filming took place of DRA Youth Theatre group in three locations: Castlegar Complex, the Roscam Tower and heritage site and the ARD Family Resource Centre.

- James Fahy and Theresa Fahy in their family home and their old farmhouse that was built in 1965. Filming included the old forge.
- Martin Ward, Pat and Jimmy Barrett and Jimmy Sweeney from Travelling community. They were interviewed in Titans Boxing Club. Filming included training with young people and a group discussion with adult trainers from Travelling community.
- Conal Kearney interviewed in his home, Roscam.
- Nuala Keady interviewed in the ARD Family Resource Centre during the costume making session for the Youth Theatre Project. Filming included the young people socialising and making their costumes.
- Randy Asante, interviewed outside the Castlegar Complex, Roscam.
- Joan Opoku Ware was interviewed at home. Filming included social scenes in the street and their home.
- Miriam McPhilbin was interviewed in her nephew's house in Sean Bhaile, Doughiska.

As well as these individuals, the theatre production itself was also filmed on the night of the festival.

There are some important insights about the documentary process that I would like to outline. First, from a research perspective how the documentary was produced is significant. In order to create an environment that was as ‘natural’ and relaxed as possible, we filmed the young people on an on-going fashion. Eventually, they became less self-conscious and inhibited. Although guided and structured (in the sense that we had stories and themes to follow, as well as technical considerations), being flexible and responsive to the people being filmed was critical. Second, while we sometimes had to stop and ask people to rephrase their answers during interviews (when someone was asked what is their name, they needed to reply *my name is...*), consideration was given at all times not to elicit or compel replies. Indeed, one of the illuminating and rewarding

aspects of working with young people is their honesty. They would just shrug if they had no response. Third, as detailed in Chapter eight, the project brought an atmosphere of excitement and interest. The young people were enthusiastic about learning about the production and were extremely proud of being involved. As an interactive process it provided an invaluable opportunity to engage in dialogue. The adults involved in the project also learnt a lot about each other as they forged new relationships.

Four, having such large amounts of footage at the end of my research was very useful, as I was able to go back through some of the more casual extracts to gain statements and develop themes. Five, I believe that this form of research has enormous potential and I would value an opportunity to work on another project now that I have learnt some of the basic methods involved. These include ethical concerns such as the cautious administration of ‘release’ and permission forms, on-going communication with parents or responsible adults, procedures put in place for the safety of children and vulnerable adults (we always had two or three adults present when filming and two during theatre rehearsals, we were conscious of people’s privacy at all times and had a signing in book that was dated and filled in every week). However, balancing the range of demands in research that involved artistic design, creativity, group dynamics, organization, technical issues and working as part of a team of community volunteers and professional film producers was complicated. Sometimes the balancing act was difficult. The success of the project is down to good communication and organisational skills, as well as having a team of people with a range of complementary skills. Everyone had something valuable to offer. My biggest personal challenge was ‘letting go’ of my ideas of how the documentary was to be developed. It was essential that the documentary remained a community led affair. An example of how diplomatic dialogue was called for was when the professional film makers insisted on the inclusion of an interview that others were not happy about. A consensus was arrived at, through discussion and compromise. Overall, the project was an enormous success. Learning the craft of film

making methodology with a group of people with such diverse interests was hugely rewarding.

While the young people are named in the attached documentary, as this video is in the public domain (DVD and online, as well as through public performances), some of the conversations commented upon in the Theatre Project chapter are anonymous (pseudo names are assigned). Although I intended to use anonymous names for all the young people mentioned in the chapter, after consultation with the families, we decided together to use real names for the main characters. This is because the young people were all deeply proud of their work and wanted to be identified. This form was signed by all the families:

Minor Release Form

School of Political Science and Sociology
Aras Moyola, Room 331.
National University of Ireland, Galway
Ireland
Mobile: 00353 (0) 863952831

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I give permission for _____ interviews and / or quotes (and / or photographs), from personal interactions or from film recordings, to be used in Anna King's Ph.D: *An Alternative Gathering: Public Space and Shared Agency in the Lived Experience of Multicultural Ireland*. In addition, I understand that Anna's work may be published in books, journals, newspapers (and other) and that it may be used for further research or for presentations / website media / workshops / teaching.

Although all of the young people's real names are used in the *Making History* documentary, which appeared at the *Town Hall Theatre*, I understand that Anna has given anyone under the age of 18 years an anonymous name in the PhD, to protect their identity.

If you prefer your child's real name to be used, please state clearly.

Signed: _____ Date

NAMES	DRA Young THEATRE DATES						July		
	9 th	16 th	23 rd	30 th	1 st	8 th			
Nathan Mc Phelbin	✓	✓	✓	✓	○	No Film	✓	Set	
GRIFFEN SMALL	✓	✓	✓	✓	INTERV.	○	✓	Nav	
DAVID ROZBICKI	✓	○	○	○	INTERV.	○	✓	Debate	
HUGH M' GINLEY	✓	✓	○	○	○	○	○	Friends	
BIMBO M' GINLEY	✓	○	○	○	○	○	○		
NOKA BARRETT	✓	○	○	○	○	○	○		
SIOBHAN WHITE	✓	○	○	○	○	○	○		
SHAKON UGBADE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○	○		
PATRICK OYELOLA	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	○		
AMMAR TAHIR	○	✓	✓	✓	○	✓	✓	Kne area	
JOSHUA KEANE	○	✓	✓	✓	○	○	○		
JESSICA OKEKE	○	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	○		
LAUREN OKEKE	○	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	○		
VICKY UGBADE	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○		
TOM OYELOLA	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○		
LINDA OSUYEMI	○	○	✓	✓	○	✓	✓	audition recording copy louise	
SAMMARE TAHIR	○	✓	✓	✓	○	✓	✓		
SHAKON UARE	○	✓	✓	✓	○	○	✓	no kate	
CATHERINE KEANE	○	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	script DEBATE	
HANNAH RUSSEN	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		
AISLING CARRICK	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		
CAROLINE KEANE Quirke	○	✓	✓	✓	○	○	○		
ANNA KING	✓	✓	—	✓	○	○	○		
SANDER JAFFRY	✓	✓	○	✓	○	○	○		
NIALA KEADY	✓	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	✓		
RANDI ASANTE	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○		
CONAL KEARNEY	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	script	
SEAN KING	○	○	✓	✓	○	○	○		
PAUL GALLAGHER	○	✓	✓	○	—	—	—		
SPANKY LOONEY	○	○	○	○	—	—	—	—	—
Conor HOGAN	○	✓	✓	—	—	—	—		
RICHIE EKNU	○	○	○	○	✓	✓	○		
LOUISE O'GENDY	○	○	○	○	✓	○	○		
KAREN GLYN	○	○	○	○	✓	○	○		
NIAMH HEERY	✓	○	✓	○	✓	○	✓		
ALISHA HANLEY	○	○	○	○	—	✓	✓	REHEARSAL A.D.	
leader									
Whole Ready Time in 7pm. Time out 4pm 4Whole Ready									

Figure 6 Extract from signing in book.

Sharon Ugbade → Refr project July '12
Victoria Ugbade
Project 2022 Theatre and Film Documentary.
C/O The DRA Community Development Ltd.

Dear Parents,

To protect your children and family from any form of invasion of privacy, Project 2022 would like to ask your permission for the following:

Do we have your permission to take photos on an ongoing basis of the theatre group activity from June until final performance in October, 2012. These photographs will be used for oscail.org (www.oscail.org), Project 2022 face book page and / or other promotional activities. They may also be used for research purposes when evaluating the success of the theatre project later on in the year?

In addition, we have a team of adults and young adults making a film documentary about the theatre production. We equally need your consent for this process. It will involve your children being filmed during theatre group activities as well as during the ultimate performance in October, 2012. This documentary will be filmed at the Town Hall theatre later on in the year and may be involved in further showings / competitions. This activity is supported and funded by the Galway Film Centre (see www.galwayfilmcentre.ie).

I give permission for the above: Stella Ugbade please sign your name.

Date: 22/6/2012

Please do not hesitate to ring me if you need to discuss or clarify these issues further.

Kind regards,

Anna King

086 3952831

Figure 7 Permission form.

Gloria

Release Form Juvenile
ID Projects 2012

I hereby give permission for images of my child, captured during DRA YOUTH THEATRE PROJECT FESTIVAL, through video and digital camera, to be used solely for the purpose of FILM DOCUMENTARY + PROJECT 2022 P.R. + ANNAKINGS documentary and publications, and waive any rights of compensation or ownership PHOTO RESPECTLY. thereto.

I understand that his/her image/voice may or may not be used in the final documentary/publication and his/her name may or may not appear on the credit list.

Name of Participant (please print) Gloria Bonniv, Age: 7 - 10 yrs.

Name of Parent/Guardian (please print) ON BEHALF OF CHILDREN

Date 31 Nov 12012 NAMES: Rachel - Elberle
Asmar - Cordell
Darlene
Kirdele.

Figure 8 Release form

2.9 Lessons Learnt: Descriptive Text, Photography and Community Mapping

Descriptive text

As a more experienced researcher, it is now possible to look back and see ways in which I could have detailed more descriptive text in my written research. For instance, the colour, texture and feel of certain fabrics people were wearing or the colour of their eyes and the way in which they speak or laugh. I would have taken more casual notes, descriptions of the area (such as the colour of the landscape on a cold grey afternoon in contrast to when the spring flowers were attempting to find space between the paving stones; and of the people I worked with and the places I met them. In addition, I have learnt from the work of Back (2012:29) that I can now write in detail about the role of the ‘senses’ in my work. Although I have stated that my senses were involved throughout the research experience, I do not describe them here. The reason for the lack of such text in this research is for two reasons: space (it is already a large piece of research) and also because I did not feel sufficiently confident that these observations would be accepted as ‘academic’. Back’s work has inspired otherwise. He quite rightly asks the questions: ‘How to account for the social world without assassinating the life contained within it’ (Back, 2012:21)? Furthermore when considering this question he argues that often during the research endeavour

quotations are extracted for meaningful inspection from the live contexts from which they emerge in the first place. They become epitaphs to a life passed in living. The challenge is how to find ways to represent such lives and objects that sustain rather than foreclose their vitality and on-going life (Back, 2012:21).

While I feel I have given justice to this endeavour, in that I have continually attempted to contextualise the residents lived experience in this research, I believe that bringing the personalities ‘alive’ through more descriptive text would have supported my intention more fully. However, it is important to recognise that, while this may be an honourable intention, descriptive text is not ‘just’ descriptive, but carries a huge burden of extraneous or misleading intervention from the author’s cultural position. How to write such accounts is, therefore a real challenge.

Community Mapping

In addition, I could have included a community mapping exercise as part of the World Café experience. I came across this work at a workshop on 19th September, 2013 on Community Mapping by Maeve Lydon. Her work demonstrates the power of bringing people together creatively to capture the power of place, visualise engagement and create contexts for change (Lydon, 1985). This is achieved through the creation of visual material that maps people's local environment from both the prospective of what exists already and what needs to be changed. This is an approach that is similar to the World Café experience, detailed in this thesis, but I believe that having a powerful visual product from the experience could have inspired further engagement. This is because, as argued by Prosser (2011), the 'visual' is not necessarily about just the image or object in itself but more concerned with the perception and the meanings attributed to them (Prosser, 2011:479).

Arguably, when people engage in creating a visual artefact they are infusing it with meaning. In my experience, when this kind of craft making occurs individual's feel more 'attached', more willing to feel part of the event and therefore there is more likelihood that they will continue to be engaged.

One of the problems I encountered with the World Café experience is that although there was a significant positive response to experience, nobody came forward from outside our original group to offer to help further. This is quite common in social development projects, where there is more often than not a small group of people that do the majority of the work while the larger community communicate their needs, but there is a disjuncture between 'needs' and 'action'. It is my opinion that engaging in community mapping might have extended the group further, because people might have felt more personally inspired through the use of visual material and through the crafting of a map about their area.

Creative use of photography

Under other circumstances, I would use photography in a more creative manner than I did here. I have used photography throughout this research for two reasons. First, I believe it provides a ‘feel’ for an area or topic that otherwise would be missed through text alone. For instance, the powerful images of the ghost estate building in Chapter three capture the trials of local residents more than the written word. It reaffirms Schwartz’s (2009) argument that pictures

offer us ideas and an irreducible experience that cannot be restated or translated in linguistic terms. Articulations produced through photographs can offer us insights based on spatial and compositional arrangements, they can convey moods and emotions (Schwartz, 2009, cited by Prosser, 2011:481).

Many of the photographs of the young people give a real sense of how they bonded and enjoyed the experience of being involved in the Play.



Figure 9 - Actors enjoying tea break during costume making. Photograph from community documentary.

Second, I believe that visual stimulation can engage the reader in ways that the written word cannot. The work of *Friends of Merlin Woods* is a case in point. They believe that their Facebook campaign was driven by the visual dimension of the photographs taken.

The photographs on Facebook provide rich content that enhances the forum as a medium for shared communication and community building. In this sense, photography can become another tool to contribute to social action and mobilisation, as well as act ‘as an extension of participant observation’ (Hurworth and Sweeney, 1995:153).

Many of the photographs for this research were taken by Peter Brennan, who lives in Doughiska and was involved in much of the community activity. His contribution has been valuable to the DRA community-building puzzle, attending nearly every event, opening or important meeting with his camera. He has built up hundreds of photographs that document the very beginning of the new community from 2000 to present. His photographs have also been an important element in funding presentations, and to highlight maintenance problems and provide descriptive visual material concerned with challenges associated with development in the area. On this matter, Hurworth and Sweeney (1995) note that photography can be a useful tool to bring about change. In their research, Hurworth and Sweeney document a community development and housing project in North Melbourne, where photography was used as a method for developing a ‘sense of community’ through a ‘participatory model’. Inspired by the work of D’Amico (1986), tenants were asked by the local Residents’ Association to ‘comment on their world, identity, and daily social interactions’. Local residents from a multi-ethnic neighbourhood were encouraged to ‘work together and practice decision-making as a community’, by taking photographs that represent what it was like to live in North Melbourne.

Pictures of local ‘graffiti, rubbish-filled laundries, gaping ceiling cracks, rotted carpets and a view of a fire from a nearby chemical plant’ were taken. Positive images included scenes from a ‘community festival, colourful markets, prized possessions, and a well-tended balcony gardens’ (Hurworth and Sweeney, 1995:160-161). Hurworth and Sweeney point out that the Melbourne tenant’s photographic data became a powerful lobbying tool, as it influenced local government to send out tradesmen to resolve

maintenance issues that had been highlighted through the pictures (Hurworth and Sweeney, 1995:161-163).

The power of photography is immense. As well as contributing to participatory development it can help us understand the more subtle aspects of social life. The drawing of light through photography is a medium that can capture and hold the most delicate moment; it can also create an image never experienced before. Photography can do many things. It records history, it can make real the abstract, and it can tell a story. Pictures have become part of our daily dialogue. They have a place in history not just as a record of events, but as visual reflections of our collective memory. Peter Brennan's photography, for instance, provides an account of cultural change in the DRA over a ten year period.

As part of this research Peter Brennan's photography is what Back (2009) terms 'ethnography in action' (Back, 2009:472). They are representations of the key themes explored throughout the research through the eyes of Peter Brennan. Thus far, his photography is used here as a form of historical account. However, photography can be used to 'understand contexts' in more depth and as 'a means of carrying out historical comparisons' (Hurworth and Sweeney, 1995:153). See also, Dowdall and Golden, 1989; English, 1988; Tucker and Dempsey, 1991). Photography can be used to understand social situations better as they 'betray the symbolism of a class or group'. As Back observes, it is not just about the

interpretation of what an image contains but also the social and historical dispositions of the photographer. In a sense the biography of the photographer is revealed in the choices s/he makes and yet at the same time the image-maker remains visibly absent (Back, 2009:474).

When reflecting on the photography of Colin Stanley, from *Friends of Merlin Woods*, what is really interesting is that his shots are all detailed close up images using a macro lens. While they are stunning creations, it is interesting how he rarely provides shots that take in the larger area. He is interested in specific detail rather than context, thus revealing the subjective nature of the image and the personality of the person behind the

camera. Such an observation could have enormous implications for visual research interpretation. One of the ways of possibly overcoming such bias would be to take an image from a range of angles and use creative media production to superimpose images on top or beside each other, or by using collages. Similar to Back's (2012) work with poetry, a reflective narrative could be engaged in that could include the photographer in the interpretative exercise.

My use of photography is narrower in scope. It uses 'photographic rather than word emphasis' (Prosser, 2011:481). But, I have learnt a lot from the use of visual material for future research. Take the photograph of Paddy King, a local resident whom I interviewed early on about change in the area.



Figure 10 Paddy King, Farmer, 74. 19th January, 2011. Photograph taken by Anna King

I think his photograph demonstrates the power of how an image can capture the past and the present together. His stance is one of pride of place, family and culture. The fact that

he refused to smile was not, in my view something negative, but a way for him to hold on to a particular type of culture that is passing in Ireland. Neither did it imply detachment, as he had been incredibly open and friendly during the interview. Not smiling was ‘just his way’. That the photograph may not portray fully the man that I had experienced, an individual who was acquiescent to change, points to the benefit of using mixed methods. It cautions against the distillation of human nature. Using mixed mediums, such as photography or film-making, to explore creative approaches to research is exciting. There are many subtle aspects of social life that can be undermined in traditional forms of research. For instance, how light affects our experience. There are many variations of light. Blinded by a glare, seduced by a subtle glow; light affects every waking moment. The power of light can transform or destroy, depending on the context or circumstance. The consideration of light is, therefore, important when attempting to understand experience.



Figure 11 - Actors performing stations of the cross, Easter, 2013. Merlin Park, Doughiska. Photograph taken by Anna King

The colours used, the texture of the background, whether natural light is used, whether it comes from the foreground or background, if the focus is soft or harsh, animated or still,

are all important factors that affect the experience of the beholder, and are issues that become more important to research when we use visual data. When considering the social world, we more often than not focus on interactions or the material, social or political influences that shape the encounter. Using photography as part of the research project helped me to understand how the *feeling of an environment* can have a major impact as well. If we interview someone in a cold bare room with stark, unyielding light, then we can guess that we may get a different response compared with an environment that is more relaxed or warm. While such considerations are taken into account by many researchers, I believe that there is room to explore in more depth how particular influences of different everyday environments affect what people say, to whom they say it, and whether meaningful relationships emerge from the encounter.

Research in many ways is similar to taking a photograph. It offers snap shots of life perceived through composition (context). How life and composition come together influence whether our experience is pleasing or challenging. When looking at a photograph, our eyes and senses, often without knowing, consider the depth of field and content at the same time. Social engagement is similar: we absorb and make sense of a myriad of influences at one time. Like the picture, there are an amazing amount of things going on, even in the most banal, or simple moment. Photography and life are one and the same; every movement or expression in the scene comes together as part of the powerful reflection we call life.

Photographs stimulate emotion, they share an individual's plight, they demonstrate wealth or poverty, they can therefore, change the way we think and feel about something. I did not use photography for these aims, they were more to provide context. However, I have subsequently become interested in their role as a sociological tool. Similar to Back's (2012) work with poetry, I would like to further explore the role of using visual material to invite participants to explore beneath the surface of the image that we call life and discover some of its concealed dimensions.

2.10 Future Plans: School for the Performing Arts, Public Art Programmes, Regeneration of Public Spaces, Mixed ethnographic Methods.

Future research that I intend to pursue includes the use of mixed methods in social research, such as film-making, photography, art, theatre and poetry. In addition, I will be contacting place-based performance researchers in order to develop a more refined form of social activism that uses arts-based methodology. I am particularly interested in the work of Lewis (2007) and McAuley (1999, 2005, 2006, 2007), as I would like to develop a more ‘place-based’ experience of performance ethnography, one that examines the dynamic between history, place and performance, where spaces are transformed into meaningful places for social engagement.

Second, the resounding success of our project has inspired us to set up an official theatre company (below), dedicated to social and cultural development in the DRA. *The Public Space Theatre Company*:



Figure 12 Public Space Theatre Company

We are seeking funding to support a social and cultural regeneration project that uses the arts to build relationships and create conducive public spaces for community gathering

and cultural production. In addition, this will also offer a platform from which different cultural practices can be creatively interpreted, understood and expressed.

The project has three specific objectives:

1. School for the Performing Arts:

Our project provides creative experiences for young people to explore personal and career development in theatre, dance, music and art. It will develop community art and performance programmes that will provide quality, professional entertainment, as well as showcasing the potential inherent within community arts. *The Public Space Theatre Company* performing arts school will provide dance, drama and music in local communities. It will support young people to shine, build their confidence and explore their individual and community identity. We aim to create a centre of excellence to deliver a multi-disciplined approach to social development, the performing arts and academic research. We believe that it is time to provide alternative educational spaces, to move from the school hall and the academy, into bright, creative public spaces whereby the whole community can be involved in supporting their young people in the communities that they live. We will engage young people into these programmes through a community liaison programme that will work with established organisations such as the ARD Family Resource Centre and local groups in the area such as the Ghanaian Union. We already have many young people in the area that are hoping this project will start in Spring, 2014.

Catering for young people from secondary school to 25 years, we will offer classes in drama, street dance, musical theatre and ballet. The year will be divided into three terms, with week long summer schools in July and August. Each year we will present our showcase performance. Students will also avail of examination by the Royal Academy of Speech and Drama and Dance, who award recognised certificates. In addition, we will work towards establishing a work placement and apprenticeship programme for older youths, within industries that value creative, innovative ideas.

Funding permitting, there will also be opportunities to develop an international exchange programme.

2. Public Art Programmes

Working with the performing arts school, *Public Space Theatre Company* will provide creative community theatre, as well as innovative opportunities for young people to be engaged in all aspects of making and producing theatre, stage design, costume and make-up, film and multimedia productions, dance and music production. From design to implementation, young people (aged between 15 – 25) will experience all aspects of production and direction. These projects will be rolled out in stages as, and when, funding is obtained.

3. Regeneration of Public Spaces

The project will also bring the concept of making theatre into the community. Our concept is powerful: theatre is not only about performance, but also an opportunity for social and cultural transformation. The concept will be expanded to a number of public spaces. Here, theatre takes on a new meaning: creating physical spaces that are conducive for community gathering. This will bring theatre to the streets through art, plays, performance and dance, engaging parents, local business and residents in the production. The project is committed to utilizing public spaces for 'whole' communities. Here, the use of performance and public art within creative social spaces engages young people within public spaces in a new and exciting way, thus offering new forms of civic expression.

Merlin Park Woods, for instance, is a wonderful public space for educational and artistic performance. We are in the process of designing a short performance with *Friends of Merlin Woods* to help counteract the negative associations attached to a tree in the woods, where young people have allegedly committed suicide. We will draw on tales about the tree that date back hundreds of years to when the woods were used by local carpenters. This production will provide an opportunity for community dialogue about suicide, as well as give space to explore the role of place within social contexts.

The project is committed to utilizing public spaces for 'whole' communities. The use of performance and public art within creative social spaces that engage young people in a new and exciting way, offers new forms of civic expression. The concept will be expanded to a number of public spaces where theatre will take on a new meaning: creating physical spaces that are conducive for community gathering. These sites will be transformed into artistic spaces that will stay in-situ after the performance. *These kind of spaces will 'continue' to bring 'alive' the connectedness that the theatre provides.*

4. Social & Cultural Development

Public Space Theatre Company provides a model for social and cultural development and research within multicultural communities. We will publish research and promote the DRA community as an international centre for social regeneration through the arts. The project is particularly interested in using the arts as a platform for understanding and adapting to change, especially within socially and culturally diverse contexts. As well as providing rich opportunities to explore the positive dimensions of change, bringing theatre alive within community is a powerful way to bring people from different cultures, backgrounds, age groups and nationalities together. Thus, 'making theatre' builds new relationships and bonds within community and provides meaningful ways to envision and create a shared future.

Apart from continuing to work on the youth theatre project, encounters during my research has inspired me to become involved in an interfaith group with my supervisor Professor Ricca Edmondson, organised by the local Imam Khalid Sallabi. Although I am not part of any institutionalised faith, I believe that the valuable work achieved throughout the last four years can support further research into building meaningful relationships between different faith groups. I hope to organise the writing of a poem by two people from different faiths about their experiences; we will then find an artist to paint a picture of the poem's message. These will be displayed during the official opening of the DRA Community Centre in 2014. It will provide a forum for discussion

and extend an invitation to different cultures and faiths to make new friends and share experiences.

Project Development:

We will be seeking partnerships with *National University of Ireland, Galway* as well as international universities and educational establishments interested in the arts as a form of local development.

Ballybane Enterprise Centre have allocated Galway Arts Festival Director, John Crumlish as a mentor to help identify funding for our project(s). January, 2013, Galway Arts Officer, James Harrold (Galway City Council) became a partner to promote the DRA as a centre of excellence in social and cultural regeneration through the arts. In 2014 he will work with our theatre project to bring professional performers and artists into the community. November, 2013 we received 2,000 euro from the Galway City Arts Grants. We have networked with many local and national community organizations to promote the project and build relationships.

Chapter 3

A Shifting Landscape in which to Gather

Every river is more than just a river. Every rock is more than just one rock. Why does a real estate developer look across an open field and see comfortable suburban ranch homes nestled in quiet cul-de-sacs, while a farmer envisions endless rows of waving wheat and a hunter sees a five-point buck cautiously grazing in preparation for the coming winter? The open field is the same physical thing, but it carries multi-symbolic meanings that emanate from the values by which people define themselves. The real estate developer, the farmer, the hunter are definitions of who people are, and the natural environment – the physical entity of the open field- is transformed symbolically to reflect these self-definitions (Greider and Garkovic, 1994:1)

A landscape that has evolved over a period of time has been shaped by many factors, both physical and social. The term landscape is significant for it holds within it a profound opportunity to understand ourselves as both part of that landscape, and of a social-cultural-scape. As Greider and Garkovich note:

Our understanding of nature and of human relationships with the environment are really cultural expressions used to define who *we* were, who *we* are, and who *we* hope to be at this place and in this space. Landscapes are the reflection of these cultural identities, which are about *us*, rather than the natural environment (Greider and Garkovich, 1994:2).

Before considering some of the crucial factors that transformed the DRA's social and physical landscape, this chapter pauses for a while on the changes themselves, and how they shaped a number of individual and group experiences. The placement of this chapter, before the public policy chapter, is made so the reader can gain a *sense* of what has taken place, rather than bouncing into a chapter about policy that may seem 'removed' from location. Although it might seem intelligible to reverse this order, it would not provide the impression I wish to convey. Important as the underlying forces are, this chapter is concerned more with how individuals coped and responded.

Five kilometres East of Galway city centre, the area now known as the DRA, has been transformed.¹² A period of rapid economic development re-shaped completely the neighborhood from a homogenous, semi-rural network of traditional Irish families to a multicultural, heterogeneous society. The emergence of urban sprawl and the associated social fragmentation has changed the physical and social landscape irreversibly. For people who had tight historical and cultural association with their landscape, this was a particularly dramatic experience.

An interesting starting point is to reflect upon how residents of the DRA have stories to tell about important shifts in Ireland's cultural landscape. The land for them has stories to tell; it has been part of Irish traditional social practices for generations. This is evident in the place names for the area:

There are a number of theories regarding the origins of the name Doughiska. Some believe it derives its name from 'Black Water' or 'Pool.' However, as with other names and places throughout Ireland, the folklore is almost always more interesting and exciting. According to one legend, the name Doughiska is derived from the murder of an old couple that lived in Merlin woods and had an Inn there during Cromwellian times. The story goes that as the Cromwellian army made its way across Connacht to lay siege to Galway city in 1651, some of the soldiers stopped at the Inn and asked for a drink of water. The old couple, being Gaelic speakers, did not understand the soldier's request and so did not respond. The soldiers, in turn, did not understand the

¹² In a recently compiled census report the ARD Family Resource Centre noted that: 'whilst the areas fall within the Ballybane Electoral area, they are distinctly separate in both a geographical sense, as there isn't a direct road or bus service linking them, and in the fact that they are developing communities (84% of the housing built less than 12 years ago / 53% of accommodation is temporarily rented), whereas Ballybane is an established community (Frecklington and Carney, 2013).

In response to the massive demographic expansion of the area, Bishop Martin Drennan officially opened the Good Shepherd Parish, Galway on Sunday 29th April, 2007. Formerly part of Ballybane parish, the DRA made its mark on history when over 400 people attended the opening celebration, which included many people from its multicultural community (Interview, appointed parish priest, Fr. Martin Glynn, March 16th, 2009).

Irish language and, believing that they were being refused a ‘drink of water’, became infuriated, killed the couple and buried them in the woods. Another version of the story mentions that the soldiers were looking for alcohol and the old couple thought it was a drink of water they were requesting. Over time, the story was passed down through generations of local people and the legend grew that they were killed for a drink of water, hence this interpretation of the name, Doughiska.

(Extract from the DRA community website, oscail.org (Irish for open), written by historian William Henry).

When walking around the DRA there are many stories to be heard, ranging from families that emigrated abroad and have now come home, to the struggle of locals for political independence, of personal narratives of lost love, and the hardship of ‘times gone by’. But, significantly, what really comes across when chatting to older locals is the profound shift in how people now engage with their local landscape. People from the area, such as James Fahy, seem to live between two worlds, the old and the new:

When I grew up in Doughiska it was completely beyond any comprehension that one would go into Galway frequently. You might get to see Galway City once or twice a month, whereas now there is a bus service outside the door every 15 minutes.

(James Fahy, born in Doughiska is a member of one of the original families from the area. Interview for community documentary in Fahy Residence with Theresa Fahy (mother), Doughiska. 11th August, 2012).

In particular, much history was lived out on the Doughiska road, which can be seen in this picture of James Fahy’s father, Willie Fahy:



Figure 13 Willie Fahy. Photograph from family album.

Typical of Irish families my father was involved in the revolution:

My great-grandfather settled and took over the forge. It would have been this man who came back from Australia and settled here. He took over a black smiths forge. And then they started carpentry and created the horse and cart business.

I remember having two horses on the farm, tillage, turnips potatoes, some corn, beef cattle, sheep. When mother married into the house we started a dairy farm delivering milk in a milk churn. Father sold horses and bought a tractor. It was a difficult life because you had to be here 24 – 7, with milking twice day. I'm renovating the old house, for sentimental reasons I like to see and preserve part of my own heritage and lineage.

(James Fahy, born in Doughiska is a member of one of the original families from the area. Interview for community documentary in Fahy's residence with Theresa Fahy (mother), Doughiska. 11th August, 2012).



Figure 14 - James Fahy in the old forge. Photograph taken from community documentary, *Making History*.

In the picture above James Fahy shows the tools that were used in the blacksmith's forge. He identifies the tools used to shear sheep: 'We are preserving a little bit of history'.



Figure 15 - Old forge. Photograph taken from community documentary, *Making History*.

A significant cultural tradition of the area was hurling. James Fahy's father was an avid supporter:

He was a very keen hurler. He passionately loved the sport. He was very active in the Castlegar Hurling Club, right up until the day he died.



Figure 16 - James Fahy's father playing at Croke Park. Photograph from family album.

Of importance to all development in the DRA has been a startling transformation in both the physical and social landscape. Here, reminiscences of Breda McNicolas, who was born in the area gives a sense of the dramatic nature of change:

I missed the old Doughiska, where we knew everyone and my father used to ride his horse and cart up the road. (Breda McNicolas, 20th July, 2008. McNicolas residence, Doughiska).



Figure 17 - Breda McNicolas' mother and father, Bridie and Jack Burke with Paddy King. From family album.



Figure 18 - The old Doughiska Road. Breda McNicolas' sister, Siobhan Burke. From the family album.

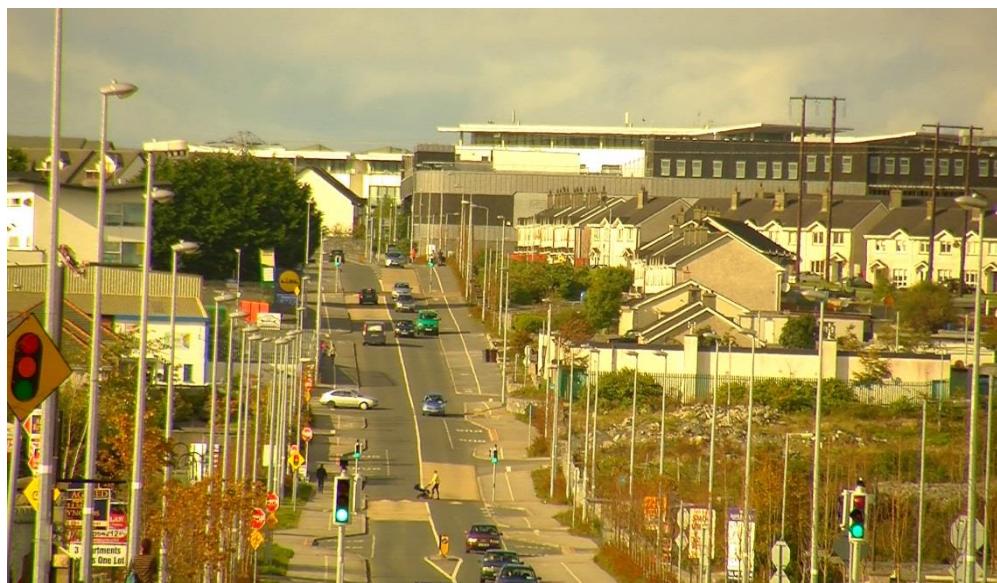


Figure 19 - The new Doughiska Road.

Breda grew up in Doughiska when there were only a few families living in the area, a railway lodge, an old marble quarry and Fahy's farm:

When I got married in 1974 more Irish people moved into the area... We all knew each other; we had a lovely 'community'. This all changed in 2000. We had no idea of the extent to which the area was going to change. It all happened so quickly. It started when McInerneys bought a piece of Willie Fahy's farmland and this became one of the first estates... houses started going up on the Doughiska road. We didn't know what to do or how to react to this rapid change. There was no opposition though, we didn't know what we could do. We were told that it was just progress...

(Breda McNicolas, 20th July, 2008. McNicolas residence, Doughiska).



Figure 20 - Development in Doughiska. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

The biggest issue for the local people of Doughiska at that time was the lack of infrastructure:

The builders seemed to just do whatever they wanted. There was no planning. Providing infrastructure and new amenities for the increasing population should have been a prerequisite to any building. They didn't even widen the road or put in footpaths.

(Breda McNicolas, 20th July, 2008. McNicolas residence, Doughiska).

This shifting landscape was traumatic for Nuala Keady. She recalls that there were hardly any facilities in the area:

When I moved out here in 1985 the road started at Coyne's shop and went right through to the railway line out onto the Dublin road. There was a smaller road that went to Merlin Park and the other side of that road is now cut in two by the motorway. The only shop was Coyne's and a small butcher's shop. They were mostly bungalows out here, attached to farming land.

When I moved out here I saw that there was a Traveller site and Tigeens. I had lived in the countryside before moving to Galway, and Travellers would regularly camp on the roadside near our house. I developed good relationships with them and they even helped me out after my husband died.

(Nuala Keady, 22nd November, 2012. Interview for community documentary, *Making History*, at the Family Resource Centre, Doughiska).

Originally from Roscommon, Nuala Keady moved to Galway in 1972 and then to a bungalow in Doughiska in 1985. It had no inside water tank and only four channels from an aerial in the roof.

It was all farmland right from the shop down to the sea. When the bulldozers moved in (2000) the pheasants, birds and foxes disappeared. They cut down all the trees; nature disappeared overnight. Previously, we'd been a very sociable community: bonfires at the crossroads, cards and socials at the Castlegar Hurling club; the place was buzzing. But when the developers moved in they built massive roads that divided the community. We were suddenly physically isolated from one another. The whole fabric and practice of everyday life changed... We used to call into each other's house for a cuppa tea; the door was always open. These days you have to make an appointment! We no longer felt like a

community. Most social events stopped. We didn't even have a local church to keep us connected, until Fr. Martin moved here in 2005.

(19th June, 2012. 147. Conversation with Irish resident, Nuala Keady, Túr Uisce, Doughiska).

This posed a number of challenges. Nuala Keady describes how the transformed landscape affected social life:

When they cut the hay it was a social event, something for the kids to do in the summer. In June, St Johns eve, they had a kind of bonfire up at the crossroads. Everyone congregated in the evening to chat and have a sing-song and the kids played around as well. At Christmas we would have a social. Everyone went to it. There was card playing on Thursday night. In 2000 everyone was talking about how the Celtic Tiger was here...

(Nuala Keady, 22nd November, 2012. Interview for community documentary, *Making History*, at the Family Resource Centre, Doughiska).

Such practices stopped after development, changing irrevocably the social aspects to life in Doughiska at that time.

While the changing landscape of the DRA is by no means unique, it exhibits in a concentrated form, many of the challenges associated with this period in Ireland: unbridled development and an enormous population explosion.¹³ As Breda recalls:

Suddenly so many people of different nationalities moved into the area. To be honest it was a shock at first.

(Breda McNicolas, 20th July, 2008. McNicolas residence, Doughiska).

¹³ The Geraghty report (2009) estimated that the DRA grew to 7,279 people, from 200 in 2000. 26.6% of the population were aged under 15 years, with an estimated 1,933 children living in area. One third of population comprised of non-Irish nationals, with at least 33 different nationalities living in the area (Geraghty, 2009).

With property speculation in full flow from 2000 onwards, the DRA became a *resource* for developers and landlords, as thousands of people moved into an area bereft of schools, community facilities, buses or even lights on the road in many of the estates.



Figure 21 - The new Doughiska landscape. Photograph by Anna King

Of the three settlements, Doughiska has arguably undergone the most profound change, and is now an urban landscape of sprawling high density housing estates with major socio-economic and cultural differences. Here, Paul Frecklington, original from the United Kingdom (Manager of the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska) notes that:

According to 2011 CSO small area population statistics almost 47% of our community (Doughiska) was born outside Ireland. Despite the recession many of these migrants have settled down and started families. This is reflected in the fact that 54.33% of people in our community are living in a family setting with children. The people behind these statistics, who show up at the door of our centre want to stay in Ireland, their children are settled, some describe themselves as Irish. The combination of statistical and anecdotal evidence has led us

to identify building a multi-cultural community as a key objective for future generations of people living in the area.

(Cited in The ARD Family Resource Centre 2011 Census Summary Report Frecklington & Carney, 2013:9).

The transient nature of this growing ‘settlement’ was of concern to people who were more settled in the area. Nuala Keady, for example, states:

Where I live in Tur Uisce, its part of Willie Fahy’s land. It’s one of 33 estates between the Doughiska side of the road and the Roscam. I think a lot of people bought houses during the Celtic Tiger with the intention of buying them, selling them and moving onto something better. But, then the crash came and the people are still living here. I think that it was better for the community that all the people that did move in 2000 didn’t move out, because you might have had a lot of transient people, and you would have a lot of people moving.

(Nuala Keady, 22nd November, 2012. Interview for community documentary, *Making History*, at the Family Resource Centre, Doughiska).

While Nuala Keady is relieved that people have remained living in the area, Doughiska still has a significant transient population, with rental accommodation accounting for 70.37% in total, and 52% private landlords with the remaining being from voluntary or local authority housing. The more permanent residents live in Sean Bhaile, a large local authority housing estate, with over 30% of residents being lone parent households (Frecklington & Carney, 2013:4).

While many of the families living in Doughiska are new to the area, there are several native Irish families still living in the locality (Fahys, Burkes and the Furys and a number of Travellers who have been living in Doughiska for generations). In one generation these families have witnessed a complete transformation of ‘their’ community. Two members of the travelling community, who have lived all their lives in Doughiska, describe it thus:

We have lovely neighbours around... it’s absolutely brilliant out there... compared to years ago when there was nothing, only 12 houses

in the road... never any hassle... when we were young it was lovely as well... because we would go down to the fields and do a bit of hunting or whatever... do a bit of jogging and stuff... The Kings down the roads bred goats and stuff, they were great mates of us... Then you got the Kings out the back... We always got along, put it this way – we used to rob each other's chickens... it was always good out there.

Our families go back 50 years... it was the Corcoran's first and then the Barretts' about 38 – 42 years... we were born out there... Me grandfather was there, they'd pull in there in the winter months and then pull out and go around Connemara in the summertime... Get out for the summer and try to make a few pound and get along... We would come back for the winter and get out of the cold... when they lived out there it was in the tigín... it was lovely. I liked it the way it was but, I like it the way it is now... it's easier, you don't have to travel up from Ballybrit to Castlepark to get milk. It's much easier..

(Interview for community documentary *Making History*, with Pat and Jimmy Barratt. 7th September, 2012. Titan's Boxing Gym).

Although regarded as 'progress' for the Barretts, for others these changes caused consternation and insecurity. Characteristics familiar to the community, such as cohesion and common identity, deteriorated in a short period of time. There was no gradual evolution or period of adjustment to such vast development. Distinct and relatively 'stable' communities, each with unique social characteristics, were catapulted into unknown and strange landscapes. Though defined as one community, the sudden population explosion has, ironically, created a context that now has dispersed, socially fragmented groups of people living in close proximity, with very little in common. Former ideas, perceptions and experiences of community have weakened, replaced by new and different conceptions of what constitutes community, both for the native Irish and other nationalities living in the area.

While some parts of the community were attempting to engage in processes of change, such as Breda McNicholas, Nuala Keady, Jimmy and Pat Barrett, others coped in a different way. They retreated more into their own traditional social networks. In some contexts this was facilitated by a variance in changes to the physical environment. While

Doughiska and Roscam experienced a striking population increase, Ardaun's development was put on hold in 2007 as the Irish economy slowed. The Ardaun (meaning high place) remains primarily farmland displaying many of the hallmarks of a traditional rural Irish community, with only 11 homes spread over 158 hectares of land. This has a feeling of 'old' Ireland, and natives still relate to history of the area.

Pausing for a while on the experiences of people living in the Ardaun gives a flavour of what Irish life was like before development in 2000. The Kings and Burkes, who still reside in the area, have a long history that dates back to 1850 when the Ardaun was owned by Theobald Blake who sublet it to three families: Michael Burke, James Greaves and Patrick King (Padraic O'Laoi, 1996).¹⁴ Up until the 1990s, people from the Ardaun would have been life-long residents, with extensive kinship networks and, even though the residents of the Ardaun are still Irish, most people are no longer native to the area. As many of the older generation have died, social dynamics within the community have changed as the younger generation are more mobile and less likely to socialise in the same way as they did before the Celtic Tiger experience. Paddy King, from one of the original three families, reminisces:

When I was a younger man, the land was full of men working. You would walk the land every day and meet a farmer. Everyone you would see, you would know. What was important in those days was talking. There would always be a lad out by the wall to talk to. Now I still go out walking on my land, but I don't meet anyone. Everyone has gone. First it was to the factories, and then when the Celtic Tiger came the men left the land and went working in construction. Farming became a hobby. You would only see them in the evening when they came home from work. And then they were too busy to talk. Communication died.

(Visit with Paddy King, 19th January, 2011. King's residence, Ardaun).

¹⁴ It is unclear from the publication itself the exact date that this book was published, but I have been told it was printed in 1996. There are limited copies of this book, but many residents of the Castlegar Parish still have copies.



Figure 22 - Paddy King, Farmer, aged 74 Years. Photograph taken by Anna King.

When reflecting on the transformation of the DRA (particularly Doughiska) the King family lament the changes that have occurred, but appear philosophical as well. There is a sense of resignation and acquiescence to change, described as ‘progress’, as something that cannot be stopped. Progress, at least to Paddy and his son Martin, is regarded as an unchangeable order, beyond human control, a pattern of human nature:

We learnt years ago that you cannot stop progress. I remember as a child Paddy Nally’s land down the road. It was full of hazelnuts and mushrooms and we were always trying to get into his fields. He was a terrifying man and if he caught us he would chase us off his land. Paddy fought development right up until the dual carriageway was laid right through his land 20 odd years ago. He refused to sell. They moved him off with a serving order the day before the tractors came in.

(Martin King, son of Paddy King, 19th January, 2011. King’s residence, Ardaun).

Martin now farms his Father’s land. Martin and Paddy both seem to accept the inevitable vulnerability of the human condition in the face of uncontrollable forces. They

appear to have made peace with the unstable and insecure setting in which they now find themselves. Martin King observed that:

Change can be good. There are many different cultures living here now... more so in Doughiska, than Ardaun, but I guess we are more multicultural now... you can't stop change... even here, which is still very rural compared to Doughiska, development has happened. There are new people living here. The older families are disappearing. Farming is not the same as it used to be...

(Martin King, son of Paddy King, 19th January, 2011. Kings' residence, Ardaun).

Although many residents in the community found change difficult, there was, more often than not, an openness to 'accept' and 'move' with the times. In this vein, Martin King pointed out that we

learnt from this that progress is like a teenager: you have to give them the head and let them go; you cannot stop them... likewise you cannot stop progress. Things change and we have to make way for new people. The generations change... Paddy Nally is dead now...; it's all a natural cycle and it cannot be stopped. Every generation needs more space and room.

(Martin King, 19th January, 2011. King's residence, Ardaun).

Gerry Burke, a native to the area, also accepts change, but for different reasons. He says this is because he has a close family network. In many ways

this area had always experienced change. At the height of the famine in 1840s, 20 families were moved off of Ballybrit Castle grounds by landlords. These evicted families found refuge in Doughiska (Deochuisce) and they established a new village called Baile Nua, known to locals still in the area as Ballynew (new area).¹⁵ People have come and gone throughout the years, but nothing as dramatic as over the last ten. My family have seen the area completely transformed. The Waithman family, for example, who owned Merlin Park house

¹⁵ People in the area still remember the families that first moved to Doughiska: Connors, O'Neill, Sweeneys, Hollands, Mannion, Somerly, Joyce, Maguire, Niland, Costello, Gavin, Lydon and Biggs (O'Laoi, 1996:85).

from 1880 – 1940s, donated their property in the 1940s when the government passed a bill giving the state power to take possession of land for public good.¹⁶ The Health Board demanded the sale of Merlin Park and house for a T.B hospital. Three generations of Waithman had lived in Merlin House. A sister of Waithman inherited the Merlin Park marble quarry from her father and she appointed her brother to run the business. The quarry did exceptionally well for decades, but that too closed down in 1970.

My family have always been here as far back as I can find. We have seen many changes. Twenty years ago everyone knew each other. My grandfather owned 50 acres and my uncle had 80. Much of the land was unusable though, for the most part we had dairy cattle. As a young lad I remember that times were hard; we didn't have money, but we all had potatoes, milk and pigs to eat. There were only traditional families living in the area, including the travellers, who seem to have always lived here. In those days we called them tin smiths. They were a fundamental part of our community and they would come and have tea, dig potatoes and help out on the farm when we were busy. In 1965 my father died and I took over the farm. From then on things really began to change for us as a family and community. In the 80s we invested in pedigree Holstein cows and now we keep race horses. Although life now is so much easier, I miss the old days.

I am a bit of a loner, so I don't get involved in the new community; I keep myself to myself, as I have a large family network. In many ways I don't have to go out into the new community as I still know local people from the area. I can see how it must be difficult for people arriving from other countries though. It must be very hard not having family in the area. I would imagine that the need is stronger for these people to build a community.

(Visit with Theresa and Gerry Burke, 18th January, 2011. Burke's residence, Doughiska).

Even though the DRA's physical and demographic landscape has changed dramatically, for the main part Gerry still lives his life as he has always. This reveals that it is not just change that influences how an individual lives in a community: Gerry's

¹⁶ Merlin Park House was built in 1812, a Georgian mansion originally owned by the Blake family until sold to Henry Hodgson's in the 1850s, when the Blakes fell into financial hardship (O' Laoi, 1996: 95; Sheerin, 2000:75).

view raises questions about what an individual's ideas about community are, the extent to which being part of a familiar network acts as a buffer to the forces of change, and the degree to which personal motivations and needs have more bearing on lived experience than a commitment to social development outside of familiar boundaries. In their response to social fragmentation, the Burkes removed themselves into a 'closed' familial network.

Ardaun's neighbouring settlement, Roscam (Roscannin, meaning crooked promontory), has been physically transformed, but it still has intact some ancient Irish heritage. Though once as rural as the Ardaun, it is now a large residential development with shops and a café¹⁷, but Roscam was once a very old settlement that dates back to the ninth century. It had a significant monastery in A.D. 1177.

Jenny Reilly moved to the old railway lodge in Roscam the day World War two was announced: 1st September, 1939. She took over the job of railway gate attendant because the previous employee had been killed by a train. Jenny Reilly was born in Foster Street, Galway. Her father was a guard on the Clifden railway line, but he died when she was three years old, leaving her mother to raise herself and three other sisters and a brother. She vividly remembers her experiences as a young girl walking the railway line to Galway every day to attend school:

There was no public transport. It took us an hour to walk to Mercy Convent School, there and back again every day, whatever the time of year or weather. We didn't mind at all. There were no houses in this area in those days; only one thatch, owned by Biggs. After that there were only the Burkes, Fureys, Cummins, Willie Fahys farm, and the quarry, owned by the Lord Mayo, all further up in Doughiska. That was it! Any other houses were down in Ballybrit.

Life was completely different in those days. I got married in 1962 to Eddie, who was a signalman in Galway. Both of us come from a family of railway line workers. It's been in our families for generations, it's something we have in common: we both have a love of trains, especially the old steam engines. I took over my mother's job in 1969

¹⁷ At the time of thesis submission this café had closed down, much to the disappointment of the owners and locals.

and we all lived in the lodge together. My mother used to get up in the middle of the night to open the gate for cars. This was because there were no phones or signals, the gate had to be closed all the time so that the trains did not have to stop. This changed in the late 60s when Lord Mayo bought new gates with a signal, because he didn't want to get my mother out of bed every night to open the gate for the lorries working the quarry. Everything then began to change quite rapidly. My mother died in 1978.

In 1974 the first estate went up in Roscam. There was one house per acre initially. This made the houses too expensive to sell, so John Cummins divided the land up and built 12 houses instead of 7. I guess this was the beginning of development, some people call it progress.¹⁸

(Jenny Reilly, 17th January, 2011. Railway Gate Lodge, Reilly residence).¹⁹

Change, for Jenny Reilly, was crystallised when the physical landscape of Roscam was transformed by housing estates.

These families are only a few, but they demonstrate quite starkly the changing cultural nature of the DRA. It is not just the physical changes identified by Jenny O'Reilly that are important, but also the meaning attached to such change. Drawing on Blumer's work, Greider and Garkovich note that the meaning of a landscape changes through 'social interaction', and that

it is not an environmental change per se, but the meanings of that change that are negotiated within and between groups of people, that result in sociocultural outcomes (Greider and Garkovich, 1994:9).

It is plausible to suggest that the physical landscape constructed during the Celtic Tiger era was more than a process of urbanisation, but a process of physically reproducing individualist practices that prioritised economic gain over social development and imbued

¹⁸ Houses in the Roscam estates built in 2000 have a density of 7 units per acre. In Doughiska sites are even higher in density with 14 units per acre. These features are typical of high density developments during the Celtic Tiger period.

¹⁹ Sadly, Jenny Reilly passed away in early 2014 (RIP).

the physical landscape with symbolic associations that constrain social interaction and community building.

In all of the time that I have interacted with people in the DRA, I have never heard anyone refer to the new physical DRA landscape as conducive to social life. The opposite appears to have occurred. For instance, there is consistent reference to the fact that the roads divide people from each other or, that parts of the DRA are isolated. Here, for example, James Fahy observes:

The most dramatic changes occurred in the 1980s and 90s and through into the 2000s... The first major roadway to be constructed through the area was the carriageway that goes by the Galway clinic. And that split us as an old community – the Kings and the Furys are on the east side of the dual carriageway and the Burkes and our house (of the old houses), are on this side. I found it an impossible concept that we would be less aware of each other, as an older village, just because of this road. But the reality is that did happen; roads do actually separate you, strangely enough... The carriageway had a definite impact on community life. It split our land. We had 90 acres of land at the height – and it would be almost fifty - fifty on each side of the carriageway.

(James Fahy with Theresa Fahy, Doughiska. Fahy Residence.
Interview for community documentary, *Making History*, 11th August, 2012).

While strong references are made to changes to the physical landscape, most of the conversations I had with residents were peppered with comments about how these changes affected social interaction. As James Fahy commented: ‘the area modernised, things changed pretty dramatically in relation to how people interacted and how they interact today’ (11th August, 2012). It is an observation confirmed in Dan Hurley’s view that

we have been living in area since 1994. Until 2005 I didn’t have any active involvement in the development of the area whatsoever. Heretofore we had attended mass in Ballybane or Renmore. Generally Renmore, because our children went to school there and we felt more part of that community because of that. I became aware of the lack of facilities for families. As well, the main artery road was in a very

unfinished state, with footpaths and landscaping all left out. Indeed, there were no facilities what so ever.

(Interview with Dan Hurley, spokesperson for the DRA Development Company, Ltd. 26th September, 2012. Parish Office, Castlegar Complex, Roscam).

Dan Hurley describes that up until this point ‘everyone was living in their own little island,’ and says, ‘We didn’t know anyone outside of our estate’ (26th September, 2012). He identified the physical barriers to such practices, such as roads and sprawling estates. Such statements confirm Chen, Orum and Paulsen’s view that the character of places can shape experience (Chen, Orum and Paulsen, 2013:6).

It was a theme also taken up by Nuala Keady, who stressed that her sense of community was shaped by the physical changes that took place from 2000 onwards, and that these changes profoundly affected her relationships, as well as changing her sense of tradition. For Nuala, development brought with it a completely different way of life:

When the developers moved in they built massive roads that divided the community. We were suddenly physically isolated from one another. The whole fabric of everyday life changed. I used to be able to ramble over to Mary King, now you have to go around the whole world to get there.

(Interview with Nuala Keady, 19th June, 2012. Keady Residence: 147 Túr Uisce, Doughiska).



Figure 23 Nuala Keady. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

For Nuala Keady, and other community members, the shifting social and physical landscape brought about a period of transition and adjustment that affects how people relate to each other within families and extended networks. There can be little doubt that Nuala Keady's experience revealed an intense level of anxiety associated with massive development in 2000:

My husband died in 2000, so when I saw three story houses going up around my small bungalow I decided to move. I moved into an estate – to Tur Uisce; I had to buy [television] channels. It was the loneliest and most difficult time. My son, who was born in 1986, was diagnosed with a learning disability (Williams Syndrome) and the children used to tease him.

(Conversation with Nuala Keady 19th June, 2012, 147. Túr Uisce, Dougishka).

However, it is crucial that views such as Nuala's are understood over a period of time, that they are not crystallised experiences, but evolve in response to larger social dynamics and influences on the lived experience:

Looking across at houses... when you open your curtains you see people sitting in their houses across from you. I found that very difficult. There were lots of nationalities moved in as well. There were Indian people, Nigerian, Polish people, and Irish from all over Ireland... It was difficult to get used to living with different nationalities. They were not Catholics, they were different religions. But, once you got to know them, talk to them I found that I had lots in common with them. Even though they had a different culture, there were similarities in our up-bringing.

(Interview for community documentary, 22nd, October, 2012. Family Resource Centre, Doughiska).

Nuala Keady's experience changed for the better because she became involved in social interaction with 'strangers':

Ironically, now that I have adjusted to the changes, I actually prefer it. I cook my food; the Nigerians and Indians cook theirs. We need to accept that people have put their roots down here, their kids are now Irish. I would like to think that they would help me out and me them. There

are Romanian, Nigerian, Polish and Irish living in my cul-de-sac; we look out for one another.

(Conversation in with Nuala Keady, 19th June, 2012, 147 Túr Uisce, Doughiska).

Evidence that Nuala Keady's attitude changed after social interactions that involved sharing certain practices, such as cooking and 'looking out for one another', is important. For instance, Nuala Keady explains that although initially her experiences were difficult, the changes that occurred within the DRA have brought many positives. She feels that people with disabilities, for example, can have more opportunities now, and are more accepted:

Long ago people with disabilities were hidden away. They weren't seen at all. Whereas now they are out in the community and people talk and chat to them and people realise that they are like us... it's great to see it.

(Interview with Nuala Keady for community documentary, 22nd, October, 2012. Family Resource Centre, Doughiska).

What is interesting about much of the conversations concerned with diversity is how place and culture are referred to on many occasions and often associated with ideas of identity.²⁰ For Nuala Keady, diversity is positive, but not at the expense of losing a sense of tradition:

²⁰ It is important to note that while people often refer to their culture, it is important not to conflate individual differences under an homogenous grouping, even though many of the interviews refer to 'our' culture or 'we want to retain our identity'. It is taken for granted that there are many differences within each cultural group detailed in this thesis. No one person can represent a whole nation or ethnic group. On this matter, Greene acknowledges that

Cultural background surely plays a part in shaping identity, but it does not determine identity. It may well create differences that must be honoured; it may occasion styles and orientations that must be understood; it may give rise to tastes, values, even prejudices that must be taken into account (Greene, 1993:16).

Although having such diversity is wonderful in the community, we need to support and keep alive our own Irish traditions as well. There is a sense that we are losing them.

(Interview with Nuala Keady, 19th June, 2012. Keady Residence: 147 Túr Uisce, Doughiska).

In order to understand how this may be achieved it is useful to consider Kahn's view that places are

fertilized into being through a confluence of voices. Places are complex constructions of social histories, personal and interpersonal experiences, and selective memory (Kahn, in Feld and Basso, 1996:167).

This led me to consider in more depth the role of place in the community-building puzzle, and in particular how culture is embedded within experiences of place. If we follow this line of thought one of the ways of overcoming Nuala Keady's challenge of equal opportunity for identity expression is to consciously put places to 'work' (Basso, 1996) as physical and symbolic containers for as many voices as possible.

As Jane Jacobs' (1961) in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, highlights, community is found in places; everyday social life is where community happens. For Jacobs, everyday life happens in the parks and streets, prioritising the importance of place and neighbourhood in the community-building puzzle. For Jacobs, the social interactions that take place between people are essential, and therefore we need to appreciate the role that the physical characteristics of the city neighbourhood allow conducive interactions (Jacobs, 1961).

Furthermore, Greene draws on Paulo Freire's work, which emphasizes that while people may cherish their own culture, it should not become 'absolutized':

'When it is absolutized, when a person is closed against the new culture surrounding her or him' it would be difficult to learn new things that would otherwise, if open to others, be a meaningful experience (Greene on Freire, 1993:16).

Our understanding of our identity and tradition has arguably become more complex because of mass globalization and migration. But, as Chen, Orum and Paulsen point out, place-based identities are still important:

The places we are from still constitute an important part of who we are. This is part because the meanings attached to places also attach to people. When a stranger asks you about yourself, one of the first things that you tell them is likely to be where you are from (Chen, Orum and Paulsen, 2013:14).

Places conjure meaning because landscapes are laden with constructed identities that have been physically and symbolically realized, developed over time and relate to events, class, business, history, and activities undertaken by the people that dwell in such places. Cultural identities are not reproduced smoothly, neither do they *determine* who we are, but it is possible to suggest that both lingering and present relationships to specific localities can ‘place’ us in the world, give us structure, a sense of belonging and build an understanding of what is important. A relationship with locality is, as Basso argues (1996), an opportunity for abstract associations, myths and stories about the land and those that reside in it, to provide a structure in which we become ethically positioned in the world.

Even if we choose to reject certain traditions or norms associated with places, it is possible to argue that the *act* of being able to deconstruct this relationship, by ‘letting go’ or re (building) our lives elsewhere (with new identities and associations), is an important part of both personal and community development. Of import here, is the way in which culture is related to place; that people often relate their cultural traditions to a ‘sense of place’. As Nuala Keady indicated, place and tradition become integrated into social practice and norms, generating new cultural and social forms (Interview with Nuala Keady, 19th June, 2012. Keady residence: 147 Túr Uisce, Doughiska). By using the phrase ‘sense of place’, we highlight the relational aspect to land, place or space for both individuals and groups of people that attach meaning to places (Phillips, 2013:200). Many of the residents identify the ‘old’ when they are describing the ‘new’. This

suggests that both the past and present exist in tandem through memory, conversation and social practice. It is through these encounters that culture comes ‘alive’ and is given form. While members of the community suggest that they wanted to retain their traditional culture, they are also grappling with new cultural ideals, aspirations and needs. Bruner (2002) asserts that the past and the future are not mutually exclusive and that within the cultural domain it is possible to get a sense of how these forces combine and evolve: culture is where this tension is lived out (Bruner 2002:14-16), it is where individuals and groups discover potential, or reproduce established norms, and it is where life is understood as a creative exercise of realisation, situated in meaningful engagements with the past, present and future. It is about engagement in a landscape of change.

The next four chapters explore how residents (re) negotiate a sense of place in a changing social and cultural landscape. There is tendency to assume that the quality of a place is determined by forces that are largely outside of our control (or, at least they are difficult to change). However, if we follow Greider and Garkovich (1994) then it is the meanings within the process of change that are negotiated within and between groups of people. If places are ‘inherently social creations’, then it should be possible to engage in changing what might otherwise appear as insurmountable forces, for ‘humans shape cities that are in turn shaped by them’ (Chen, Orum and Paulsen, 2013:7). What is important here is the quality of the spaces created within places: whether they constrain, or are conducive to community gathering. In this vein, spaces within places are creative ‘cradles’, imbued with enormous potential (Chen, Orum and Paulsen, 2013:8). Here, spaces become ‘geographic entities with distinct shapes, scales and other properties that set the stage for certain kinds of human activities’ (Chen, Orum and Paulsen, 2013:8). At this point it is worth noting as Chen, Orum and Paulsen do that places are ‘specific sites that are shaped by and shape the lives of human beings, sites of human identity, security and community (Chen, Orum and Paulsen, 2013:7). Places are rich sites to which we feel attached and that become a part of us. As places, cities are distinct and

meaningful sites in which people live out their lives. These places have histories both formal and informal and are created by people through their daily activities. These histories affect ‘the uses to which places are put’ (Chen, Orum and Paulsen, 2013:8).

It is certainly evident from this research that much of the social action in the DRA inspired over the last six years was to re-cast a new stage for community building that is fundamentally place-based. It was an exercise that involved gathering together, *in place*, to debate, laugh, bond and build a shared future. It was during such encounters that people brought to the fore ‘what matters most’ to them, not as isolated entities, but as collective groups engaging over time in a process of community realization. The following is an attempt to do justice to these experiences, to document as fairly as possible the experiences of others, as I ventured upon a collaborative creative exercise.

Chapter 4

The Setting for the Gathering: Public Policy in Ireland

The association took the council on and made them sit up and take notice of us. We let them know that we weren't going to go away, so just deal with us now, as the problem would eventually end up with them anyway. We contacted every relevant department in the council and every councillor in east Galway to back up us. The work continues...

(Maura Mulroe, Chairperson for FFC (Fearann Ri, Fionnusce, Caistlean Thorlaigh) Residents Association. 169 Fearann Ri, Doughiska. Correspondence with Anna King, 30th August, 2013)

How and why we gather are crucial elements to understanding how cultural encounters that matter emerge. But, before we can explore these cultural encounters we need to explain the ‘setting for the gathering’, or its political and economic context. The principal objective of this chapter is to outline key areas of public policy that have had a significant bearing on the residents’ lived experience here. It does not seek to provide a comprehensive over-view of public policy in Ireland over the last decade, this has been explored in depth elsewhere (Adshead, 2008; Kirby, 2008; Boucher and Collins 2003; Taylor 2002, 2005). Rather, it seeks to fully appreciate the social dimension to the lived experience of residents in the DRA. Here, we need to recognize that social processes do not only have their genesis in individual or shared experience, but in underlying forces that shape the predicaments people face. It therefore attempts to outline these underlying forces, focusing upon two key aspects of public policy in Ireland that have impacted upon the DRA: the emergence of the partnership agreements from 1987 onwards and the housing boom during the period of the Celtic Tiger. In so doing, it demonstrates much about how and why this particular social context developed.

The chapter argues that while it is impossible to understand public policy in Ireland without acknowledging the influential role of the Catholic Church, it is plausible to suggest that this has diminished, and that increasingly Irish Governments have

embraced a market-driven agenda, one that has accelerated since the economic collapse of 2007, as the Troika (International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and the European Commission) has insisted on reforms to the welfare state and an extension of the free market (Kirby 2008; Boucher and Collins, 2003, Taylor, 2002, 2005; Honohan 2011). These ideas, drawn from both the USA and the UK, have shaped vast areas of government policy, including most notably, and detrimentally, financial regulation (see Honohan, 2010). But they have also found a receptive context in welfare reform and, of course, housing, where in Ireland government policy has always favoured private ownership.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first two sections outline some of the core themes of the Irish Welfare State and the Partnership Agreements. The third section examines the housing boom that took place in Ireland as a result of both international and national ‘forces’ that have been refracted through the resident’s lived experience in the DRA. The final section addresses this more clearly through the struggles of a residents’ association, which has been involved in lobbying local government to resolve infrastructural issues such as drainage, sewage problems, inadequate roads, lighting and the blight of a ‘ghost estate’.²¹

The Fearann Ri, Fionnusce, Caistlean Thorlaigh residents’ narrative reveals how these urban spaces are not just aesthetic and social scars on the landscape, but are sites for exceptionally challenging social dynamics. Just as important is the way the residents have managed significant achievements by participating in making officials accountable for policies that left three estates within the Doughiska area with inadequate infrastructure and a ghost estate. This group’s effort highlights the enormous human struggle that has occurred, personifying the human face of policy. Their strength,

²¹ These empty and now derelict buildings are generally owned not by developers, but by the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), which has taken on the debts accrued by developers that were once located in the banks. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, the banks, which have been subsumed by the government (tax payer), have now off loaded most of these debts to NAMA.

tenacity and sheer determination demonstrate the enormous potential to be gained from shared community responses to local problems.

This small group of people turned a wasteland neighbourhood, where nobody knew each other, into a place where people are beginning to feel a sense of community, with an increasing number of people involved in activities, such as clearing rubbish and taking care of public spaces. Elzbieta Nikiel, a resident of one of the estates, who helps on a regular basis to clear the rubbish from Merlin Woods, observes:

I think creating things together is a good way of talking to people, getting to know others, sharing things and making friends. Where I come from in Poland, there are many different cultures. We sweep the streets together... this helps build relationships.

(10th September, 2013. Conversation, with Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King. 24 Caislean Thorlagh, Doughiska).

This section also draws our attention to another issue that is important: how a community's response to the problem of resolving these issues has been complicated further by the failure of local government to ensure that bonds for infrastructure were adequately supervised. Government policy favoured an untrammelled free market in housing, and when linked to local authority planning that was weak, and in many instances negligent, this has presented a range of incredibly complicated issues which the residents association has attempted to resolve. As Dan Hurley explains:

This area was a total victim of the Celtic Tiger on the one level, in that the houses were built at rapid pace, without the any facilities being put in place. And as we can see now, without the proper supervision or follow-up to ensure that bonds were in place in case the inevitable happened.

(Dan Hurley, secretary and spokesperson for the DRA Development Company Ltd. 26th September, 2012. Parish Office, Castlegar Complex. Roscam).

Within this overview it is also possible to see much of what Bang and Sørensen (2001) term 'the role of the every-day maker', where civil engagement is no longer

organised along party political lines (ideologically), where it is couched in networks rather than hierarchy, and the choice either to engage or disengage from any given context is available (Bang and Sørensen, 2001). In particular, Bang and Sørensen's work focuses on engagement that is often short-term, 'hit and run', in order to achieve the project's objective. While at a first glance the experience of the FFC residents' association would appear to confirm this version of Bang's view of the role of the everyday maker, a different perspective emerges when considering how the association's activities have led to long-term community building.

4.1 The Irish Welfare State

Ireland's welfare system has been difficult to categorise, largely because it demonstrates different historical, ideological and social trends. It is, therefore, useful to consider, albeit briefly, how these different strands are situated within a historical context in order to estimate how they might have impacted on areas like the DRA. Three particular influences are important: post-colonial economic expansion, the role of the Catholic Church and the development of the New Right in Britain and the USA.

Although Irish Governments had proposed a policy of export-led industrialisation based on foreign direct investment from the early 1950s, this was an approach not formalised until the White Paper *Economic Development*, introduced by Lamass' Government (1958). The document was shaped by T. K. Whitaker, Secretary of the Department of Finance, and involved a move away from the protectionist policies that had been the official strategy since the 1930s. From here on in, Ireland would seek to be integrated into the international economy, a move that anticipated both a commitment to financial growth and an expanded role for government. Not everyone agreed with this approach. The Department of Finance, which was closely aligned to the banks, preferred a more conservative line of 'limited expansion', and sought to temper political enthusiasm (Adshead, 2008:66).

There was also political support for EU membership, perceived as an opportunity to move out from under 'Britain's shadow' (Adshead, 2008). By the 1970s, all parties,

including the Labour Party, which had opposed joining the EU during the 1960s, agreed to some form of association, a move consolidated in a referendum on EU membership that resulted in an overwhelmingly positive (83%) vote. The Labour – Fine Gael coalition (1973) endorsed the vote, arguing that both the trade union movement and the business community would benefit from access to both European structural funding and export revenues. In addition, farmers would gain from subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Although there are variations specific to individual countries, welfare studies undertaken by authors such as Esping-Anderson (commonly used as a basis for distinguishing between models of public policy), generally refer to three categories of welfare regimes: ‘liberal’, ‘social democratic’ and ‘corporatist-statist’. A liberal model is characterised by means-tested assistance, with modest universal transfers and/or social insurance plans. A corporatist-statist welfare system prioritises social insurance schemes, calculated on a proportion of previous income; the more you earn and contribute, the more social welfare you are entitled to receive (NESC, 2005:123). A social-democratic model promotes equality by incorporating classes under one universal insurance scheme; income is provided when the need arises.

From the 1940s to the 1970s most industrialised countries were committed to some form of this social democratic project and were influenced by Keynes’ ideas on government intervention. Keynes’ approach was to sustain demand in the economy by increasing employment to ensure an inclusive society where citizens had spending-power (Kirby and Murphy, 2008). Ireland’s welfare system demonstrates influences from both the Liberal and Social Democratic models as well as Catholicism. Here, McLaughlin believes that the Irish State has been shaped essentially by Catholicism that created an ‘inclusive, culturally homogeneous and conservative’ identity (McLaughlin, 1993:206-7, see Lee, 1989). It was not just that the Church was a powerful institution, but that civil servants saw governing as being related to ‘their own Catholic consciences’ (Ferriter, cited in Asdhead, 2008:8).

While agreement may exist on the influence of the Church, the extent this shaped particular cases is more open to debate. Thus, while Boucher and Collins (2003:299) maintain that Ireland's Welfare State was a combination of the liberal state and the delivery of social services by the Churches, Fahy suggests that its primary role was not to combat poverty, but to safeguard faith (Fahy, 1998: 415). Here, Fahy argues that one of the important features of the Catholic Church in Ireland was its ability to embed itself within the system of social service provision in areas such as hospital care, orphanages and a limited number of services for the poor (cited in Adshead, 2008:9).

By the 1970s, government intervention was being openly challenged by Conservative Parties in both the USA and the United Kingdom. Western economies had experienced a period of persistent unemployment, rising inflation and low levels of growth (stagflation). To New Right critics of Keynesianism, governments had become overburdened with social, political and economic challenges; they had literally trampled upon entrepreneurial activity, crowded out investment and reduced innovation (King, 1987). Both the Conservative Governments of Reagan and Thatcher demanded reductions in tax, 'roll back' the state and reassert the importance of the individual (Gamble, 1996).

However, in contrast the Irish government was pursuing policy that involved the trade unions in the national level bargaining process (partnership) (Adshead, 2008: 71; Boucher and Collins, 2003: 296). These national partnership agreements were an attempt to overcome issues of unemployment at the end of the 1980s, which had thwarted economic progress during Ireland's 'lost decade'. During the early years of the 1980s, falls in GNP were recorded as government struggled with escalating public sector debt, rising inflation that averaged 20.5% (1982-7) and unemployment levels that remained at record highs (MacSharry and White, 2000). By 1987 calls for change formed around cuts in public expenditure and a reduction in the national debt. It was an approach the Labour Party felt it could not agree with, because spending cuts were regarded as unacceptable (MacSharry and White, 2000:62). The coalition with Fine Gael collapsed in January

1987.

It was far from clear whether the unions or business would agree to this approach. However, the unions were fully aware that in the UK they had been ostracised politically so there was a commitment to remain within decision-making circles. For its part, the government's position was especially difficult, attempting to balance the terms of the agreement without destabilising its own minority-government voting position in the Dáil (Irish Parliament). For business, there was a desire to rectify high levels of industrial unrest, reduce taxation and make cuts in public finances (O'Donnell, 1998). The ensuing agreements addressed the benefits of a trade-off between wage moderation, fiscal restraint and tax concessions as well as industrial peace, labour-market flexibility, active labour-market policies and work organisation (O'Donnell, 1998).²²

Though many benefitted from these negotiated agreements, advantages accrued mainly to those in employment, and particularly those in well-paid jobs. Critics such as Allen argue that partnership has actually institutionalised social inequality (Allen, 2000; see also O'Riain and O'Connell, 2000; Murphy, 2002; Kirby, 2002 & 2004; Boucher and Collins 2003; Geoghegan and Powell, 2006). Demands for a reduction in poverty and more inclusiveness have been made, but partnership has focused primarily on wages, with the voluntary and community sectors largely absent (Hardiman, 2005, as cited in Millar, 2008: 109).

While the fall in long-term unemployment brought about a decrease in poverty levels, the *Living in Ireland* survey (2001) pointed out that 22 per cent of the population were still living below the 60 per cent median income line and 29 per cent below the 70 per cent median line (Whelan *et al* 2003, cited in Millar 2008: 101). It is a view with

²² As of 2011 there have been seven social partnership agreements: the *Programme for National Recovery* (PNR) from 1987 – 1991; the *Programme for Economic and Social Progress from 1991 – 1994*; the *Programme for Competitiveness and Work* from 1997 – 2000; the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* from 2000 – 2003; *Sustaining Progress* from 2003 – 2005 and the latest agreement: *Towards 2016: 10 Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement* from 2006 – 2015.

which Adshead (2008) agrees, adding that in some cases inequality during the period of prosperity has actually increased. This overall predicament includes a lack of affordable housing for lower income families that has been compounded by the on-going privatisation of the local authority housing stock; a high level of early school leavers from working class or farming families and a disproportionately high level of upper - middle class young people attending university: 80% compared to 20% for the working class (Adshead, 2008; see Drudy and Punch, 2001; Archer, 2001). Estimates suggest that 1000 children per year do not go from primary to secondary school and of those that do, 2,400 leave school with no recognised qualification (*Combat Poverty Agency*, 2003 cited in Millar, 2008: 101).

Though Ireland may have been the first government in the EU to adopt a global poverty reduction target, known as the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) in 1997, this has had only a marginal effect. Moreover, while the Irish welfare system is a ‘pay related’ system, with a basic minimum level of security and services guaranteed on a near universal basis, it is one that allows the more ‘advantaged’ to supplement their benefits through market or government incentives. This is certainly the case in the areas of health, education, housing and pensions, where the middle classes are effectively subsidised by the lower classes, through a succession of tax reliefs. The government has always provided mortgage interest relief for property owners, tax incentives for private pension schemes, and tax reliefs for those that have private healthcare insurance.²³

Students in university are subsidised by the general tax payer, despite evidence that shows that this is a benefit disproportionately used by the middle classes. A particularly striking example of this type of regressive policy was the Special Savings Incentive Scheme, introduced in Ireland in 2001-2, which ‘rewarded’ savers with a 25% bonus as part of an attempt to dampen the economy. Those on higher incomes were able

²³ The current coalition has revised the cost of private medical insurance to reflect further the ‘costs’ of private patients in public hospitals, but recognizes that this still does not cover all those costs.

afford the full payment per month, and in many cases, sponsor family members, in effect receiving free gifts from the government. Those on low incomes simply could not participate.

Research published by *Social Justice Ireland* highlights the fact that, while poverty in Ireland is high, government policies since 1987 have increased the income of the richest ten per cent of households, widening the gap between these and the rest of society (Healy, Policy Briefing, January, 2011). It is impossible to overestimate how significant the partnership process has been in changing welfare provision in Ireland. The influence of the agreements has filtered through to education, health care and welfare. While these agreements espoused ‘partnership’ they were also important in developing policies that were increasingly market-driven, most notably in housing and taxation policy, which were at the forefront of stimulating a boom in construction. These policies, and those that pursued financial regulation, had catastrophic effect on both the economy and the DRA.

4.2 A Property Bubble and Social Dislocation: The Case of the DRA

The profile of Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun (DRA), though not unique, exhibit, in a concentrated form, many of the challenges associated with this period in Ireland: unbridled development and an enormous population explosion. In order to understand how these processes have affected the DRA, it is important to consider the impact of Ireland’s property bubble and the social consequences of a poorly regulated private rental sector.²⁴ This was not a particularly novel experience for Ireland, as Irish Government policy has persistently promoted home ownership as the preferred tenure for its citizens. However, from the mid to late 1990s, public provision of housing diminished

²⁴ Bubbles form when the price of any asset get out of line with its underlying value (Woodall 2003:2). In Ireland, house prices increased significantly between 1994 – 1995: 5 % in Dublin and 7% in the rest of the country. Further significant leaps took place between 1996 - 1998.

considerably as a series of government tax reliefs extended home ownership and expanded the role of the private sector in providing rental accommodation. These alterations also included changes to mortgage interest relief and capital gains taxes, as well as special reliefs to encourage landlords back into the market from 2001 onwards. This was a combination of policies that incentivised aggressive property speculation, sponsoring a race to build large sprawling developments with little regard for long-term economic or social development.²⁵

The ‘Celtic Tiger’ boom started in the mid-1990s.²⁶ Over subsequent years, a unique set of circumstances occurred to provide conditions for the construction industry to dominate the economy: immigration increased, personal incomes improved and demand for property escalated as the European Monetary Union established both a climate of low interest rates and an opportunity for Irish Banks to access ‘cheap’ money from European sources.²⁷ When Ireland became a founding member of the euro-zone, interest rates fell dramatically²⁸ and risks from fluctuations in foreign borrowing were effectively eliminated. These forces, when combined, stimulated a belief that house prices would soar and that demand would persist (Honohan, 2010:20).

In a relatively short period of time, Ireland underwent a remarkable transformation. By 2005 the construction industry had overtaken exports as the primary engine of growth, accounting for 23% of Ireland’s annual wealth (Woodall, 2003), and

²⁵ These schemes included: the Temple Bar area scheme; the Rural Renewal scheme; the Urban Renewal scheme; the Seaside Resorts scheme; the Islands scheme; the Rented Residential accommodation element of the Park and Ride scheme; the Town Renewal scheme; the Rent-a-Room scheme; the Shared Ownership scheme.

²⁶ The 'Celtic Tiger period' refers to a time of rapid economic growth during the beginning of the 1990s – 2001, with a shorter economic revival from 2003 – 2007. When Ireland joined the Europe it was the poorest country in its grouping. From the late 1980s onward, the economy experienced rapid expansion and, for a while, had one of the highest per-capita incomes in the European Union.

²⁷ European Monetary Union made it far easier for Irish banks to gain loans at favourable interest rates because they were now part of a more significant trading euro zone bloc.

²⁸ Average interest rates fell from about 7% in the decade after 1983 to 3 % in the 1990s (Honohan, 2010:22).

the share of the workforce engaged in construction rose by 7% in the mid-1990s to 13 % in 2007 (Honohan, 2010:24). Honohan asserts that from 2003 onward the boom in Ireland became banker-led. The Bank of Scotland (Ireland) and Anglo Irish Bank in particular were engaged in aggressive lending, in both residential and commercial property sectors.²⁹ With interest rates low, margins were small, and if shareholders were to be satisfied, the banks would have to increase their market. With new funds available from European banks, lenders were incentivised to make a greater number of loans. The time span expected for mortgage repayments was extended and the ratio of loans per income altered: in some cases up to 40 years and the loan to value ratio moved closer to 100% as ‘standard practice’ (Honohan, 2010: 25).

The FF/Green coalition insisted that the crisis that engulfed Ireland in 2007 was caused by the collapse of the Lehmann Brothers and the credit crunch that followed, events largely out of the control of a small, open economy (Honohan, 2010). However, Honohan points out that domestic policy had for a considerable period of time failed to take sufficient measures to counter the growing evidence of a potential property bubble. During the late 1990s and the early part of the millennium, government decided to retain tax relief on mortgage interest,³⁰ maintain grants for first-time buyers, and introduce a succession of tax schemes designed to sustain private sector confidence in housing as an ‘investment.’³¹ In this period a series of changes in stamp duty to encourage first time buyers and reforms in Capital Gains Tax fuelled further speculation.³² In addition,

²⁹ Anglo Irish’s market share increased by 3% to 18% within a decade; its loan portfolio expanded by 36% each year (Honohan, 2010:27).

³⁰ The ceiling on income tax deductibility of mortgage interest for owner occupiers increased in 2000, 2003, 2007 and 2008 (Honohan, 2010:31).

³¹ The structure of tax revenue changed dramatically in the decade following the mid-1990s, shifting gradually from stable sources of taxation (such as personal income tax and VAT/excise taxes) to cyclical taxes (such as corporation tax, stamp duty and capital gains tax). In the late 1990s, the share of cyclical taxes was 8%; by 2006 it reached 30% of all revenue (Regling and Watson, 2010:27).

³² The rate of stamp duty was lowered in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005 and 2007, in a misguided attempt to address increasing property prices and improve affordability for

different classes of construction investment enjoyed sizeable income tax concession and a range of schemes between 2004 – 2006 emerged: urban renewal, tourism, third level education, car parks, student accommodation, park and ride, nursing homes, hospitals, sports injury clinics and childcare facilities. All of these measures were taken despite the Bacon Report's recommendation to adopt a more cautionary stance.

As early as 1998 the government appeared to recognise that a wave of speculative buying by investors was inflating house prices.³³ It opted for three measures to cool the market: a 2% anti-speculative property tax, a 9% stamp duty on investors and the 60% capital gains tax on serviced land. These anti-investor measures prompted objections from lobby groups, such as the Irish Home Builders Association (IHBA), the Construction Industry Federation (CIE) and the Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers (IPAV). In response, the Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevy, decided that business should continue ‘as usual’: a critical point in the trajectory of the Irish property bubble.

Between 2001 - 2006 house and land prices rocketed. As Honohan points out, prices quadrupled and were among the highest in any advanced economy (Honohan, 2010: 24). In Ballsbridge, at the height of the boom, Sean Dunne bid €53 million an acre for Jury’s Hotel site. This was followed soon after by Ray Gretton paying €87.5 an acre for land nearby. All of this was subsequently trumped by David Daly, paying the exorbitant figure of €122 million an acre for Franklin House. Within a short period of property speculation, land in Ballsbridge had increased in value by over 150% (RTE, Freefall, 6th September, 2010). In part, this can be explained by the practice encouraged by banks to persuade developers to seek further loans (roll-over), rather than repay existing ones in full in order to avoid tax. Such lending practices were to come to an abrupt halt. As the Honohan Report (2010) shows, while the downturn triggered a crisis

first time buyers (Bacon Reports, 1998 & 2000; Honohan Report, 2010: 30).

that crippled the Irish banking sector, property prices in Ireland were already falling. With many of these loans made without guarantees, or any means of gaining recourse in case of default, it left the banks and the Irish taxpayer vulnerable to further costs.³⁴

The economist, Woodall, argued that as far back as 2003 house prices were 42% overvalued and that by 2005 Ireland's property bubble was the biggest in the world. Any attempt by economists and political commentators to raise concerns about a slowing economy and an imminent property bubble were aggressively dismissed. Indeed, the then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, accused property pessimists of cribbing, moaning and talking the economy down. He said it was; "... a lost opportunity. In fact I don't know how people who engage in that don't commit suicide" (RTE, Freefall, 6th September, 2010). It was extremely difficult for these 'property pessimists' to be taken seriously, largely because the political culture had championed a market driven agenda. It was crucial, they argued, that there should be no limits or restraints on business. As Brian Cowen, then Minister for Finance, argued, it was important that developers were given free reign: "I don't want to see any interference in the property market. My job is not to interfere. I don't want to say anymore about it" (RTE, Freefall, 6th September, 2010).

Ireland's vulnerability to falling house prices, rising unemployment and excessive lending was exposed after the collapse of *Lehmanns Brothers*, which reduced trust between international banks. However, for Honohan, the international property crash brought to a close a period in which government policy had favoured financial regulation with a 'light touch,'³⁵ supporting the short-term interests of

³⁴ 79 billion worth of debt has been transferred from the Irish banks to the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA). In addition, 30 billion euros has been used to prop up the two pillar banks (Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish banks) as well as payment to Anglo-Irish bank before it was liquidated.

³⁵ Light touch regulation refers to the deliberate attempt by governments across the world to reduce interference by those such as the Central Bank of Ireland on how retail banks operate. In other words, the new office of financial regulation had reduced responsibilities, and was instructed not to intervene excessively either with demands for

developers and property speculators. As the revenue generated soared, government spending increased and taxes were cut, all of which contributed to Fianna Fáil's electoral success.

However, the long-term cost to the Irish taxpayer has been enormous. Huge loans to Anglo-Irish bank have been lost. Six years on from the outbreak of the financial crisis the two 'pillar' banks (Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Bank) remain in severe problems with expensive tracker mortgages and drowning under a sea of negative equity as variable mortgage holders feel the pain of austerity. As far as the experience of the DRA was concerned, there were a number of elements to this government policy that contributed to a detrimental social experience. First, further moves to privatise social housing were combined with reductions in tax to incentivise the private rental sector. Second, the government's determination (post-2001) to incentivise economic growth further through tax changes for land and property.

The private rental sector in Ireland has evolved into two distinct sub-markets: people with reasonable incomes who can choose where they wish to live and those on low income or social welfare, for whom choices are extremely limited.³⁶ There can be little doubt that the role of the public sector in housing has been marginalized, reducing further the role of local authorities and confirming Fahy's observation in the late 1990s that renting accommodation from the local authority had become a simply a 'staging post' on the route to the heavily subsidised owner-occupied sector (Fahy, 1998). Moreover, by 2006, Ireland was one of only four OECD countries that did not tax rental income or capital gains, for owner-occupiers (Honohan Report, 2010: 31).³⁷ In addition, a property tax that

information, checks on corporate governance or monitoring that may increase costs or inhibit growth in individual businesses' (Honohan, 2010).

³⁶ There are nearly 400,000 people renting privately in Ireland, 40% of whom are in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance (Green Party Statistics).

³⁷ After 2001, for investors deductibility was limited only by the investor's rental income

would provide a stable source of revenue for the public sector was absent, with measures designed to encourage private speculation, particularly in the rental sector (Fahy, 1998).

Traditionally, local authorities had carried out most of the development, provision, regeneration and maintenance of social housing in Ireland. The units were then rented out at subsidized rates to tenants on the housing waiting lists. However, for a sustained period of time the role of local authorities in housing has been reduced. The public housing stock was also significantly reduced by a policy of sales to tenants at a discount. In total, over 230,000 public housing units (out of a stock of 330,000) were transferred into the private market in this way. This was, in effect, the biggest privatization of state assets since the foundation of the state, with the ‘sell-off’ of more than half of all the public housing stock, and it represented a major transfer of wealth from public bodies to private individuals. This is manifest in the fact that while local authority housing comprised 15.5 per cent of all residences in 1971, this figure had plummeted to 9.7 per cent by 1991 and a mere 6.9 per cent by 2002 (Drudy and Punch, 2005).

Insufficient central government funding for the building of new social housing meant that public capital investment by local authorities through 1980s-1990s focused on the refurbishment of their existing housing stock (Blackwell 1988; Norris and Redmond *eds*, 2005). In the housing sector, the market focus of housing policy and government reduction in spending on direct social housing provision created a situation whereby private housing supply in the late 1990s and early 2000s reached historically high levels nationally. For example, over 60,000 units were completed in 2003, while the national social housing waiting list reached 48,000 households by 2005 (Drudy and Punch, 2005).

Government also introduced urban renewal legislation in the mid-1980s that allowed for Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in the form of local urban development agencies. These were separate entities to local authorities, and were used as mechanisms

(Honohan, 2010: 31).

to drive the development and regeneration of urban areas.³⁸ Planning was encouraged to become more pragmatic, flexible and results oriented, focusing on creating the right conditions for investments in areas that were identified to have the highest potential for success in encouraging inward investment and speculative property development (Hearne, 2011:66-67).

These forms of financing had proved popular in many countries, most notably the UK. Although there is a range of PPPs³⁹ they depend upon the logic that relationships with private sector management techniques reap benefits in terms of a reduced stress upon public finances (in the short-term) and speed of delivery. PPPs, when constructed in a competitive process, have an '*incentive structure*' that is linked to the business entity's *own private financial position*; this incentive structure cannot be replicated for obvious reasons within the public sector' (Hearne, 2011:76). Supporters argue that government should play a limited role so that it is free from political interference. The Fianna Fáil Governments of the early 2000s were convinced that PPPs could address the public infrastructure deficit in Ireland more rapidly than would have been achieved by traditional means (Hearne, 2011:71).ⁱⁱ

So far this chapter has outlined the public policy that provided the setting for the social experience that developed within the DRA. The following is a more detailed outline of the social consequences of such policy, and an example of how a number of residents came together to try and resolve some of their challenges associated with this period of development.

³⁸ Further ambitious targets were set in the National Development Plan, 2007-2013, which provided from some 13.35 thousand billion in PPP-funded capital investment.

³⁹ There are three recognizable types. The first, and most limited is design, build and operate (DBO), where the private-sector partner designs and builds the public facility and is paid from the Exchequer. Design, build and finance (DBF), often involve asset transfers (usually land) while the private sector develops the project. Finally, with design, build, finance and maintain, (DBFM), the private-sector partner is responsible for maintaining after they have been developed and is most commonly associated with hospitals or schools.

4.3 The FFC (FearannRi, Fionnusce, Caistlean Thorlaigh) Residents Association

In the early 1990s, Galway City Council identified a significant imbalance in the city, to the effect that people did not generally live where they worked. Residential expansion had occurred largely on the west of the City, yet most of the industrial estates and business parks were located in the east.⁴⁰ In order to redress this imbalance, lands east of Merlin Park were zoned for residential development and rapid building took place between 2000 – 2006, particularly in the first three years. Thus, the physical and social landscape of the DRA was transformed, resulting in a number of challenges for residents.

As the ARD Family Resource Centre notes:

Our report details some challenging and disturbing statistics about the multi-cultural suburb of Galway city that incorporates three areas known as Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun. The information is compiled from the CSO Census 2011 - Small Profile Areas. Doughiska is the largest of the three areas. The statistics suggest an overwhelming picture of serious social problems for future generations. The area has a deprived physical and social infrastructure with a distinct lack of community facilitates to provide basic support services and build and develop a shared sense of place and identity.

The area, and particularly Doughiska, is characterised by its multi-cultural mix with almost half of the population born outside of Ireland; a significantly youthful population with an exceptional number of children and young teenagers; high levels of unemployment and a higher than average number of people parenting alone. Over 70% of its population live in rented accommodation and many of these are tenants in buildings that are now subject to receivership.

During the years of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ this part of Galway saw the highest population growth of any district outside of Dublin with the number of residents multiplying 36 fold between 2000 and 2009. The area is located on the outskirts of Galway city and is some distance from many basic public amenities. It was only last year that schools were approved for the area.

⁴⁰ This development strategy is detailed in the 2002 Galway Transportation and Planning Strategy (GTPS). This report selected the south-eastern extension of the city as Galway’s main growth corridor due to the attractiveness of the local environment and easy local and national access.

(Letter accompanying the The ARD Family Resource Centre 2011 Census Summary Report. Frecklington & Carney, 2013).

Many of social consequences in the DRA unfolded directly as a result of incentivised housing policy. The issue of ‘buy to let’ is central and has resulted in a significantly higher rented sector in parts of the community. A number of the most serious challenges that face the DRA (and Doughiska in particular) are linked to government policies that have reduced the role of local authorities, creating a situation in which an unregulated private sector dominates, and poorly-managed estates proliferate. These issues led to many people feeling isolated, constraining the capacity of people to build social relationships.⁴¹ For those such as Magdalena Kudzia, originally from Gorlow Wielkopolski, Poland, it had a number of serious social consequences:

When I moved to the Doughiska in 2006 there was no interaction between different nationalities. There was no community. People stayed within their own families. I remember as far back as 2005 there was no public spaces for people to visit. No parks, and the area did not encourage interaction between people. The only place to go were shopping centres. It was very isolating.⁴²

(Conversation with Anna King, 3rd, September, 2013, Arabica coffee shop, Salthill, Galway).

Even where legislation exists, local authorities have been hesitant to regulate or be accountable for issues concerned with socially inadequate planning applications, poorly built and maintained estates and exploitative and negligent landlords. In some instances, they have completely ignored government building standards and allowed a situation in which private enterprise has dominated local authorities. The impact of these issues cannot be underestimated, as the ARD Capacity report highlights:

⁴¹ A far higher percentage of people living in the DRA dwell in apartments rather than houses and is a high percentage of people living on their own (in keeping with a national phenomena) (DRA ‘community’ Profile and Needs Analysis 2009).

⁴² For a discussion on the importance reclaiming public space for in the field of architecture see Mattson, 1999; Kunstler, 1993; Katz, 1994).

Most of the people in our community are living in rented accommodation (70%) with 53% in temporary rented accommodation. This is particularly pressing issue at the moment as some of our residents are tenants in buildings which are subject to receivership. The impact of these statistics is that people live with a permanently temporary status where they cannot commit to courses and other pathways out of poverty because they do not know where they will be living next year. This problem is exacerbated for migrants and lone parent families as they lack the extended family support referred to earlier (Frecklington and Carney, 2013:5).

Many of the social challenges facing the DRA such as insecure tenure, lack of access to public amenities, sub-group clustering,⁴³ and a lack of influence in local power structures, can be linked to private interests given priority over long-term social development.⁴⁴ Initially, many of the social problems in the DRA were not

⁴³ A term loosely used in social, professional and academic circles to denote a particular area within a city or town that has become socially segregated and often inhabited by socially displaced people of the same race, religion, social or economic circumstances. It is often an area with social problems, higher cases of petty and serious crime, drug related incidences, and it may be run down, lacking in basic amenities and an environmental hazard. International research suggests that spatial concentrations are often associated with housing conditions and housing characteristics. Processes of segregation and inequality within spatial concentrations are a controversial area of study with many different explanations that are dependent on a range of factors, developments and contexts (Van Kempen and Ozekren, 1998; Van Kempen and Murie, 2009). Immigrants also have a predisposition to gravitate towards one other and form cluster communities. This is partly for reasons of familiarity and because it is easier to live near people of the same nationality, particularly if there are language difficulties. Many Polish people that live in Ireland share accommodation, in order to send money home to families in Poland. Concerns about safety, cultural identity, new community norms and a suspicion of other cultures also influence why immigrants tend to form sub-communities. The DRA 2009 Survey documents that 13.5% of the Polish people interviewed for the study stated that a principal reason for moving to the area was to be near family or other Polish friends (Geraghty, 2009: 27).

⁴⁴ Immigrants and lone parents make up a surprisingly large percentage of people living in the DRA area (especially within Doughiska), reflecting financial vulnerability. Of the 25 lone parents interviewed for the 2009 DRA Survey, only one person was in the process of buying their own home (DRA Community Profile 2007:28). The Galway City

concentrated, but scattered through a range of different estates, making it difficult to evaluate the extent of the problem. Over the years this has changed, and certain areas now demonstrate more social challenges than others, such as Fearann Ri, Fionnusisce, Caislean Throlaigh apartments, Sean Bhaile and neighbouring estates. The ARD Family Resource Centre Capacity Report drew attention to this:

We have a higher than average number of people parenting alone. Our interaction with families in the area has shown us that these families are clustered in particular estates such as An Sean Bhaile where over 30% of residents are lone parents. As many of our single parents are from another country they lack the support network and extended family that is an important part of social security provision in Ireland.

We have identified a need for free childcare so that these parents can return to work and education. At present we do not have the physical space in our centre to provide this. Working with the Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun Community Development Company, we have established an afterschool and crèche in Merlin Woods School.

However, this service is temporary and we have a long waiting list of families. We need long-term investment to ensure that these services can continue (Frecklington and Carney, 2013:5).

It is possible to argue that the physical structure of certain estates in Doughiska exacerbate sub-group clustering and issues of alienation. Although large amounts of land adjacent to the Doughiska road were developed at the same time, there is a profound difference in both the standard of finish in one development compared to others. The Doughishka Park and common area act as a dividing line between two completely different built environments. As we can see from figure 24, Tur Uisce is generally finished to a high standard, is well-landscaped and has good roads, services and crèche facilities.

Housing list (2005) showed that 41% of people on its waiting list were lone parents. The 2008 DRA Survey showed that 96% of lone parents living in the DRA were renting, with 52% in private accommodation and 44% in local authority or voluntary housing (DRA 2009 Survey: 28).



Figure 24 - Tur Uisce. Photograph by Anna King

The neighbouring estates of Fearn Ri to Caislean Thorlaigh, however, are a different story. These estates are completely run down, with unfinished roads, no services or facilities, un-kept common areas, unfinished buildings and a derelict building site with 50 half-built apartments in Fionn Uisce.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ More than 2,8000 “ghost” estates of some 43,000 unfinished or vacant apartments and houses have been identified by the National Housing Development Survey, commissioned by the Department of the Environment between May and September, 2010. Nationally, there are 23,000 completed but unoccupied houses and apartments; 20,000 at various stages of completion, half of which have been identified as being at “early stages” of completion; just over 78,000 are occupied and 58,000 houses have permission but have not been built. In Galway there are 24 ghost estates; 1,039 units occupied; 260 completed units vacant; 429 unfinished; 201 planning authorised but no work started and 1,929 total number of units with (Olivia Kelly, *Irish Times*, October 22 2010: 12). The main tax incentives that created these “ghost estates” were the Rural Renewal Relief that was created by Minister for Finance Charlie McCreevy in 1998 and the Urban and Town Renewal Schemes (Laura Slattery, *Irish Times*, October 22 2010:12).



Figure 25 - Ghost estate, Fionn Uisce. Photograph by Anna King.

This degraded environment is not just physically dangerous and aesthetically unpleasant; it also raises the issue of how important physical space is in creating sustainable communities, preventing or resolving social deprivation and poverty. Communities are not built in isolation but in a process of interaction that takes place in a social space.

In 2000, land from Fearann Ri to Caislean Thorlaigh was owned by McInerneys, a large Irish construction company (subsequently placed in receivership). After planning permission was granted in 2001, McInerneys needed to finance the building of another estate (Tur Uisce), so they sold the Fearann Ri site to a group of builders. Harmack Development bought Fionnuisce and John Curley, Dave McCarthy, Steven Harris and partner bought Caislean Thuolaigh. What transpired from these transactions was that a number of builders worked separately in these estates, resulting in lack of regulation as well as substantial differences in the quality of housing.

While it is certainly true that a succession of government policies combined with poor judgments on risks by the banks, became the drivers of the housing boom, the planning system in Ireland undoubtedly played a major role. The National Housing Development Survey, October 22, 2010 reported that tax breaks (although a hugely significant factor in the housing boom in general) were only responsible for 10% of unfinished estates. Inadequate planning, excessive zoning and negligence on the part of City Council to implement legislation to monitor planning were more significant contributory factors.

In a response to this survey the Mayor of Galway, Cll. Crowe, lauded Galway's planning department because Galway "only" had 24 ghost estates, compared with much larger figures for other cities in Ireland. The Mayor insisted that: 'proper and prudent decisions were taken in relation to zoning and planning, and I think that it is fair to say that they have paid off for us...' (Galway City Tribune, October 22, 2010).

It was not a view shared by the FFC Residents Association, formed on 15th March, 2010 and which consisted of approximately 30 members (50% are Irish and 50% are non-Irish nationals - Nigerian, Romanian, and Ukrainian, Polish) to raise awareness of the deteriorating conditions in the estates and petition local government. Initially it was difficult to galvanise people, but eventually a group came together and they initiated a monthly clean-up, to try and improve some of the public areas by planting flowers and clearing debris.



Figure 26 - Unkempt areas in estates. Photograph by FFC Residents Association.

As the minutes to its meeting (24th July) record:

Firstly, a huge thank you to everyone who turned out on Saturday the 9th June, 16th June & last Saturday to give the whole estate a makeover. We have nearly all the beds weeded, dug and replanted with plants Becky got from the council. Everyone gave an hour of their time here and there and there was overall 5 hours of hard work put in on Saturday, digging, weeding, planting, edging, cleaning graffiti off the signage, sweeping, litter picking and sweating! ...we have only two beds left to do in phase two of Fearann Ri which is great. There was a great turnout on Saturday so we got a lot done and even the sun shined all day.

(Minutes from FFC Residents Association, 24th July, 2012).

Some of the major problems within these estates, however, could not be resolved so easily, and certainly not by planting flowers or clearing debris. They require extensive building work, as one of the residents in the association pointed out:

The area is not fenced properly, and it is a serious health and safety issue. The current reality in our estates is that they are... dangerous, unsafe and unacceptable. It is a sad reality that there is danger all around us and there is very little that we can do ourselves, we need help!

(FFC Residents Association member. Comment at meeting Merlin Park Primary School, 19th October, 2011).



Figure 27 - Unsafe areas. Photograph by Anna King

In addition, many of these areas are attracting anti-social behaviour:

Windows are smashed by kids. Young people congregate. They enter the buildings regularly and there are at least two fires every year due to the wood going rotten.

(Comment by residents at a meeting at Merlin Park Primary School, Doughiska, 19th October, 2011).



Figure 28 - Areas for anti-social behaviour. Photograph by Anna King

Any response to these matters is time-consuming, but also complicated by the difficulty of establishing ownership (responsibility). As the minutes of the FFC residents association meeting record:

It was brought up last night that no 161 (vacant) has the back door kicked in and young people are in and out stealing from this house. I traced the listed owner this morning and gave him a call. He said he sold the house in 2009 and has no clue who owns it now. He gave me the estate agents name that looked after the sale, so I rang the Gardai and reported the house. They were aware of house and are watching it. I gave them the info ref owner so they will try and trace current owners through the estate agent.

(FFC Resident's Association Minutes, sent to members on 22nd May for the 22nd May meeting about Management Company).

Over a two-year period of either attending meetings, or discussing issues with residents (as well as through email correspondence), I found members of the residents' association

deeply committed to their cause, but also very saddened by their circumstances. At times it appeared as if it did not matter what they did, things just got worse. For instance, although they have done tremendous work replenishing public areas with flowers and shrubs and attempting to keep the grass cut, the rubbish kept building up:

Rubbish is left out, which is a serious eye sore as well as a health issue.
It feels sometimes as if no one actually cares about us.

(Comment by residents at a Meeting at Merlin Park Primary School,
Doughiska, 19th October, 2011).



Figure 29 - Rubbish dumped. Photograph by FFC Residents Association.

A further source of frustration for residents is the failure to maintain those limited public spaces that do exist:

Doughiska Park is not being adequately maintained. The council come along and cut the grass in the park, but they leave areas that do not belong to them. They will actually cut up to a particular line and leave the rest. It's ridiculous.

(Comment at meeting Merlin Park Primary School, 19th October, 2011).

Councillor Michael Crowe stated at one meeting that, while he was sympathetic with the residents, the council considered the other side of road to be ‘private property and therefore they don’t want to know about it’ (minutes of meeting at Merlin Woods School, Doughiska. 22nd May 2012).

One of the biggest headaches for the residents was being able to obtain information on who owned a particular house. Individuals from the residents association went to houses in the area to establish who owned the properties and to get contact details for landlords, but to no avail. People renting were either not concerned, or refused to give out the names of their landlords. This reveals that even the simplest of tasks, such as identifying ownership, has become onerous:

The problem is that during the end of the Celtic Tiger period so many deals were done with small contractors and developers that it is hard to establish who owns what.

(Meeting 19th October, 2011 at Merlin Park Primary School, Doughiska).

Such matters are not resolved easily, for they are complicated further by the rights that private property owners have, and the limited jurisdiction of local authorities. More often than not it involves recourse to the courts, which is time-consuming and expensive. In this unregulated housing arena, where many developers are either bankrupt, in receivership or have had their debts transferred in to NAMA, further difficulties emerge.

Ilariu Raducan, a resident, asked councillors whether ‘the owners of Fionn Uisce and Caislean Thorlaigh have any obligation to keep their areas maintained, and whether this should be looked into, ‘these areas are largely owned by developers and have not been kept tidy. The area is becoming run down and turning into a ghetto’ (minutes from meeting, Merlin Woods School, Doughiska. 22nd May, 2012). Galway Councillor, Michael Crowe, sympathized, and stated that: ‘the three councillors in the room, along with the Director of services, should work together and to try and sort out the significant problems that we have in the estate. It was decided that the first thing to do was for the

councillors to approach the receiver to ask for a meeting to get clarity in the situation at hand'. Michael Crowe suggested that the issue should 'be parked for the moment and to concentrate on Fearann Ri, as there was a huge amount of issues to get sorted there first' (minutes for meeting in Merlin Woods School, Doughiska 22nd May, 2012). Councillor Crowe said he would talk to the 'relevant people' over the next few days and get back to Michael Nolan by end of week. It was pointed out that the director of services has an 'obligation to deal with our issues, as some issues are a public health hazard, such as seeping sewage, unfinished roads. We also need clarity on the state of sewers' (Minutes for meeting, 22nd May, 2012).

At the heart of this matter lies the complicated relationship between the local authority and private developers, a direct consequence of government policy that promoted private ownership as its preferred form of housing tenure and a public sector that has been run down. Consequently, local authority maintenance resources have been cut substantially. However, the economic crash has called into question this market-driven agenda, one that has been poorly regulated and where bonds or formal contracts to complete many estates have been 'lost'. The local authority maintains that these estates are not its responsibility. But, for the residents association it is an issue that extends beyond 'green areas', and includes serious elements of the local infrastructure such as

the drainage system installed for the houses is inadequate and, in some cases, there is sewage backing up. Some families have the smell of sewage all the time. And there have been countless times that the drains have overflowed and caused floods. Developers exploited loopholes during the building of these estates, we are the ones now having to sort it out – it's outrageous. They were able to build more units per acre than usually required. We don't even have space to park.

(Comments by residents at a meeting in Merlin Park Primary School, 19th October, 2011).



Figure 30 – Dangerous pavements. Photograph FFC Residents Association.

There is a genuine fear among residents that the condition of the estates will deteriorate further and, that in time, more properties will be left vacant:

Nobody is going to buy these empty properties, especially now in a recession. For those of us who own our house here, things are just going to get worse. Something needs to be radically done. We would like to have the ghost estate completely knocked down and turned into a community garden. This would transform the area. We could then take care of it. This is not a good place for our children to grow up.

(Comments by residents at a meeting in Merlin Park Primary School, 19th October, 2011).

Councillor Frank Fahy asked Dan Hurley about the ‘bonds’ and was informed that following ‘our meetings with the council we found out that they had expired’ (Minutes for meeting in Merlin Woods School, Doughiska. 22nd May, 2012). By law, developers are obliged to pay bonds as security to the City Council as well as development levies. According to the Connaught Tribune (Edna Cunningham, August 1, 2010), Galway City

Council was owed €5.4 million in unpaid development levies, of which €1.3 million was being sought through the District and High Courts, the rest was subject to enforcement orders or had been under negotiation.

Crucially, for the DRA a ‘mistake’ had been made by the City Council, which had sought development levies from Harrmack Development (headed by Steven Harris and, at different stages, Joe McNamara and Bernard McKeon) for the Fionn Uisce site. A typographical error meant that instead of applying for levies for 120 residential units in one development, the Council specified only ‘apartments’ of (28 units) and a further €393,275 for the 50 half built apartments in Fionn Uisce. There are also unpaid and ‘missing’ insurance bonds that should have guaranteed that public areas in the estates would be completed. When Edna Cunningham approached Tom O’Connell, the Director of Services for Planning and Development for comment, the response was that maybe the council had been too ‘reasonable’ towards developers at that time! Such ‘errors’ have had a significant and detrimental impact on the DRA.

In response, the FFC residents committee decided to ‘pursue’ the receivers, but ‘so far none of them have had any luck’. In an updated email sent on 11th July, by Maura Mulroe, noted that ‘Cllr Nuala Nolan saying she has been chasing up Michael Crowe and he has told her he hopes to have news soon’:

In the meantime our chairman Michael Nolan has emailed the receiver, Mr. Ian Barrett of KPMG directly to see can he get in contact with him on our behalf. We had a discussion the other evening and decided to write a letter about our situation highlighting the health and safety issues (sewage seeping up onto roads, smell, unfinished roads, possibility of no lighting in estate come this winter etc etc) and get all the councillors to sign it and send it directly to Ian Barrett by registered post. It’s worth a shot.

(Maura Mulroe, email update, 11th July, 2012).

Michael Nolan (Chairperson) followed this up to see if they had any success with contacting the receiver, but he did not have encouraging news:

Michael contacted him directly and got a response. The receiver requested a list of questions we wanted answered. Michael sent them

off to him and the reply was basically that he regarded the estate as "finished", and therefore "held no responsibility for completed estates". He gave us a reference no for two bonds and told us to follow up with the council as they were the sole beneficiaries of the bonds. He also told us that the receivers are not appointed over any management company and therefore have no authority, obligation or power to deal with these companies. The current directors of the management company are responsible for its running. In regard to the question about outstanding service charges and management fees, he told us that legal advice would be required to get this information. So this needs to be discussed at the next meeting.

(Maura Mulroe, email update, 24th July, 2012).

In an attempt to make some headway the FFC Residents Association contacted a Residents' Association in Co Cork (Cluin Ard) that were

in exactly the same situation as us and he advised us to keep writing and getting in contact with Mr Barrett and eventually we should have some luck. He also said to try and contact him through his PA Terry Shine so we'll do that to. They have a Facebook page if anyone wants to look them up. Some day when I get a mine I'll try and set up a page for us so everyone can check in and see what we are up to!

(Maura Mulroe, email update, 11th July, 2012).

The lobbying also extended to health authorities, in order to highlight 'how unhygienic the sewage issue is here, as it's a health hazard. Again, it's worth a shot. The more people we contact the more chance we have of getting somewhere' (Maura Mulroe, email update, 11th July, 2012). A private management company originally ran those areas that were not the responsibility of the local authority. However, without fees from the ghost estates and the empty houses, they simply withdrew their services. As word spreads, a domino effect occurs, as one resident explains:

Why should I pay when my neighbours are not... in fact, why should I pay anyhow, as they don't do anything to make the area better. How do we know what is actually happening to the money...'

(Comment by resident in the area, Doughiska, June 3rd, 2011).

Residents from the FFC Association became even more agitated when communication with Winters Property Management Agency completely broke down:

Winters Property Management Agency were supposed to be managing the estate, but recently pulled out after stating that 70% of the properties are rented and that it was impossible to get hold of landlords to pay... who is responsible now? Who is going to help us?

(Meeting 19th October, 2011 at Merlin Park Primary School, Doughiska).

When I bought my house in 2006 I was of the understanding that the estate would be looked after and maintained by a management company, as was stated in my contract. It's legal I thought, so it must be honoured, right?

Wrong, unfortunately, 3 years after I moved in the management agent pulled out of the estate and we were left high and dry with no one to look after the estate. The area quickly became rundown with grass growing high, flower beds unkempt and litter everywhere.

(Maura Mulroe, 169 Fearann Ri. Direct correspondence with Anna King, 30th August, 2013).

The FFC Residents Association organized a meeting with a spokesperson for the City Council, Nora Ann Keane (Galway Council) and Maura Mulroe, vice-Chair of the FFC Residents Association, and Celia Keane, to try and answer some of these concerns. I attended this meeting on 1st Dec 2011, City Hall. As well as the terrible physical conditions of the FFC estates (lighting, paths, sewage system, health and safety and fencing around the ghost apartments), the issue of property management was raised. During the meeting it became clear that the council had no obligation to the residents. As a spokesperson for the City Council explained, these issues were not his department's responsibility. The exchange between the City Council spokesperson and Maura Mulroe is illuminating:

Something has to be done... it's a serious health hazard. Children are gaining access to it, which will in the future lead to a child getting hurt or, worse, killed because it's so dangerous.

(Maura Mulroe, 1st Dec 2011, City Hall).

The spokesperson for the Galway City Council's response was that he had met with Steven Harris' wife and a consultant to discuss Fionn Uisce, and that the Galway City Council had requested a survey of all services, together with a report from Harmack for all of Fionn Uisce. The report was never sent and he explained that

A new fence was put around this building last week, but Steven Harris (Harmack Development), who is responsible for the estate, contacted us and told me that we were trespassing on private property.

(Spokesperson for the Galway City Council. 1st Dec 2011, City Hall).

He suggested that the 'residents compile a health and safety report'. Maura Mulroe questioned how this could be achieved, when in some cases the developers had gone bust and others had just disappeared:

It appears as if larger developers sold land to smaller builders during the period of development, and these people have vanished. We don't have any idea of who owns some of these properties. How are we supposed to find these people?

(Maura Mulroe, 1st Dec 2011, City Hall).

It was not, in his opinion, a question he could answer. However, he was insistent that the estates were private property and that the Galway City Council was not responsible for remedying the problems:

In order for the council to take it over, the developer has to finish it fully and apply to the council to take it over. Then, and only then, will the council look into taking over the estate.

(Spokesperson for the Galway City Council. City Hall, 1st December, 2011).

The spokesperson for the Galway City Council stated that he had no answer to this question, nor could he confirm whether the council had contact details for individuals who had built property in the area. Neither were there direct answers to questions about

regulations to protect communities during the period of development, or whether the council knew that deals had been made between different builders at the time.

Conversations about who was directly responsible for this situation were evaded. He did, however, explain that the council had attempted to hold Harmack accountable:

The council had issued an enforcement notice to Harmack in 2010, with regard to amenities and development not being finished.

(Spokesperson for the Galway City Council, City Hall, 1st December, 2011).

It was not clear from the spokesperson for the council why it gave permission in 2005 for the second phase of Fionn Uisce to be built with inadequate building standards. Though, rather oddly, he conceded that

we had no knowledge of how poorly finished the estate was, as the Council doesn't inspect sites when they are being built...

(Spokesperson for the Galway City Council. City Hall, 1st December, 2011).

To both Maura Mulroe and Celia Keane it seemed incredible that the council would have no knowledge of ‘inadequate building practices’. The spokesperson for the council declined to comment further, but he explained that the issue of developer bonds for Harmack (originally paid by a developer to the council to ensure completion) had expired in 2010, and intimated that there was nothing that the Galway City Council could do about this.

In response to a question about inadequate drains and sewage problems, a spokesperson for the council stated that an engineer’s report should have been completed when the houses were originally bought: ‘It is standard procedure that these kinds of infrastructural issues should be checked before a mortgage is obtained. It is therefore, the responsibility of the house owner’. As far as the issue of property management was concerned, he argued that the best course of action was for a group of residents to ‘get together and form their own management company’. Maura Mulroe replied that

we have... all the residents have gathered and we are already cleaning the estate ourselves and planting shrubs and bulbs, which the council gave us, and which we appreciate. We are more than willing to work with you to continue the upkeep of the estate, but issues like lighting, sewage, drainage are beyond our capabilities and we would need some sort of other management. We don't have the resources to set up a company... this is impossible.

(Maura Mulroe, City Hall, 1st December, 2011).

The spokesperson explained that

our hands are tied and there is nothing we can do. Funds just simply aren't there and the cost of us taking it over are just too high.

(A spokesperson for the Galway City Council, City Hall, 1st December, 2011).

He advised the group to contact Tom Donahoe, foreman of the parks department, to discuss any issue concerned with maintenance of green areas, or with recycling bins.

After the meeting with the Galway City Council the FFC Residents Association decided to try and deal directly with the developer. On 5th December 2011, Maura Mulroe and Chairperson Michael Nolan sent a letter on behalf of the FFC Residents Association to Mr. George Maloney, the liquidator responsible for the Harmack Development site. The letter outlined the group would like to

request a meeting to discuss the ghost estate in Fionn Uisce. We have been informed that this development and land is owned by Harmack Development who has gone into liquidation. We would like to discuss with you the issue of the unfinished buildings in this development, which is causing severe health and safety issues for us as residents. Our overall objective is to find a way forward for the residents to have this property knocked down and turned into a community garden. Once the estate is handed to the community we will negotiate with the City Council to establish a community garden project.

I understand that you are extremely busy, but we would really appreciate your guidance and support with this issue.

While the residents' association is still applying pressure, as of 14th of February, 2013, little has been achieved.

In correspondence with Maura Mulroe, 1st March, 2013:

I feel we have been sitting round the table talking about costing for too long and putting everything on the long finger. We want to keep the pressure on them now to get things moving. Create more urgency in them!

We've had a little success in regard to the lighting. In Fearann Ri & Caislean Thorlaigh, the council have now "Taken In Charge" these lights. They spent a few thousand repairing them and will maintain them from now on. So that's something.

Unfortunately, in Fionn Usice they cannot fix the lights. They surveyed all the lights there and found the wiring to be substandard and not up Irish standards. They costed it and said it would take €32,000 to fix and they don't have the funds to carry out that work. To add to the problem, the developer Harris ran council workers from the site after they put the fence up around the derelict buildings and told them they were trespassing on private property. The council are now taking legal advice in regard to them doing work on the site because the owner is so uncooperative.⁴⁶

In regard to bonds:

Fearann Ri Phase 1 - €131,763. This is being renewed every month. Ourselves, as well as the councillors, asked for this to be called in a.s.a.p. The council want a full costings done before they do this, which makes no sense because we calculated it will take about €450,000 to complete the estate so the €131k won't be enough and at least they can start works with bond money before something happens and we can't claim it.

Fearann Ri Phase 2- €108,000 . This was with Anglo Irish Bank, which is now gone and Galway City Council are taking legal advice in regard to cashing in that bond, or has it gone altogether. This is why we want the bond for phase 1 cashed in immediately.

⁴⁶ This issue has subsequently been resolved. Steven Harris during the last week of July, 2012, gave consent to Galway City Council to carry out remedial work on the lights in Fionn Usice.

Fionn Uisce- Phase 1 - €127,00. This is with AIB and had been called in and should be received by Galway City Council soon.

Fionn Uisce - Phase 2 - €192,00. There's an extension to planning permission here until December, 2013. So bond can't be called in till then.

So within the next month or two we should have a full costing from the council and take it from there as to where the council will get the funds to complete the estates and take us over.

Thats our plan anyway! Maura.

By Christmas of 2013 some achievements were made. A Polish company called *Doughiska Development Ltd*, 31, based in Currachgrange, Newbridge, Co. Kildare, has purchased the ghost estate, Fionn Uisce and intends to complete. After a two year struggle the issue of lighting has been resolved. All three estates have had their street-lights fixed and Galway City Council is now in charge and the bonds are to be released. Unfortunately, 'the problems of sewage overflows on the road, sewage smells travelling up bathroom pipes and blocked drains' have not been sorted and the Galway City Council engineers have admitted that 'this problem has wider implications for the city' raising concerns about the environment and its water supplies. The other remedial works, such as roads and landscaping cannot proceed until this issue has been rectified for fear of 'having to dig up roads again to make repairs' (18th December, 2013).ⁱⁱⁱ On a more positive note, the residents continue their great work:

After asking the council for mulch at the last meeting, the Parks Department has supplied us with the first load of mulch and have specified that we can ask for more when we need it. It would be great to get a few more helping hands when next load is delivered. We have received from Galway City Council, daffodils and bluebells which we have already planted and we hope to get more plants in the spring.

(email from Maura Mulroe to Anna King, 18th December, 2014)

Overall, the experiences of FFC Residents' Association demonstrate how government has effectively left important matters to the private sector (individual mortgage holders/banks/receivers/developers).

If we are adopt a phrase from Bang and Sørensen (2001) ‘big politics’ has failed to provide a regulatory framework in which these relationship can operate. ‘Small’ politics, politics at the local level, has simply compounded this problem, with conduct bordering on negligent: a failure to ensure that developers had sufficient funds to complete projects, insurance or bonds for estates were to be completed. This raises the question of why the ‘monies’ were not taken up before the projects were given permission to go ahead, given the vast profits that were being projected in these developments.

What is clear from the residents’ lived experience is the damaging effect of a degraded physical environment, as well as how these urban spaces constrain the possibility of establishing public spaces that can sustain creative meaningful encounters. The material constraints, such as poor legislation that contain loop holes in which well-resourced developers can move quickly to exploit, and the difficulty faced by under-resourced local authorities, has been compounded by the residents associations lack of legal expertise to ‘play this game’. For the people of the area, this became a time-consuming and exhausting process.

4.4 Moving from the Material to the Ideational

Bang’s and Sørensen’s (2001) work on ‘everyday makers or lay citizens’ is a useful starting point when considering the experiences of the FFC Residents’ Association. In contrast to Putnam’s atomized individuals, Bang argues that everyday makers, people who organize politically at the local level among partnerships and governance networks in neighbourhoods, are re-defining the relationship between citizens and the state. The everyday maker considers ‘knowing as doing’, in other words local knowledge is important to successful community action. The character of the everyday maker is that they are not engaged professionally or involved full-time or long-term. Neither are they involved in traditional political parties. Their engagement is what he terms ‘hit and run’. They pursue political actions, but only through projects that may run

in the short-term and where civil engagement is undertaken through networks, rather than opposition to government hierarchies (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:152-154).

The participation of everyday makers depends on the context. This may not be ideologically inspired political commitment, but it is not political apathy. Everyday makers' activities are very political when it comes to 'small' politics (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:152-154). However, Bang and Sørensen do not mean that everyday makers possess a narrow local identity, because they think globally (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:152-154). This is the politics of the ordinary, at the local level. In summary, for Bang and Sørensen, the 'credo of everyday making' is:

'do-it-yourself; do it where you are; do it for fun, but also because you find it necessary; do it ad hoc or part-time; do it concretely, instead of ideologically; do it self-confidentially and show trust in yourself; do it with the system, if need (Bang and Sørensen, 2001:156).

While there is evidence of these practices in the DRA, such as the FFC Residents' Association, there is another dimension to the work in the DRA that offers a critical insight into Bang and Sørensen's work. There is an issue about time. The tendency in Bang and Sørensen's work is to portray social practice as short-term, 'or hit and run', whereas the ethnographic work in the DRA reported here demonstrates how these processes take place *over time*, and are not static. The term 'everyday maker' seems to capture some of this. However, it down plays an important point: that most people engage in social encounters (such as the residents' petitioning local government to resolve the problems with estates) not just to achieve a goal, but because of other aspects of social life, such as emotions and identity (this observation may only be meaningfully recognised through a form of research engagement over a number of years immersed in an area, otherwise such subtle developments may be missed). In contrast to a goal-orientated form of action, what emerged from the FFC Residents Association's experience is that even within a tense, constrained context, positive encounters evolve through the act of shared participation. These experiences seem to be continuing, even after the shorter-term projects are resolved.

A further dimension highlighted by the experience of the FFC Residents' Association is the idea that it is not just the acquisition of appropriate services that shape a healthy community, but opportunities for social engagement that give expression to what matters to people:

One of the biggest potential issues arising from living in an unfinished estate is the feeling of hopelessness amongst residents. When no one in power seems to care, residents stop caring too. This hinders social interaction as people retreat into their own houses.

(Julie Murphy, 32 Fionn Uisce. Correspondence with Anna King, 30th August, 2013).

This testimony underlines the link between the material / physical environment and the quality of life. Furthermore, it highlights a moral dimension to the circumstances that the residents found themselves; the fact that no-one seemed to care has had an enormous impact on community morale. It is possible to argue that even in situations whereby estates are finished and in good repair that community practices may not develop. However, what spurred community building processes for these residents was a desire to 'care', which was more than just a need to transform the their physical environment, but indicates that this process also brought meaning into the resident's lives. For Maura Mulroe, this was a significant moment for the community:

The area quickly became run down with grass growing high, flowerbeds un-kept and litter everywhere. I didn't know my neighbours, but had got chatting to one or two about the situation and from there we started a residents association. It was a big turnaround point on a few levels. A community was starting, neighbours were getting to know each other and we were getting a bit of people power going. We took the matter into our own hands and as a community we started litter pick-ups, landscaping days and we painted our houses.

(Maura Mulroe, 169 Fearann Ri. Correspondence with Anna King, 30th August, 2013).

These social encounters created a caring community context even within severely compromised living conditions. Julie Murphy, for example, soon realised that:

The deficiencies in the physical infrastructure by themselves pose no great threat to community spirit. It is only when no progress is being made to improve the situation that issues of apathy and social isolation occur. It has to be said that the situation offers opportunities for community building also as is evident in FFC Residents Association. FFC communicate the developments made with the Council through a Facebook page as well as maintaining the area through litter picks and grass cutting. It's so important as a resident to know that someone else cares.

(Julie Murphy, 32 Fionn Uisce. Correspondence with Anna King, 30th August, 2013).

These developments occurred over time, but are distilled in the following ‘roll up our sleeves and spend a few hours’ email sent to residents on 22nd May:

Good afternoon all,
Just an update for anyone that was not at last night’s quick meeting:
We’re still awaiting information emails back from Councillors to see
have they made any progress with council/receivers. We are chasing
them to get going on this asap. In ref to collecting money for grass
cutting: We have just over €1000 collected from 5 door-to-door
collections. This hopefully will see us through the summer months. We
will ask landscaper to cut the grass a little tighter the next time. Ideally,
it should be cut a little more regular so if anyone has a lawn mower and
a spare afternoon to top up any common area lawns in front of their
house, work away! If you need help give us a shout and we’ll round up
a few helpers. It was decided to have one last door-to-door collection
to call to any houses that there was no answer from the last time. We
will gather at the tennis courts @ 7.30 on wed the 13th June, so if
anyone is available to help tag along. If you know of any house owners
that are not aware of the resident association, ask for their name,
number and email so we can add them to our mailing list and keep them
informed. Rebecca (treasurer) is getting a quote from the landscaper to
spray the whole estate with weed killer on Sat 9th. Our resources are
very limited, so if the quote is to expensive then the plan B is for a few
of us to roll up our sleeves and spend a few hours on the Sat 9th June
@11am spraying as much of the estate as possible. So if anyone has a
back pack spray, watering cans etc. let us know. We’ll supply the weed
killer, we just need the tools. So all going well with the weed killer (it
needs a week to kill weeds before we can go digging), we are calling all
house owners & residents to gather their wheelbarrows, spades,

shovels, spare plants/shrubs, gloves etc. to gather at the tennis courts on the following Saturday the 16th June @ 11am to dig up all the beds and tidy them up for the summer. We have applied to the council to supply us with mulch/soil/plants so with a bit of luck (and a bit of friendly constant badgering) we'll have stuff to plant.

Not everyone can come to every meeting but we'd urge all to come out and help whenever you have a free evening/morning. Stating the obvious, but the more that show up, the quicker we get things tidied up.

Kindest regards
Maura Mulroe
Vice Chairperson FFC Residents Association

"Many hands make light work!"

(Maura Mulroe email sent on 22nd May, 2013)

These testimonies highlight the complex inter-relationship between the structural and ideational components to the development process, and offer a moral or ethical dimension the community-building puzzle. They also explore the tentative ways in which people come together in a shared response to change.

Many conversations with people who were 'beginning to gather' to shape a new development agenda reflected these ideas. Taking a shared approach to development is not an easy task, as the local parish priest, Fr. Martin Glynn makes clear; it is important for leaders within community to be aware of the social dimension to leadership, to be aware that people in positions of power must, at all times, be aware of their responsibility to others:

As a priest I have learnt that the people who are the real stake holders within a community are the people themselves. Priests come and go, and it is important to remember that when the chips are down the people will collectively carry more weight; they will continue the community even after the individual personality has gone. They, therefore, need the fullest opportunities possible to express themselves. My role as a leader within our community is to mentor, to facilitate and build bridges. After a period of time, my role will change and new people will bring what is necessary for change and progress.

(Fr. Martin Glynn, Conversation with Anna King. 6th April, 2011, Café Mocha).

Furthermore, as Fr. Martin Glynn's testimony indicates, social development processes in a community need to appreciate a collective response:

The key to the success of our community projects is to take the personality out of the picture and focus on the issues. It is like dropping a pebble into a still pond of water and watching the ripples extend and expand outwards. It is the same within a community: when we broaden our focus onto the community, rather than the individual, the family, or the culture we are familiar with, we open up to the possibility of reaching a multitude of people. For instance, from a community centre we can run courses and programmes to give others the opportunity to develop their own potential. Not only do we touch an individual, but also the family and the children of the family.

(Fr. Martin Glynn, Conversation with Anna King. 6th April, 2011, Café Mocha).

These conversations reveal the shift in the approach to development that took place during the period of this ethnographic research, from one concerned exclusively with resources to one that conceived 'spaces that are at once accessible to everyone and which also foster a sense of shared concern' (Tonnelat, 2010:1).

This chapter started with a discussion about the underlying forces 'outside' of local experience that shape change and development. Research reveals, however, the importance of the social dimension to development, especially as residents gathered to renegotiate their shared landscape. This is by no means an easy task, and requires substantial effort by 'everyday makers' over a sustained period of time, reflecting the evolutionary nature of these social processes. It also stresses the importance of an ideational dimension to the community-building puzzle: participation, equal representation and the importance of having a shared vision. The FFC Residents' Association provides a brief example of how, in an incredibly constrained social context, opportunities for community-building exist.

These experiences provide worthwhile evidence to investigate further ways in which it is possible to encourage such encounters, creating public spaces in which

individuals can ‘gather’ that are meaningful. While it is vital to consider the material forces that shape change, it is crucial we appreciate that, if individuals are to fully participate in building an inclusive, fair and equitable future we need to create conducive public spaces for gathering. The following chapter outlines new forms of gathering in the community that embrace these ideas, as well as exploring positive ways in which diversity and difference can be embraced and encouraged. These spaces for inquiry offer ways to ‘materialize a way of experiencing, bring a particular cast of mind out into the world of objects where men can look at it’ (Geertz, 1993:99).

Chapter 5

New Forms of Gathering

Truth can sometimes be stranger than fiction! I grew up in a little country parish in East Clare. This parish had less than two hundred families in it. If someone at that time had suggested that one day I would be a priest in a parish with a population of over seven thousand, and more significantly - with a population of over thirty different nationalities - I would have *not in my wildest dreams thought it possible*. Emphasis to highlight intonation.

(Fr. Martin Glynn. 9th March, 2010. Good Shepherd Parish, Castlegar Complex, Roscam).

In order to understand development in the DRA it is important to consider not just the underlying policy factors that have shaped change, *the setting for the gathering* and the focus of the previous chapter, but how such forces are refracted through the residents' lived experience. This chapter follows those shifts as residents reacted to change, pointing to emerging practices that reflect novel ways of understanding the residents' lived experience in a diverse social setting. The ethnographic work in the DRA revealed that much of this social action followed a pathway that shifted from a focus upon material needs, such as services and infrastructure, to one concerned with new forms of social gathering that reframes negative challenges into opportunities, allowing for creative dialogue.

The chapter contains four themes. The first, that new forms of gathering have emerged constructed by the Catholic Church, the GAA and the Ghanaian Union. Not only do people use these new forms of gathering to help build sustainable relationships, but they have become important sites for participation in future development. The Church as it is represented in this particular area, for example, now conveys a modern 'inclusive' approach to faith, as it embraces new people, cultures and religions. Here, it is plausible to suggest that the launch of the Good Shepherd Parish symbolized the beginning of a passionate interest in the role of celebration, music and cultural exchange.

These are events that provide examples of how many of the local Irish people, and newcomers to the area, felt a strong desire to ‘integrate’, while retaining a sense of identity and tradition.

A second theme is the radical shift in thought that took place, challenging the stereotypical images of the DRA as a ‘ghetto’ or ‘melting pot’. Here, it is possible to identify how members of the community came together to counter such a narrative, initially through commissioning the Geraghty report (2009) to provide a more nuanced appreciation of the area’s profile and needs. The approach undertaken in the DRA has been a combination of skill sets (some professional) that were rooted in social engagement within the community. Importantly, it sought to identify skills and talent for local regeneration and it highlights the need for a structured approach to long-term development, one that provides an official platform for the community to have a voice in formal government agencies and institutions.⁴⁷

A third theme is to consider how these events took place in a context of changing narratives that regard diversity as full of potential, rather than as a problem to be solved. Finally, as a precursor to the following three chapters that examine the (re) emergence of place-based social development, this section examines how social action has led to the elevation of public space (local primary school and park).

Although this chapter lays out the evolving ideas in a linear fashion, it is important to note that this presentation is inevitably ‘artificial’, structured in this way primarily for the purposes of clarity for the reader. In practice, ideas shift back and forth, have multiple forms of expression and inherent contradictions. A community’s shifting ‘psychology’ is complex, certainly it is difficult to capture in words or reports. In my

⁴⁷ There is a very strong emphasis on interviews with Dan Hurley in this section. There are two reasons for this: First, much of the activity that he describes occurred before I became involved in the area, and many of the original people are no longer involved in the committee. Second, Dan Hurley has subsequently become a spokesperson for the group and, apart from easily identified statements that are of a personal nature, his views are a summary of what occurred during this period and, in my experience, they chime with the general feelings held by members of the group.

view, the only truly valuable way to understand such matters is in practice; through experience. However, that given, this chapter does attempt to outline major shifts in community gathering in a number of settings. It is not a testament to all encounters and experiences. It gives attention to less obvious elements to the community-building puzzle; what matters to people and how this is realised.

5.1 Recasting the Social Stage

From the mid-1990s a combination of Ireland's rapid economic growth, labour shortages and successful job creation provided an economic environment that encouraged diverse populations to enter Ireland (Lentin, 2012:11). By 1996 in-migration had 'outstripped emigration, a process that accelerated with the decision to allow ten new EU member states citizens' access to the labour market' (2004) (Ruhs, 2005, cited in Lentin, 2012:11). The figures for in-migration peaked between 2004 - 2007 (Lentin, 2012:11). While there may be statistical variations on the exact figures (see Mary Gilmartin, 2011), largely due to inadequate resources for the monitoring of migration patterns, and the issue of the transient nature of labour migrants, evidence suggests that even after the economic crash, many people that had moved to Ireland decided to stay (see ARD Capacity Report, Frecklington & Carney, 2013 for statistics relating to the DRA). While the scale of this internationalisation has declined in the recessionary period post-2007, immigrants still account for 12% of the labour force (Healy 2012:217).

There is a range of reasons identified for in-migration. Among the more established in-migration populations coming to Ireland have been people from China. In many instances, they may have been intending to stay in the UK, but ended up in Ireland 'by accident' (McFayden, 2008). However, more recently, as part of a government initiative aimed at recruiting more Mandarin speaking professionals, the numbers in Irish educational institutions and multinationals located in Ireland have increased. As well as career opportunities it is a location attractive to students, largely because of the availability of part time work, which provides a means through which they can pay fees. In contrast, much of Nigerian in-migration has a cultural dimension, as the decision to

move may have been based upon their experiences of missionaries of the Catholic Church, religious-run schools, NGOs and/or government aid. The levels of in-migration were also affected by refugees who had been forced to leave their country or escape war. Table 3.1 (Healy, 2012:220) below provides data on the number of applications submitted to the Irish Government.

Year	Number	Year	Number
2000	10,938	2006	4,314
2001	10,325	2007	3,985
2002	11,634	2008	3,866
2003	7,900	2009	2,689
2004	4,766	2010	1,939
2005	4,323	2011	1,290

Table 1- Applications for Asylum in Ireland, 2000 - 2010

Original source: Office of the Refugee applications Commissioner (2012)

For Indians, migration has been influenced by potential employment opportunities, and is seen as advancing individuals' careers. Partners tend to arrive at a later date, once one of the couple has secured some form of employment (McFayden, 2008). For most in-migrants employment can bring greater recognition, better pay and lower workloads. Moreover, as a predominantly English speaking country Ireland has proved attractive. Very often, people who have high levels of qualifications have moved because they have been unable to secure employment elsewhere in the recessionary period of the late 1990s (notably Lithuanians) or, in some instances, their choice to migrate has been influenced by a desire to experience new countries or cultures (McFayden, 2008).

However, a passage into Ireland is by no means easy or simple. Some in-migrants must secure either a work permit (temporary and renewable only on an annual basis and cannot be transferred to another job) or a green card, which is directed to highly skilled in-migrants and restricted to specialist areas of the economy (renewable bi-annually). In

both instances labour tests apply and eligibility criteria have become more stringently applied since 2006. Those with work permits may apply for their spouses to gain ‘entry’, but only after 12 months and this is not guaranteed. Those with a green card may apply after three months.

While the downturn in the Irish economy has led to a significant increase in emigration from all nationalities in Ireland, and most notably a massive reduction in asylum applications, (see Table 3.1), there is evidence that many migrants have made Ireland their home (*Social Justice Ireland*, 2012:217) which, as Healy point out, poses a number of challenges:

Irish society needs to adapt to this reality. Ireland is now a multi-racial country and government policies should promote and encourage the creation of an inclusive and integrated society in which respect for and recognition of their culture is an important right for all people (Healy, 2012:217).

These changes at a national level are reflected in the DRA. Thus, approximately one third of people attending the Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, in 2011 were born in countries other than Ireland and, most strikingly, in 2012, 100 per cent of children attending the Good Shepherd Parish youth group (Flock or Friends Youth Club) are from non-Irish backgrounds. Such data demonstrate an evolving multicultural community identity. However, there are different concentrations in the respective areas of the DRA. The 2006 National Census and the Geraghty 2009 Survey revealed that there were over 33 different nationalities resident in the area: 66.6% Irish, 23% European (with 11.9% Polish compared to 1.5% national average), 7% African (of which 50.7% of all Africans are Nigerian), 2.2%, 0.6 American, 0.6% other. According to Geraghty (2009), statistics for the whole area suggest that one third of the population were non-Irish nationals. The Central Statistics Office (2011) data on small area populations confirms that almost 47% of the community (Doughiska) was born outside Ireland compared to 20% in Roscam and Arduan, with a significantly high proportion of Polish people (24.51%) ,and those who regard themselves as Black or Black Irish (Frecklington and Carney, 2013:77).

In most instances community culture, norms and practices in the DRA have been transformed both by economic development and a change in the demographic profile. These changes have completely re-shaped traditional Irish social and cultural practices. For example, in the local Merlin Woods primary school, 75 per cent of children attending in the school year beginning in 2010 were from non-Irish backgrounds and enrolments for September, 2013, indicated that this would rise to 80 per cent. What is interesting is that statistics suggest that this shift in profile has not necessarily led to negative social circumstances. Although the DRA is perceived as a poor area by the wider Galway community, proportionately, the area's population is very educated: 14.36% of the Doughiska population has an honours bachelor degree or a professional qualification (or both), Roscam and Ardaun has 19.90%. This is significantly higher than the national average of 9.0% (Census 2011 Small Area Population Statistics (Frecklington and Carney, ARD Capacity Report, 2013:18). In addition, based on the Census 2011 statistics, 67.74% of Doughiska and 72.34 % of Roscam and Arduan are 'in work', compared to 50.12% in Galway City, with the state average being 50.08 (Frecklington and Carney, ARD Capacity Report, 2013:13). Certainly, these figures concur with anecdotal evidence gained throughout this research, which suggest that the area has an enormous wealth of talent.

5.2 Social Development in the DRA

Now, to return to the more temporal evolution of development in the DRA. For one of the main activists in the area, Dan Hurley, spokesperson for the DRA Development Company Ltd., the difficulties associated with the shifting physical and social landscapes of the area were brought to the surface in 2006, when he found himself in an awkward social situation. He was called upon by an African couple that were getting married, but had found themselves refused entrance into a hall where the service was due to take place:

There had been some misunderstanding between the groups of people, but management of the facility were unwilling to yield and let the

couple in for their wedding. With much deliberation, I stuck my neck out and took liberties and was able to eventually get access by 2pm the next day. There were up to 40 different countries represented by 200 people all outside in the car park and they didn't know how they were going to get in. To me it was an embarrassment to be Irish that day, so it stands out vividly for me. There was a certain amount of human sympathy given the predicament they were in.

We spent an hour fixing up flowers. They had no paper tablecloths because the centre was supposed to provide them. The service took an hour and half and during this I drove around looking for table cloths. Mary Dempsey helped me. I eventually rang the Clarinbridge Court Hotel, her name was Jill, the same as my eldest. She said, that they had linen table that were fully starched clothes and just to return them and they would wash them at no cost to us. They were over the moon. A wonderful day was had. The dancing and costumes were to die for. At 12 pm that night the married couple arrived at my door with a bottle of bubbly, which was lovely. This was a turning point. They had, from my point of perspective, acted with the utmost integrity right through the whole negotiations.

I felt we had a major bridge to build in the community to get the non-Irish integrated if they were to meet that kind of resistance.

(Dan Hurley, spokesperson for the DRA Development Company Ltd., 23rd September, Interview, Castlegar Complex, Roscam).

Dan Hurley's response was to become involved with the local priest and a number of residents to resolve the problems he had encountered first-hand. During this time two important changes occurred in tandem. First, the three areas of Roscam, Doughiska and Arduan were amalgamated into one community. Second, the new Good Shepherd Parish was established by Bishop Drennan, to represent the geographical area of Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun.⁴⁸ A public meeting was called in December, 2006, by the new priest for the area, Fr. Martin Glynn, to discuss the future for the community. As a direct result of this meeting the *DRA Planning and Strategy Committee* was constructed, which

⁴⁸Fr. Martin Glynn, appointed in 2004 by the late Bishop James McLoughlin to look after the spiritual and pastoral needs of the community, is now the Good Shepherd Parish Priest.

consisted of seven people with a mission to act as a voice for the people of the entire area.⁴⁹

This meeting provided a spark for debate about the long-term development in the area. During this period Dan Hurley held conversations with other members of the community about these matters and, over time, ‘on the ground it became apparent that people were very motivated’ (Interview, 23rd September, 2013). This spurred on discussion by members of the DRA *Planning and Strategy Committee* about a survey entitled: *The Profile of Doughiska – Community in the Making*, that had been commissioned by the Ballybane Partnership in 2005:⁵⁰

The nub... of what that said about Doughiska was that it was a community that was desolate, without heart, without leadership, without any nerve centre or facilities. The report was very negative.

(Interview with Dan Hurley, spokesperson for the DRA Development Company Ltd., 26th September, 2012. Parish Office, Castlegar Complex. Roscam).

For instance, it was reported that

this research, presents a picture of a community without any obvious leadership or capacity building process in place to develop that

⁴⁹ Membership of the committee consisted of seven volunteers from the area. The original membership consisted of Ms Josephine Okuguni, Ms Nuala Wakefield, Dr. Marita Glacken, Fr Martin Glynn, Mr. Dick O'Hanlon, Mr. Colin Joyce and Mr. Dan Hurley. More recently, Ms Miriam Kivlehan and Mr Paul Frecklington have replaced both Mr. Colin Joyce and Dr M Glacken on the committee. The seven members are now Directors of the new DRA Community Development Co. Ltd.

In order to address the demand for services in the area, the *DRA Planning and Strategy Committee* became incorporated as a not-for-profit, limited liability company; *The DRA Community Development Co. Ltd.* in 2010. The company has since acquired charitable exemption status since March 2011.

⁵⁰ *The Doughiska Community Profile and Needs Analysis* had been commissioned by the Ballybane/Mervue Community Development Project and was part funded by the Galway City Partnership, the Galway Office of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and Galway City Development Board using Cohesion funding secured through the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The report was launched in 2005.

leadership. It has a young population with a mix of groups residing there (*tenants, home owners, a range of diverse nationalities, young families, people living alone, etc.*) ... There is a palpable sense that suspicion, racism and poor communication exist in Doughiska, all contributing to the mutual and pervasive isolation.

There is a deficit of social and community infrastructure within the community. There is a lack of community spirit or a sense of belonging, partly because of this social and community infrastructural deficit, but also because of the mix of population in the area. Service providers highlighted the need for a range of social and community services and facilities ... Service providers fully recognise that the lack of social and community infrastructure is inhibiting the development of a 'community' with direction, spirit and a sense of belonging...

(*The Doughiska Community Profile and Needs Analysis*, 2005:72).

Although the report's findings were useful, many residents felt that it was a simplistic account, providing limited evidence of what was happening on the ground. In addition, the report focused only on Doughiska, as opposed to the entire area, presenting a jaundiced view of the community. For Dan Hurley the

report did not appear to represent the current experience of people living in the area. It was being presented in this research as being so impoverished, and poor and depressed.

(Interview with spokesperson for the DRA Development Company Ltd., Dan Hurley, 26th September, 2012. Parish Office, Castlegar Complex. Roscam).

Dan Hurley pointed out that treating Doughiska separately would have an impact on the whole area, so that rather

than push out an area that is in need, it seemed more beneficial that the whole lot was taken in – the good and the bad... and try to work out equilibrium to suit everybody.

(Dan Hurley, spokesperson for the DRA Development Company Ltd., 23rd September, 2012. Castlegar Complex, Roscam).

After discussion with both community members and local government officials the committee decided to integrate the three areas now making up the DRA in order to address the area's infrastructural and service provision deficit, as well as to challenge the stereotypes of Doughiska as a 'ghetto'. Dan Hurley felt that

a more equitable approach to development was required and that this was best achieved by amalgamating the 3 neighbouring areas. The new committee identified 3 main goals: to develop the community, its infrastructure and influence future planning of the area.⁵¹

(Dan Hurley, spokesperson for the DRA Development Company LtD., 23rd September, 2012. Castlegar Complex, Roscam).

The committee made a concerted effort to engage with the National University of Ireland, Galway, to commission an in-depth report that would act as a template for development from 2009 onwards: *A Community in the Making: Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun. Community Profile and Needs Analysis and Action Plan* (Geraghty, 2009).⁵² It seemed important to consider the positive dimension to change and not concentrate exclusively upon the problems. In addition, development in the area would need to be fair, authentic and meaningful to everyone, not just those that were in a more fortunate circumstance or locality. Shortly afterwards, members of the DRA committee suggested that many of the infrastructural projects would require a particular type of organised social action, one that would have the power to engage with government agencies, officials and political interests, if the difficulties were to be addressed. After a number of

⁵¹ While the areas remain in the Ballybane Electoral area, the DRA is distinct through its geography, (there is no direct road or bus service linking to Ballybane and the communities are completely different in that 84% of the housing in the DRA was built less than 12 years ago, whereas Ballybane is a well-established community (Frecklington and Carney, ARD Capacity Report, 2013:1).

⁵² Geraghty, (2009) *A Community in the making: Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun. Community Profile and Needs Analysis and Action Plan*, was commissioned under the auspices of National University of Ireland, Galway, and was launched in November 2009. The DRA Planning and Strategy Committee secured funding for this research, from NUIG, Galway City Council, Galway Diocese/ Good Shepherd Parish and McInerney Homes Ltd.

meetings, Dan Hurley reports that it was decided that there was a need for a legal institution to be set up to represent the people within a larger political and economic context:

We clearly demonstrated the need for every community to have their own independent legal structure that is able to represent the views of the people. It's not just about one or two voices, but there is also Dick and Nuala Miriam, Josephine and Paul who are also on the committee. The structure is what is important; the people on it can change and rotate. And I would be strong on that point – that different people bring different strings... The group is never the sum of any one person... it is the proper, recognised structure. Such was our call upon for dealing with things that we decided to incorporate the committee as a company limited by guarantee not for profit: the DRA Community Development Company Ltd, and we got charity status in March, 2011.

(Interview with Dan Hurley, spokesperson for the DRA Development Company Ltd., 26th September, 2012. Parish Office, Castlegar Complex. Roscam).

During this period two fundamental issues were identified by members of the DRA Development Company, Ltd. First, the need to provide essential services and infrastructure, such as schools, parks and adequate landscaping. Second, to try and support a more positive experience in community. From 2006-2013 members of *The DRA Development Company Ltd.* negotiated with other community members, statutory agencies, government and local officials to change these circumstances. The view held by the Company's members was that it was possible to militate against some of the challenges associated with large-scale change in physical and social settings if people have the necessary services, as well as vehicles for getting involved in the community. In Dan Hurley's opinion it was

imperative that the facilities are put in place; a whole variety to meet all the different age groups and needs. Variety is absolutely important. People then get involved in community and see it as a hugely positive thing for a growing community. There is integration, there is interaction, and people have an outlet to go out and meet each other, to socialise, shop and to just generally build community. To put a heart-core in community.

We need to get a credit union, a post office and a proper community centre, which is pivotal. We need to get the church going. There are so many Eastern Europeans here that have been brought up on court games, and we have nothing to give them.

(Interview with Dan Hurley, spokesperson for the DRA Development Company Ltd., 26th September, 2012. Parish Office, Castlegar Complex. Roscam).

The efforts of members of the *DRA Development Company Ltd.*, and others, have been resoundingly positive. They have secured both a primary and secondary school, provided much needed services, worked with Galway City Council on major infrastructural projects and secured a property that will become a community centre.^{iv}

It is possible to argue that newly emerging forms of gathering started with the establishment of the *DRA Development Company Ltd.* with its remit to counter the negative consequences associated with shifting physical and social landscape. But, at this point another important shift also took place. During these meetings one of the primary issues discussed was how to overcome the challenge of social dislocation and the alienation of large groups of people in the community. There can be little doubt that the traditional community organisations, such as such as the Catholic Church and the GAA, were pivotal in recasting the social stage, and were involved in a process of (re) interpretation of traditional practice.

For some of the traditional Irish residents the church was an avenue for change. Breda McNicolas and her husband Noel, for example, became involved in the ‘new’ community through Church activities and community work. Indeed, before Fr. Martin Glynn came to the area, Breda McNicholas felt that there was no sense of community at all:

When Fr. Martin Glynn arrived, he jumped on his bicycle and went to visit everyone. He was instrumental in bringing us together again. He created a community for us... The commitment and enthusiasm of Fr. Martin Glynn gave us all hope that we as a community could work towards overcoming the challenges that we were experiencing. The day that Fr. Martin Glynn arrived three years ago is memorable. He got onto

his bicycle and went knocking on everyone's doors. He visited all the different nationalities and brought us altogether through the church.

(Breda McNicolas, 20th July, 2008. McNicolas residence, Doughiska).

The Church, in the guise of this particular priest, who has a distinctive approach to social relations, became a vehicle to bring many different people together. As Fr. Martin Glynn explains, with

over 35 different nationalities living in our community, the Good Shepherd Parish pays tribute to its mission statement of being an inclusive Christian community. It is a beacon of light and love to nurture the faith of all. As a parish we are dedicated to bringing people together. Young, old, Irish, international – everyone is welcome and valued equally.

(Fr. Martin Glynn. Good Shepherd Parish, Sunday 29th April, 2007, Castlegar Complex. Roscam).

Although some community members had, in response to change, retreated into familiar networks, another type of response was also emerging, one that was more 'collective', which attempted to build a new social setting for positive social encounters. The activities that appeared to have had the most impact were a number of social events that prioritised celebration through culture and the arts. The first formal attempt to provide space for such a cross-cultural exchange was held in the Castlegar Complex, where Bishop Martin Drennan officially opened the Good Shepherd Parish, Galway on Sunday 29th April, 2007. Primarily, the event was to launch the new Church, but it also provided a space conducive to new forms of community gathering. Pictured below is the official launch of the Good Shepherd Parish, which shows the profound change that had taken place in traditional Irish practice. Hitherto, many Church activities would have been dominated by white, western interpretations about and how and where to gather. And yet, this picture clearly demonstrates a shift, not just in profile and participation, but practice. The day was very different from 'ordinary' Church services. It was held in a GAA hall, because the parish had no Church, but there was much colour, singing,

celebration and social engagement.



Figure 31- Official launch of the Good Shepherd Parish, Sunday 29th April, 2007. Castlegar Complex, Roscam. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Over 400 people attended the opening celebration, all from different cultural and social backgrounds. For many, it crystallized enormous potential. Certainly, many parishioners embraced the new social aspects to the church. Thus, Breda McNicolas observes that,

when my mother died three African children served at mass. I didn't even notice at the time because we had all become so used to each other.

(Breda McNicolas, 20th July, 2008. McNicolas residence, Doughiska)

It is possible to argue that the process of 'bringing people under one roof', to engage in shared practice, was central to inspiring such a changing perspective.

Significantly, Fr. Martin Glynn was also committed to new forms of organizing Church activities and, while many of his comments are concerned with faith, interaction with him over a period of five years has led me to conclude that ‘community’ also matters:

The Good Shepherd Parish has a golden opportunity within the community to return to the core of the Christian Gospel; to return to the values of the early church. The early church was all about a community of people living together, supporting each other and being concerned about each other.

(Conversation with Fr. Martin Glynn, March 2nd, 2010. Castlegar Complex).

Although the vehicle for change here was the Catholic Church, it is important to note that many of the people that became involved in social activities spearheaded by the Church were non-Catholic. From the outset, Fr. Martin Glynn was dedicated to embracing everyone in the community, irrespective of religion or nationality. As Fr. Martin Glynn points out:

Man is not an Island; people need a community and there are countless examples all over the world whereby people strive for companionship outside of their direct family. Individual’s need to search for togetherness, they need support and friendship, whatever their financial or personal circumstances.

(Interview, 6th April, 2011. Café Mocha, Roscam).

Fr. Martin Glynn, and a number of other parishioners, were deeply concerned with the well-being of the larger community and a desire to reclaim the human dimension to development for them was crucial:

While it is vital to not to minimize the importance of an appropriate church or building for the celebration of the Eucharist, we need to realize that the teachings of Christ are primarily about people, not about buildings.

(Conversation with Fr. Martin Glynn, March 2nd, 2010. Castlegar Complex).

The Catholic Church in Ireland, and other religious organizations, has seen the issue of diversity rise to prominence in debates. This is a development confirmed in research elsewhere. Passarelli (2013), for example, has addressed the problems that migrants encounter when ‘being in a strange land, coping with expectations and missing family and friends’. These are experiences that can often be a cause of trauma (Passarelli, 2013:143), which may be tempered through engagement in Church activities.⁵³ For Pasarelli, migration has changed Ireland’s ecclesiastical landscape (see also Stephens, 2004, 2011; Ugba, 2007 and Macourt, 2008), as the Church seeks to provide a ‘home away from home’ for newcomers. In so doing, it helps them rebuild their life, enhancing the capacity of each individual in the congregation and creating that sense of belonging together which creates bonding ties, they promote a model of inclusive and integrated community which fosters migrants’ active participation in churches as well as in the wider society (Passarelli, 2013:157).

Fr. Martin Glynn’s comments have a bearing outside of a religious context. When addressing the newly emerging role that the Church can have in building community, he notes that

the Church can play a meaningful role within an increasingly diverse community of people from totally different backgrounds and experiences. The Church is one of primary centres, whereby people from all different nationalities can come together as God’s family under one roof. When these people come together they are not just practicing their faith, they are also meeting each other, building relationships and getting to know each other.

(Conversation with Fr. Martin Glynn, March 2nd, 2010. Castlegar Complex).

These are ideas that resonate in DRA residents’ lived experience, where the Church provides an important space for public encounters that over the years have included people from other kinds and no faith as well as different age groups.

⁵³ Although Pasarelli’s research project is primarily concerned with migrants’ experience of Anglican and Methodist churches in Ireland and Italy, there are similarities to be drawn.



Figure 32 - Official launch of the Good Shepherd Parish, 29th April, 2007. Castlegar Complex, Roscam. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.



Figure 33 Official launch of the Good Shepherd Parish, 29th April, 2007, Castlegar Complex. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Of particular significance was how the newly emerging face of the Church in the Good Shepherd Parish was reproduced in an informal context.



Figure 34 Good Shepherd Parish Christmas social. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

During Church activities ‘the kettle would be on’, there would be new people to meet and an opportunity to engage, make new friends and discuss casually issues that may have arisen. Mass on a Sunday offers a space for support and a useful place to learn how to negotiate unfamiliar social circumstances. The kitchen has become a symbol of hope and a space for engaging in future plans and community building. Nuala Keady recollects that the parish started from humble beginnings:

Fr. Martin Glynn and a small group came together in 2006 to talk about how we may develop. Our first meeting was in the kitchen of the Castlegar Complex. With the help of many people including Stella Ubade, Bridget Oyelola, Peter Bennan and Breda McNicolas, the kitchen area was transformed into a Mass centre. We then had to move into the larger hall because so many people were coming. Up to 200 people now attend the Good Shepherd Parish Sunday mass and an average week-day mass attendance is twenty five. The congregation are

from Ireland, Nigeria, India, England, Poland, Angola, Italy, and the Republic of the Congo.

(Nuala Keady, Resident of Doughiska. 23rd August, 2013).

It is impossible to overestimate the powerful impact that this group of parishioners (everyday makers) and others have had on supporting integration between the different cultures living in the area. For those such as Elzbieta Nikiel or Mirek Kuzenko their involvement in the DRA Church community had been invaluable, it had increased their ‘quality of life in Ireland’ (4th September, 2013. Conversation, with Elzbieta and Julia Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, 24 Caislean Thorlaidh. Doughiska). Through being actively involved in social activities organised through the Church, both Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko felt that they had gained ‘confidence’ in their encounters with different cultures. As Elzbieta Nikiel explained: at times, she had been fearful of meeting people she did not know, but such feelings were easily overcome through encounters in the kitchen and she could now recognise the positive aspects of relationships with people who are different (4th September, 2013. Conversation, with Elzbieta and Julia Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, 24 Caislean Thorlaidh. Doughiska).

This affirms one of Passarelli’s conclusions that ‘being active in churches can help migrants to enhance their dignity and self-confidence’, enabling them to participate in other social contexts and initiate ‘other activities or associations supporting migrants’ (Passarelli, 2013:157). This is certainly something that has happened in the DRA, where Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko set up a Polish Association (Come2Gether) in 2012, to help Polish people integrate more in Irish society. Members of the Catholic Church were hugely supportive in this process, including Fr. Martin Glynn and Dan Hurley.

However, Passarelli has one observation that is particularly important: what happens when newcomers are here to stay, and how do we move away from ‘welcoming’ to a discussion about long-term involvement and integration (Passarelli, 2013:143-145)? In the case of the DRA there are reasons to feel positive. Although still low in number, it

is significant that three non-Irish people are now on the Pastoral council (two Nigerian and one Indian). The council is involved in long-term decision-making, and it is an active forum for debates that extend beyond faith, such as social development and resolving alienation.

The launch of the Good Shepherd Parish represented a turning point in the shifting landscape of the DRA, for it offered an opportunity to embrace new beginnings, new people and new social endeavours. It also symbolized the beginning of a passionate interest by members of the Good Shepherd Parish and other communities for the role of celebration, music and cultural exchange in building relationships in social settings.

5.3 A Changing Narrative

This chapter has so far followed a number of new forms of gathering in the DRA and attempts by individuals and more traditional local organizations to tease out potential pathways for long-term social development in a constrained economic and social context. Attempts to understand some of the subtle, less conventional influences that have shaped these changing community dynamics, requires us to pause for a while on a further aspect to the community-building puzzle: how changes to a development narrative that regard diversity as ‘a social asset, part of the cultural commonwealth, requiring protection and nourishment’ (Goldbard, 2006:48) have emerged in conjunction with the new forms of gathering.

Here I am particularly interested in how changing community narratives in the DRA both reflect newly emerging ways of responding to larger economic and social forces that shaped the area, as well as being powerful forces themselves for change. These are understood as reciprocal relationships, always influx.

Peter Berger has argued that people tend to refer to something as a social problem when it does not work out the way it is ‘officially’ supposed to (Berger, 1963:49-50). It follows, therefore, that these types of narratives define the future from the past, which may not always be what is appropriate (but is nonetheless significantly easier than redefining what is ‘official’ or ‘normal’). Promoting ‘integration’ through a ‘problems to

be solved' manner may often be an easier option because it sits comfortably in a larger social narrative (context), one that supports conversations on economics, resources, power, racism and sexism. Here, Block has usefully observed that the concept of

community as problems to be solved has some benefits. It values the ability to implement, is big on doing, has a certain honesty about it, and worships tangible results as the ultimate blessing. You might say that this is what has gotten us this far. It is not that this (or any other) context is wrong; it just does not have the power to bring something new into the world. To shift to some other context, we need to detach ourselves from the discussion of problems. One way to achieve this detachment is to see that what we now call problems are simply symptoms of something deeper (Block, 2008:3).

A further drawback to a focus only on 'problems', is that people resign themselves to the 'problem', reinforcing the belief that it is out of their hands, that 'nothing can be done'. There is a need, as Block recognises, to shift conversations from one of 'problems, fear and retribution to one of possibility, generosity and restoration (Block, 2008:31). This finds expression in the experience of George Dolo, who challenged the notion of dealing with people as a 'problem' simply because they had been through the asylum process.

Most people in the hostel have skills; many are professionals. I believe that it should be possible for people to contribute to society in some way, to provide skills for free to the local community, or do voluntary work. I believe that one of the most important things in life is for people to feel useful; to be able to give to their friends or family. It is when we give to others that we find meaning; from interaction with others we learn new things about ourselves and life. It is de-humanising to take away the ability to engage in community. People also need some kind of control over their destiny.

You sit and get depressed; you lose sight of why you are there... you just get fat and lazy, some people lose the will to continue altogether. I know of three people who had nervous breakdowns. They went into hospital for one or two months. I still know these people, and they never recovered. There is a general feeling in the hostel that people don't really care...

I refused to let this situation get the better of me and so I went the public library in Ennis to educate myself. I also was able through the

Refugee Support Group to set up a distance learning course through Kilroys College. I set aside some of my 19 Euros a week to pay for my online education. I spent six months working on this course in the library.

(George Dolo, originally from Liberia. 10th February, 2011, Café Mocha, Roscam).

George Dolo's comments demonstrate that people are more than *just* their circumstances. He managed to carve out a quality of life even in a constrained context through his pursuit of further knowledge. His experience shows us how it is possible to live with very low financial resources (being poor), but have an enormous wealth of richness to offer, things to share, experiences to shape. For George Dolo, the problem was that he was not given the opportunity to express fully his potential in an asylum process that did not create a space in which he could flourish. He was regarded only as a problem 'to be resolved'.

What has occurred in the DRA may offer an opportunity to explore novel ways to deal with these exacting challenges and prompts the question: is it possible to create space whereby 'new possibilities' are encouraged, even in contexts where they may be initially inhibited? One of the striking aspects of nearly all the conversations held with residents of the DRA was that even when discussion focused upon resolving challenges, attention was persistently drawn to 'possibilities'; 'the gifts inherent within diversity'; 'the wealth of experience that exists within the people'; 'the need to bring the potential from the margins into the centre' (example of comments made from 2009-2013). It was suggested that a myriad of untapped resources exist:

The DRA is one of the largest settlements in the country with young, vibrant and talented people from different backgrounds. My experience here is that every day is different. People come in with different problems and different experiences. The issues vary from unemployment to family and social problems, drug prevention and crime. All of these issues are potentially disastrous for both the individual and community. Financial investment is important, of course, to deal with such challenges, but I believe strongly that what is

most important is that we acknowledge the resources that already exist, which is the diversity of people living here and the rich experience and skills that they offer. If we can put this together and manage it properly, the results will be fantastic. We are talking about community here, and development; we have within the area enormous potential to draw on these experiences and skills, not only for the larger community but for the individuals themselves.

(George Dolo. 10th February, 2011, Café Mocha, Roscam).

There is tremendous potential within the DRA community to create employment and provide highly skilled human resources for business. A potent resource in every community is the people themselves.

(Dan Hurley, Spokesperson for the DRA Development Company Ltd. Irish. 2nd February, 2011. Café Mocha, Galway).

There are oodles of skills within our community, but they are paralysed because potential is not being expressed and realised. It is like hidden treasure, in that people cannot see it; but there exists an enormous wealth of knowledge and a potent well of skills. These treasures need to be identified and brought to the surface. We must not allow them to remain out of view, otherwise they will become stagnant and stale like a stream that does not flow.

(Fr. Martin Glynn, 20th October, 2011).

It is a very pleasant experience to work in the Family Resource Centre. All the teachers are very friendly, very welcoming and brilliant people to work with. My experience is very positive. There are many nationalities. Students are from India, Poland, Lithuania, Africa, Germany, Latvia, Russia.

(Sanober Jaffry, originally from Pakistan is volunteer for English speaking classes in the Family Resource Centre, Doughisaka, Galway. She works alongside mostly Irish volunteers 6th June, 2012, Doughiska).

From 2011 onwards, the development narrative in newly emerging forms of gathering in the DRA began to express a shift away from the conventional idea of ‘building bridges’, with its emphasis upon developing the infrastructure or ‘resolving’

differences, to one in which ‘building bridges’ *embraced* difference, encouraging the potential it had to offer. Although these comments were heard on countless occasions, I did not initially grasp fully their importance until Nuala Keady commented on something I had said at a DRA Youth Theatre exhibition in the Ardilaun Hotel, Galway for the SCCULL awards (Ardilaun Hotel on November, 16th, 2013). As I referred to the work we were doing in the community, I made reference to it being focused on ‘deprived’ areas. Nuala turned, and pointed out that ‘people living in our community would not like to be described as deprived’. The comment reminded me of the volumes of positive comments that had peppered conversations as far back as 2007. It struck me the power that words can have to define and re-create, and the importance of reshaping the language we use.

As I reflected back over conversations from 2011 to Nuala Keady’s statement on 16th November, 2013, I realised that in early 2011 these observations were ‘blurred reflections’, present but without clear structure. I noted how, from late 2011 onwards, they were becoming more defined. Prior to 2011 ‘building bridges’ had been equated with integration. As Fr. Martin Glynn notes

it is essential that every effort is made to integrate all these different cultures, including the indigenous Irish, and that these different cultures can live side by side in harmony.

(Fr. Martin Glynn. 20th October, 2010. Good Shepherd Parish).

This is a statement open to interpretation. Conventional or pragmatic thinking would stress that discovering ‘likeness...things similar or common ground’ (Fr. Martin, 20th October, 2010), is the best way forward to achieve ‘integration’. This thesis does not deny this can be beneficial. However, it wishes to stress another aspect to the community-building puzzle: how difference brings value to ‘common grounds’. In this research, ‘common ground’ is understood symbolically, through shared visions in public places.

These ‘shifts in consciousness’ were discussed at length by residents, most notably during *oscaill.org*⁵⁴ meetings that took place in Café Mocha (particularly 10th October, 25th October and 2nd November, 2011) and at events including the parish Christmas social (25th November, 2011, Castlegar Hurling Club, 7.30 – 12pm) and the Merlin Park Primary School nativity play (12th December, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska, 6pm). As George Dolo explains when discussing the community website. For him the phrase ‘oscaill’ captured this shift:

Oscaill, is the Irish word for open. *oscaill.org*, will give us an opportunity to share our different stories, to articulate our dreams, to publish our plans and to measure our progress. It will give every member of our community direct access to what is happening in our community and a chance to get involved. Apart from on-line activities, one of the primary objectives of the project is to create opportunities for people living within the DRA to become physically more involved within their community as *oscaill* will organise events to bring people together.

(George Dolo. 25th October, 2011. Café Mocha, Roscam).

It soon became clear that residents wanted to engage actively in this debate; if you like, to move from the ideational to practice. In other words, things need to happen, and this required structured, well-intentioned projects that would reflect this new awareness, such as *oscial.org* and a centre for community gathering. Crucially, social development in the DRA was beginning to acquire a process orientated tenor, abandoning a ‘problem orientated’ narrative. The emphasis was now upon how it would be possible to ‘embrace diversity and difference’, where difference was no longer something that had to be ‘dealt with’, but rather appreciated. These views were supported in many conversations during a four year period, but the following quotation is an exemplar:

⁵⁴ *Oscail.org* is the DRA community website. It is a project that aims to build a strong community by engaging with creative activities through a community website. Members of the community are encouraged to contribute photographs, articles and stories. It was set up by Julius Daree, Joe Debonnet, Fr. Martin Glynn, Bridget Oyelola and Anna King.

We all look so different; we all have different beliefs, languages, jobs, family structures - the list goes on. The world would not function, and would be a very different place if we were all the same. We are lucky to be part of a colourful and vibrant community... Through socialisation with others we can learn so much. We can take the good from all the cultures we encounter to form our own version of best practice and make us better people and achieve more than we ever thought possible.

(Conversation between Godwin Enaiho (originally from Nigeria), Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirostow (Polish) and Nicola Corcoran (Irish) during World Café training, 12th May, 2012. Family Resource Centre, Doughiska).

Furthermore, this is confirmed in a conversation, where spending time with people from other cultures can be positive:

Stereotypes are lifted because people think differently when they open themselves to others.

(Conversation between Godwin Enaiho (originally from Nigeria), Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirostow (Polish) and Nicola Corcoran (Irish) during World Café training, 12th May, 2012. Family Resource Centre, Doughiska).

On the ground, these changes were visible: common phrases used by residents in the DRA, such as 'live harmoniously', or 'become integrated', were now framed in a new conversation about the nature of social life: what was social life like in practice and, more importantly, how was difference lived out and experienced. While it was still desirable to 'live harmoniously', and to 'integrate', other aspects to the community-building puzzle were being emphasised by those such as Elzbieta Nikiel who felt very strong that Doughiska had an abundance of potential:

Doughiska is the youngest part of Galway. We have a lot of young people. People sometimes think this is negative because they fight or get into trouble. But, this is normal. Young people do these things. Old Mervue is full of old people. It is very quiet. But with young people comes potential. Doughiska is vibrant.

(10th September, 2013. Conversation, with Julia and Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King).

Elzbieta Nikiel's comments highlight both the challenges presented as well as the perceived potential believed to exist:

If you have lots of different cultures it is possible to look and see new things, good things. We can learn from them and take the best qualities from many different cultures and we then become better people. We can build a new story.

(10th September, 2013. Conversation, with Julia and Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King).

Groups have come together to embrace these ideas, evident most notably in the work of the Merlin Woods School, the Ghanaian Union, Come2Gether Association, the Connect Festival committee and the Good Shepherd Parish. In discussions about the up-and-coming Connect festival, Caroline Stanley remarked that

we really want to use this as an opportunity for people to show their own culture and tradition. There is so much colour and richness here, we really want to give people an opportunity to showcase their talent.

(Caroline Stanley August 19th, 2013, Connect Meeting, ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska).

Those such as Magdalena Kudzia, originally from Gorzow Wilekopolski, were fully supportive. As an exceptional dancer, she loved showcasing both her talent and culture and believed that an opportunity to share with others her tradition and dance was really worthwhile. The Connect Festival enabled many others to do this, reinforcing a sense of a long-term positive affect on building relationships in community. As Magdalena Kudzia commented:

Most people live behind closed doors and that's it, huge fences dividing each other. The Connect Festival was wonderful; it brought everyone together from different cultures. It is extremely important that we have opportunities for children to play around together, for adults to get to know their neighbours. This was not happening in 2006. But, now things are really different in Doughiska.

(3rd September, Interview with Magdalena Kudzia, originally from Gorlow Wielkopolski. Café Mocha, Salthill, Galway).



Figure 35 Magdalena Kudzia at the Connect Intercultural Festival, on 24th August, 2013 in Merlin Woods Park, Doughiska. Photograph taken by Anna King.

The Connect Festival was so successful that a further event was designed to embrace the potential of difference through a storytelling project to encourage people to share their journey to Doughiska.

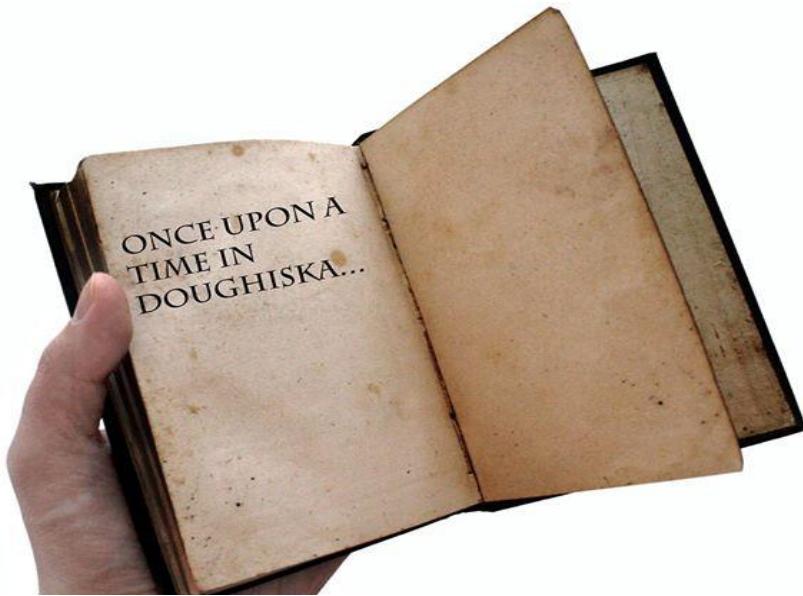


Figure 36 Picture designed by Julie Murphy.

While these events appear concerned with entertainment, they are embedded in a critical community dialogue that questions previous forms of development that constrained social life. Such conversations can be traced as far back as 2010. These discussions questioned not just how to organise development, but what lessons could be learnt from the previous period of development, evident in Fr. Martin Glynn's view that

the changes that have occurred in the DRA offer an opportunity to understand in more depth the complex nature of building social relations. Overcoming diversity and social fragmentation is desirable, not only because it creates richer and more meaningful communities, but also because it challenges people to question the norms, customs and behaviours that limit an individual's experience of the world.

(Fr. Martin Glynn. 7th May, 2010, Café Mocha, Roscam).

For Fr. Martin Glynn, the meaning of social development alters as a result of a 'shift in consciousness', one that occurs when an 'individual finds themselves in circumstances where they are forced to move beyond the comfort zones of their own perceptions and needs' (Fr. Martin Glynn, 7th May, 2010). He suggested that

over time this shift creates a profound cultural change that can result in a more equal and egalitarian society. In the past there were strong cultural norms that constrained this activity. Today, I believe this is changing for the better. We must learn from the past and at the same time not be afraid to break from the shackles of history and embrace the new opportunities that change can bring. Many of the activities being embarked upon in this community challenge these everyday norms. We have been forced to make change, to make a difference and the people are stepping up to this challenge.

(7th May, 2010, Café Mocha, Roscam).

That such themes evolved within so many groups that were not originally linked, suggests a shifting community consciousness that was not led by one or two groups, more a general evolution of ideas. While the groups mentioned in this chapter were working separately with these shifting narratives, many are now in contact with each other through the social events that have occurred over the last two years.

With over 7,000 residents in the DRA, it would impossible to determine the extent to which this narrative affected all members of the community but it was, nevertheless, discernible through the groups mentioned (as well as general conversations on the street). Upon reflection, it is possible to argue that these kinds of developments in the DRA represent a major shift in the narrative with a new social picture being sketched. This changing narrative galvanised people from different backgrounds, and would bear fruition in the acquisition of a community centre and the *Friends of Merlin Woods* project, examined in more detail below, and in subsequent chapters: The World Café experience and the DRA Youth Theatre Project.

5.4 Transforming Narratives into Sustainable Development

If narratives are to be realised and sustained, public spaces conducive for people to engage meaningfully are essential. This is because potential often cannot be realised immediately, or there maybe constraints that inhibit potential (such as lack of resources or access to education). This research argues that a ‘collective’ (public) approach to

development can resolve the kind of challenges associated with taking time to develop potential in a community.

For people in the DRA, place has been problematic due to the dramatic change in the physical landscape. Rather than addressing change within private spaces, this ethnographic study revealed the importance of experiences in public places, which Peace (2013:25) describes as ‘the world beyond the threshold’. It is therefore important we move our gaze to one that reframes the narrative of constrained landscapes to include the creation of spaces that can be crafted into places conducive to community gathering and dialogue. The following considers a number of important ways in which some residents of the DRA community (re)negotiated their space to create places of meaning and belonging for the wider community. Transforming phantom spaces into genuine public spaces that offer creative potential for all citizens, as well as acknowledge the complex ecological – human needs of specific environments are therefore paramount. This elevates a ‘place-based’ form of social development, one that puts places ‘to work’ for diverse cultural encounters that matter, rather than drawing upon ideas of places being exclusive to certain groups or traditions.

Over the last ten years the physical landscape of the DRA has gone from being a rural space filled with Irish culture into an urban culturally diverse social setting. The community set out to reclaim some of the areas that had been abandoned by developers during this time. In 2010 community action galvanised political and economic support for the construction of temporary school and park. This is a point that should not go unnoticed. Usually, the creation of such services would be the remit of Local Government. In the case of the DRA, however, it was concerted community action that spearheaded and drove these developments.

The photographs below shows how a neglected space has been realised into an alive public place: Merlin Woods Primary School.



Figure 37 Wasteland. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.



Figure 38 Doughiska after development. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.



Figure 39 Breathing life back into Doughiska. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.



Figure 40 Merlin Woods temporary primary school, Doughiska.
Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Acquiring a school for the area, and building a park, was part of the *DRA Planning and Strategy Committee*'s commitment to developing the local infrastructure. The committee liaised with government officials, local organizations and builders, and was instrumental in procuring a range of the amenities: football pitches, tennis courts, a skateboard park and children's playground.⁵⁵



Figure 41 Merlin Woods Boot Camp, July 10th 2011. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Building structures alone for public use is not enough. Shaping meaningful public places takes more than physical (re)construction, for we have to bring people to them, to make these spaces conducive for life-enriching experiences. It is possible to see from the photographs that previously empty, neglected spaces have become places where community is (re)enacted as people negotiate their daily lives. Here it is possible for public spaces to frame meaningful encounters and provide opportunities for learning and

⁵⁵ A permanent primary and secondary school are presently being built (expected to be completed for September, 2014).

invite participation. In this vein, Merlin Woods School is not just a school, but has become a hub of social activity that will shape the future lives of the infants and the families that attend. It has become a common ground for meaningful engagement. These are spaces that, for Principal Paula O'Connor, are really important

because unless you have a purpose to meet other people you're not going to interact with anyone. It would be so easy, and I'm sure it happens in many cases, for people to leave the area, come home and not see anyone. Time is important. People need to be given time to get to know each. They need somewhere for social activities to take place. It shouldn't necessarily be about courses, people need social spaces like gardens, allotments, or a coffee shop in the community centre.

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

Thus, on its opening (2010), its Principal, Paula O'Connor observed, that

we had 16 children, this year (2012) we had 116 and on our third birthday, the 1st September, we will have 190 children. The school is growing really fast growth. Once the school opened, even in the first month, we had 11 more children enrol. The school was built so quickly, even by August, with only one month to go before we opened, we still had not got the prefabs in. Parents really took a leap of faith in sending their kids to us. And we are so grateful, for trusting us... I was a completely unknown person. The school was non-existent, it was a field. Nobody knew anything about what was going to happen...we now have 40 children on the waiting list for infants and for some of the other classes as well.

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

The value of such convivial spaces for youth development and community engagement is brought into stark focus when we consider the picture below.



Figure 42 The Doughiska Road. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

In it, two people are attempting to have a conversation. While there are now pavements alongside this road, much of the grey space evident in the picture is still the dominant frame for social encounters in the DRA. At a first glance there is something unyielding about the urban landscape. This is because the landscape is dominated by large road systems, based on parallel lines, no central cultural square or hub of social activity. While new schools and a park have had a profoundly positive affect on community relationships, offering rich opportunity for social engagement, learning and community-building, there is still an overriding sense of ‘emptiness’ to the landscape, especially the Doughiska road, which provides the main artery from Roscam to the major shopping

centre. That this kind of suburban landscape prioritises cars is a matter that Mattson, addresses:

What little interaction takes place between citizens in the suburbs today is framed through windshields, and as recent reports on road rage make clear, this interaction is not often conducive to the sort of civil trust necessary for a healthy public life (Mattson, 95:134).

Over the years, against all odds, the community has transformed large parts of the physical landscape into positive community spaces. The amount of work that went on behind the scenes to get the school up and running was tremendous. Principal Paula O'Connor took heart from the support she had from 'so many people', and she felt that 'such encounters need encouraging'. She said that individual members of the DRA committee

were hugely supportive, whether it was Peter Brennan taking photographs on our first day, whether it was Dick O'Honolan showing us the amenities in the woods, or people just saying 'we are so happy to have the school here, we're helping out...'

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

These brief examples demonstrate the kind of spaces that bring life to a community. What is important to highlight is that the concept of 'public' aligns here with the definition offered by Sennett (1977) who describes *being public* as a place where strangers meet. From my experiences in the DRA, I would add another dimension to the definition of public place (space). A public place is a 'common ground', where diversity is valued and shared visions are built. This view deviates from the traditional dichotomy between the public and private realm, often defined in terms of ownership and where the private realm is not a space conducive to social encounters because access or presence can be denied. However, if we define public places in these terms we ignore the possibility that meaningful encounters can take place in private sites, such as a café. Madanipour perhaps provides more clarity:

In defining the public, “public” may be explained in the language of communal, civic, free, open, and unrestricted, but it can also be owned independently and can be a consumerised space such as in markets, shopping malls, parks with some restricted activity space, sports stadia, the transportation hub or bus stop; space that have become both regulated and open to surveillance and in this sense political (Madanipour, 1999, 2003. Cited in Peace, 2013:30).

Architects such as Mattson (1995) caution against the inhospitable space of shopping centres and the need to reclaim these areas for more social, civic experiences. He argues that

Contemporary architects design the mall for shopping – and shopping alone. It is a true representation of what sociologists call a *total institution* – in which the outside world is intentionally locked out so that as not to divert shoppers from their primary responsibility to consume... Only when the environment directed shoppers’ eyes toward the stores and the stores alone (and this meant no windows in the mall) should the designers feel they have succeeded (Mattson, 1995:135. Emphasis in the original).

Drawing on a movement known as *new urbanism*, Mattson is critical of contemporary suburbs. New urbanists refer to models of development such as New England town, which prioritises walking. Here, new urbanists believe that a better quality of life issues from kinder surroundings (Mattson, 1995:137; see also Kunstler, 1993).

It is in these smaller, hospitable sites, such as the local school or shop where stories are told, information is shared and people negotiate and learn the symbolic cultural systems of knowledge that shape the landscapes in which they live. In this sense, *public places* are vital for all residents to avail, as they offer crucial opportunities for belonging.



Figure 43 Launch of the Doughiska Park by Mayor Declan McDonnell, Friday 11th, 2010.
Photograph taken by Anna King.

The park and school have been used subsequently for a range of community activities that include ‘fun days’, festivals and a multi-faith interpretation theatre production of the stations of the cross. These spaces are also a place for intergenerational engagement. Parks are not just for young families, but also for older people to spend time. Principal Paula Connor explains that these public spaces are vital to help people overcome negative views about the area, for there is so much potential and that

we are only on the tip of an iceberg. So much has been achieved. And the good will that’s in the area is phenomenal. But, sometimes you do hear negative things about the area. And it’s from people who really don’t know anything about the area or people. I found it very upsetting when I read something on a face book page where some information

had been put up about the area, but people wrote really horrible racial comments. I felt so defensive about the area. I just felt – *you know nothing about all the positive things* in our area, about everything that people contribute, and give their time, and their energy, and get on so well together, and all these groups that work really well. I personally feel that everything I have done so far has led me to this, and I have found where I am meant to be.

We have a lot of eastern European, some children from Asia, Australia, someone coming from France, mainland Europe and African. It's been great, there is such vibrancy about it. It's been energising... The children really get on. This is the community we are living in.

Doughiska and Roscam are very multicultural areas. The children are playing with each other in the yard, they are playing at home on the green... bumping into each other in the shop. We have lots of different languages. The only challenge with that is that The department has cut back on English language support.. but, in terms of actual dynamic in children benefiting from each other it's been really really good.

Fabulous! People say that when they come into the school, that they sense a welcome feel – they feel that everyone belongs. It's all very positive. But this needs supporting. We need more public places as well. We need to be able to meet each other and get along.

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

These views support the idea that participatory practice is important but, if it is to be successful, then we need to provide as many opportunities for shared interaction as possible. For Principal Paula O'Connor, personal interaction is vital:

The school is definitely a hub. I have had parents say to us: 'I knew nobody... I didn't know my next door neighbour, I didn't know anybody... until the school. We are the social point for a lot of people. We are the social point for a lot of them. Parents have got involved in the parents association, helping at events. We really do encourage parental involvement, not only for their child's education but we are looking at the bigger picture. I feel we have a responsibility as the first school in the area to help people achieve a sense of belonging, that they are as valued and important as anyone else in the area .. that their ideas and culture is important. What we build together is important.'

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

Inclusivity is important and in Principal Paula O'Connor's view, it sustains positive energy and a mutual sense of trust. In her view, this has spilled over to the wider community, protecting the school from vandalism. The school is viewed as an important part of the community:

People have to be included. I take it as a huge sense of pride that so far we have not had one bit of graffiti in our school. We are in a very open, vulnerable area. We have a pet rabbit, she goes home with the kids at weekends. And when we had her housed outside, people said: 'are you not afraid that people will come in and do something to her'... No! People come over from the bus stop and point... grandparents come up to see the rabbit. It's about building up a mutual sense of trust.

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

As well as a school, the Geraghty Report (2009) identified the need for a centre that would be central to building a community in the area. The impetus to achieve this grew stronger over the years, as residents acknowledged the benefits to be gained from having a public space for community activities as well as an opportunity to build social relationships. As Fr. Martin Glynn observes:

All communities need resources to survive. These resources are not just financial; they are also social and personal. Many of our communities have huge resources within them, people with ambition, skills, creativity and knowledge. We need a centre that will provide opportunities for people to build on these gifts. It will be a place to meet and make new friends.

(Fr. Martin Glynn, October 23rd, 2011. Conversation, Café Mocha, Roscam).

Over the years community residents expressed the view that a myriad of benefits would accrue from such a facility: the centre could offer space to develop 'future generations through education and the sharing of skills and knowledge' (George Dolo,

10th February, 2011, Café Mocha, Roscam) and could provide a space to develop further an outreach work programme into the community that explores optimum ways of bringing people from different communities, generations and identities together in a common project (the outreach programme was originally started by Bridget Oyelola, Thursday, 14th April, 2011. Clayton Hotel, Doughiska). Indeed, Nuala Keady believed that this would help to develop effective, grounded and proactive ways of responding positively to the challenges diverse social situations pose (November, 2nd 2012, Castlebar Complex, Roscam).

A centre could also act as a forum for mentoring and support (Randy Asante, 6th October, 2012. Castlegar Complex), and ‘provide a setting for obtaining further funding to develop individuals, as well as the community in which we live’ (Dan Hurley, 25th November, 2011, Castlegar Hurling Club, 7.30 – 12pm, Good Shepherd Social). It was especially important that it could act as a ‘hub’, engaging young people from all different nationalities in community projects and civic activity, strengthening a vibrant community through participation. It also offered the possibility to provide training for young people, encouraging both team building and leadership skills.

Other ideas were also discussed, most notably the centre’s potential role as a public space to encourage physical fitness and healthy eating campaigns⁵⁶ (George Dolo, Fr. Martin Glynn, Anna King on 2nd November, 2011) and, eventually, as a venue for an older people’s project, where each week one person would tell a story from their past: where they grew up, the history of the area, or funny family stories, and then the group would write the story up or make a picture that would be published on oscail.org. Over a year the stories could be collated and published into a book. It was a project in which

⁵⁶ The objective here is to organise groups of people from different communities in the area to share healthy eating tips and recipes. These activities will be social events instead of classes. For example groups going around the supermarket checking out labels and getting ideas for healthy eating. It is an opportunity for people to get to know their neighbours and share experiences and culture. There will be a shared meal afterwards (2nd November, 2011. Oscail.org meeting).

participants could also learn new internet and creative skills, as well as engage in cultural encounters that matter, reinforcing a sense of belonging (25th October, 2011. oscail.org meeting).⁵⁷ With a community centre the residents could also explore employment opportunities, such a food collective. There are many chefs and cooks from different countries living in the area, each with their own expertise and tradition.

After protracted negotiations over a two year period, the DRA Development Company Ltd. bought the Amber Lodge Hotel from Stephen Harris and the Bank of Scotland.⁵⁸ They raised half a million euros: 40% of the contribution came from Galway City Council, as well as an interest free loan of 300,000 from the Catholic Diocese. The community received the keys on 29th July, 2013 and the building is currently being transformed into a community centre. Its social value was recognised immediately as an integral part of sustaining a community, a point emphasised by Stella Ugbabe in a short news report on RTE news (7th August, 2013): ‘I believe that having this will really bring all the nationalities together and it will really help with the integration of our children and our families and everyone around...’(7th August, 2013). Paula O’Connor’s experience of school life is that it is a public place where social life unfolds. She elevates these kinds of interactions as central to the endeavour of long-term development and suggests that a community centre is fundamental to community-building:

People from our community have come from all over the world and they’ve come from the centre of Galway and right here in Doughiska families have lived for generations. We don’t want a short term feel. People need to be able to invest in themselves into the area and to do this you need a hub to bring people together. The school was the first one. But what about all those people who don’t have children, we have to have another way. A community centre is vital to this.

(Paula O’Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

⁵⁷ A theme taken up by the Connect Festival organisers, in August, 2013.

⁵⁸ While Stephen Harris has other properties in NAMA, this was not one of those properties, because the Bank of Scotland, the mortgage holder, was not an Irish Bank and did not place loans in NAMA.

This new facility will act as both a community centre (upstairs facility) and Church (downstairs). It is important to recognise that the Catholic Diocese has invested significantly in the idea of a new type of Church:

There is something very profound and unique that this centre will now cater for not just the Catholic congregation, but it will also cater for the extended community, in the wonderful facilities upstairs. It is truly a genuine effort to respond and provide space for all members of the community and their needs, irrespective of creed, colour or nationality.

(Fr. Martin Glynn, October, 28th Castlegar Complex, 2011).⁵⁹

Previously, Fr. Martin Glynn had been using the Castlegar Complex as a temporary church but, rather than provide funds to build a traditional church, a decision was taken to invest into a community centre that could also be used as a Church:

After extensive consultation with the Good Shepherd Community it is now felt that a community facility with an appropriate space for worship is the parish's best option at this time. This is for a number of reasons: It is too expensive to build a traditional church structure. It is generally accepted, in response to the community's needs, that the centre should be used for other purposes during the week. It will provide a sacred place for celebrating the Eucharist, which is the core and centre of the Catholic faith. It will provide an opportunity for the people in the community to drop in and have a moment of prayer, reflection and silence in the presence of the Lord. And, those attending the many and varied community activities will have an opportunity to visit the Church before or after their courses on a daily basis. The Eucharist is not just something that we attend once a week, it is something that should influence all areas of our life on a daily basis.

(Fr. Martin Glynn, October, 28th Castlegar Complex, 2011).⁶⁰

⁵⁹ From the 7th of August, community members came together to transform downstairs of the hotel from a bare room to a stunning church. Fr. Martin Glynn, members of his direct family, Peter Brennan, Michael and Millie Forde, Sean and Doherty Nolan and countless other volunteers worked around the clock to have the church ready for an official opening on 3rd November, 2013.



Figure 44 New Community Centre, Doughiska. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

That shifting narratives have found a place in the new community centre is an extremely positive development. However, there are other developments that need teasing out further: the shifting cultural landscapes as older residents and newcomers negotiate common ground.

5.5 Shifting Cultural Landscapes

It is inspiring that these physical buildings now ‘house’ new cultural voices that were hitherto dislocated. Before obtaining the community centre and school, these voices were given expression through a number of cultural events that were more than sources of

⁶⁰ From the 7th of August, community members came together to transform downstairs of the hotel from a bare room to a stunning church. Fr. Martin Glynn, members of his direct family, Peter Brennan, Michael and Millie Forde, Sean and Doherty Nolan and countless other volunteers worked around the clock to have the church ready for an official opening on 3rd November, 2013.

entertainment. They were opportunities to understand and (re) negotiate changing cultural landscapes. For instance, conversations with members of the Castlegar Hurling Club revealed how change for them involved retaining their own cultural practice, while at the same time being open to new cultures. Similar to the Church's activities, they organized a sports festival to celebrate 'together' the community. On Sunday 10th May, 2009, TG 4 weatherman and presenter Dáithí Ó Sé opened the La Na gClub Castlegar Hurling Club festival to celebrate 125 years of GAA in Ireland. This festival was part of a national event to honour Ireland's GAA tradition. As Mike Connolly explains, apart

from being a treasured sport, the GAA represents everything about Irish tradition and community. The Irish are well known all over the world for sharing their rich tradition with others. With regards to Castlegar's tradition we are fiercely proud of the players of all grades who have brought such great success to the club in the past. A new aspect of our club's vibrancy is the introduction of so many newcomers to the area. We are hoping that this day will be an opportunity for everyone within our local community to come out to celebrate and share with others our local heritage.

(1st May, 2009. Mike Connolly, Chairperson of the Juvenile section of the Castlegar Club).



Figure 45 Castlegar Hurling Club Celebrations. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Mike Connolly emphasized how dedicated the members of the Castlegar Hurling Club were to 'embracing this change, with a positive outlook and commitment to integrating the 'new with the old':

Old Ireland has changed for good. But this does not mean that local heritage is lost. We need to find a way of keeping a sense of community alive for everyone within the locality, including people from completely different nationalities. Our club is a wonderful opportunity for all newcomers, adults and children, to get involved in the community, make new friends and share interests. On this note we urge old members of our club to come out on this day and share with newcomers to the area the gift of our wonderful sport. We also hope to learn about our non-Irish members. We are delighted to be able to share during the festival a children's dance performance from the African community, choreographed by Millicent Adebayo, and a presentation about Nigeria from Chris Okeke, chairperson of Afro Renaissance. Members of the Castlegar Club are also looking forward to getting the different nationalities from our area involved in Hurling. In particular children from our African communities are so dextrous and athletic. I genuinely believe that they will really enjoy hurling.

(1st May, 2009. Mike Connolly, Chairperson of the Juvenile section of the Castlegar Club).

It's important that that the club finds new ways of integrating all the new nationalities living in the area. Today is about sharing our history with them as well. The club has a great tradition and we want to be able to pass that on...

(Ciaran Scully, present Senior Chairperson for the Castlegar Hurling Club, 10th May, 2009).⁶¹

⁶¹ May 30th, 12pm. 2012: Pearse Stadium, Galway – meeting with Tom Watene Nationally, the GAA are working on an integration programme. Integration Officer Tony Watene at a meeting in Pearce Stadium, Tyrrell, Mattie Kilroy (May 30th, 2012), talks about a pilot integration initiative:

Presently, there is a great initiative running in the Mount Sion GAA Club/Mount Sion School in Waterford where the Waterford Games Manager is training people from an ethnic background in GAA Foundation Coaching. It is part of an agreement between the Waterford Games Department, Mount Sion Club and School and the trainees, once they've completed their coaching certificate, they will help coach in the School (particularly if their child is in the school) and/or in the Club. Obviously, the trainees have to complete Garda vetting and the Code of Ethics before coaching in either Club or School. So the Coaching and the Code are delivered free. The second part that they may look at



Figure 46 Participants of the La Na gClub Castlegar Hurling Club Festival, 10th May, 2009.
Credited by Castlegar Hurling Club.

This event was an example of how many of the local Irish people felt a strong desire to 'integrate', while retaining a sense of identity and tradition. This commitment to retaining traditional heritage and culture was also evident in other communities.

Culture here is defined as something experienced (norms and values), something expressed via artefacts, customs and practices as well as being a ribbon that links

Club level, is the possibility of either a free or discounted subscription fee for the coach to join their Club, on the proviso that he continues his coaching. It is hoped that because he is coaching in the school, children from the various ethnic backgrounds might join the Club as "one of their own" is coaching - a role model who shares the same cultural capital. This Waterford initiative is in its infancy and we'll learn a lot from it (Tony Watene, at meeting with members of the integration committee, Christy and I on May 30th, 2012).

individuals from the past to the present and onto the future. Cultures are, as Edmondson identifies, made up of

interlocking series of habits, practices and ideas about how things should be done; they are usually taken for granted rather than conscious, and they embrace accepted forms of feelings as well as cognitions... A specific culture may be extremely local or virtually global (Edmondson, 2001:61).

Furthermore, ‘cultures confer meaning’, and meaning is ‘intrinsically a public matter’. Cultures shape thoughts, feeling and activities by giving them intelligibility within a public sphere’. In other words, ‘the things we do colour ‘what we get done, even though they do not force us to do it’ (Edmondson, 2001:62).

It is worth listening to Bridget Oyelola views to begin to understand how culture is important to people that have located themselves in a new cultural landscape:

Our culture is very important to us. In Galway our tribes meet once a month to speak our own language and exchange stories and food.⁶² It is a social gathering, but also a way of being able to hold on to our heritage and be able to pass on things like culture, language and tradition to our children.

I love my children to know where I come from. We all want our children to hold on to this and pass it on to their children. For instance, I follow the Yoruba tradition which means that children greet their mother and Fr. in a specific way, which will be different for other Nigerian people. In the Yoruba tradition a female upon waking in the

⁶² Bridget’s tradition has a rich and vibrant culture. As a woman she would make clothes from her native print. The Yoruba women wear a specific print called Aso-oke and Adire (tie-die in English); these clothes also have a different way of sewing than other tribes. Today in Lagos, people are wearing more western styles, but they still use their traditional prints. Her mother’s tribal print is called George and is beaded material. There are also distinctive foods associated with different tribes and regions of the country. The west and the east of Nigeria, for instance, use pounded yam for Egusi soup. Yams are also fermented and dried (Locist, Ogiri). In Lagos, they eat Amals with Ewedu, which is black plantain (a relative of the banana family) and locust beans (Iru) with lots of spices. In Lagos a form of music called Juju and Apala is popular, whereas Bridget’s mother and father would have danced the Atilogu dance when they were young in their village.

morning first greets their parents by kneeling down; a boy lies on his chest. My daughter also knows that she must never pass me anything with her left hand. In the Delta region young people address their parents in a special way and in some parts of Nigeria men will not shake the hands of women at all. Each tribe in Nigeria has its own morals, values, culture and food. It is important to us that people are aware of this in Ireland, as people tend to say that we are Nigerian without really understanding that that experience could be profoundly different for each and every one of us.

(Bridget Oyelola, Thursday, 14th April, 2011. Clayton Hotel, Doughiska).

The role of culture in everyday life was brought alive during the Ghana celebrations on 9th March, 2013 in the Clayton Hotel, Doughiska. As Randy Asante points out:

As well as becoming more involved in Irish society, it is important for us that we retain and still develop our own Ghanaian culture.

(Resident of Doughiska and Chairperson for Ghana Union, Galway Ghana Independence Day Celebration: building bridges between cultures. March 9th, 2013. Clayton Hotel, Doughiska).



Figure 47 Randy Asante, Ghana Union Independence Day Celebrations. Picture taken by Ghana Union.

Randy Asante, originally from Kumasi in the Ashanti region of Ghana, has been in Ireland for five years, delivered a powerful speech that welcomed guests to the first event in Galway to celebrate Ghana's 56th Independence Day celebration. As well as an expression of culture, he emphasised the need for a shared approach to community-building, and the importance of becoming involved in local activities:

The 6th of March 1957, for us Ghanaians is more than just a historical number. It reminds us of the day that Ghana became the 1st country in Sub Saharan Africa to gain independence from colonial rule and also it is a day that we celebrate the life of Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah. Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah was a visionary. 56 years ago, this man had a dream, a vision, to free his country from colonially rule. He

succeeded and his success did not only benefit Ghanaians, but it led to a wave of freedom across the continent of Africa and beyond.

I believe when Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah set his eyes on the bigger picture, many Ghanaians had their eyes on their small personal dreams like learning a trade, getting a profession, however all these dreams came together to make Ghana what it is today.

Each and everyone in this room has something to contribute, it doesn't matter how big or small your dream is, but what matters is that we have a collective strength and that our personal vision leads to a greater vision for us all.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want us all to take a break and ponder over the theme for tonight's celebration. Building Bridges between Cultures in our community. We live in a multicultural society. The question is how do we embrace this diversity and use it to develop the kind of community we want to live in. Building bridges between cultures is a two dimensional concept, it is a give and take affair, it is a collective venture.

Ladies and Gentlemen, migration is part of human development, it's been there since time immemorial and it will continue to be there but where ever you find yourself on this planet doesn't change who you are.

Tonight I want to challenge you all with this question, what are you doing in your own small way to make Ireland the multicultural society we all like to live in. What legacy are we leaving behind for our children and our unborn generation. You can start by getting involved and taking an interest in community activities and together we can all make Ireland a home away from home.

(Resident of Doughiska and Chairperson for Ghana Union, Galway Ghana Independence Day Celebration: building bridges between cultures. March 9th, 2013. Clayton Hotel, Doughiska).

Randy Asante identified how it may be possible to 'use' 'culture as a way for people to participate in a community' (conversation, 9th March, 2013, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska). The event was hosted by the Ghana Association of Galway where those in attendance included members of the Irish, Chinese, South Africans, Nigerian, Congolese, Zimbabweans and Togolese communities. It started with the Ghanaian National Anthem,

and the evening was a rich display of prayers, speeches, songs, cultural displays, traditional Kete and Azonto dance and music. Ghanaian guests were dressed in their traditional ‘Bonwire Kente’ dresses and cloth.

What was particularly striking was the extent to which so many young people were engaged in their traditional dances. Seventeen year old, Andra Owusu, for instance, recited a Ghanaian poem and performed the traditional Asonto dance:



Figure 48 Ghana Independence Day Celebration, March 9th, 2013. Clayton Hotel, Dougishka. Photograph taken by Ghana Union.

It is plausible to suggest that the cultural displays that were brought to life during the Ghana event were a way for young people to connect, ‘not only to their ancestors’ home but also to the ethnic enclave from which they hailed’ (Chen, Orum and Paulsen, 2013:14). Randy Asante and his friends gathered on March 9th to celebrate something that was meaningful to them. The event gave shape and form to something that they would otherwise have held only in their imaginations, memories and experiences. Such events are also an opportunity to understand ‘ourselves’ in relation to ‘others’, as it gives us something to relate to, as well as offering new forms of social inquiry.

There have been a range of other events that have become a platform for new social encounters, as well as opportunities for dialogue. A more recent event was captured in the following short youtube video taken by Edward Smyda-Homa at the Galway's Suburban Diversity: Connect Intercultural Festival, on the 24th August, 2013, in Merlin Woods City Park, Doughiska https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kas9uvc5_Cc

The festival included local and international musical talents with performances by local resident Tobi Kaye, Ard Singing Group, G.I.R.O and The Galway International Retro Orchestra and AJABEO. There were international cultural and traditional food displays from over twenty nationalities, including Poland, Hungary, Zimbabwe, Spain and Ghana. The festival was a celebration of diversity in the area.

The creative component (shared celebration art, music and dance) of this event, and the Ghanaian evening, was also an opportunity for conversations about the future, to inspire new leaders and create shared visions. Kwabena Antwi Bosiako, the chairperson of the national Ghana Union Ireland announced that: 'parents should help raise children not to see colour, but rather, raise children to develop the mind set of common cultures'. He emphasised that with such an onus, 'Ireland could become unique and serve as a model for other countries to replicate' (Galway Ghana Independence Day Celebration. March 9th, 2013 Clayton Hotel, Doughiska).

The Ghana evening achieved three objectives: first, it was an occasion for individuals to be social, for members of a shared identity to bond and forge attachments to those from *similar* traditions. Second, it achieved this by sharing the practice of (re) enacting, giving shape to a defined cultural tradition (dance, music, poetry). Finally, the evening was an opportunity to co-create a shared future by uniting through *difference*, making potentially long-lasting friendships with those from other cultures and backgrounds.

This chapter has explored newly emerging forms of gathering in the DRA as a response to the shifting social and physical landscape. It has provided examples of change in traditional narratives and practices, such as the Catholic Church and the GAA,

as well as in new communities such as the Ghanaian Union. These gatherings have identified a dimension to social life that is often neglected in Irish policy, but which is important to the community-building puzzle: places as *sites* of community and the importance of culture in everyday social life. One of the more significant findings so far has been the positive role for diversity in creating such meaningful change. Tentative though these findings are, they identify a desire and willingness on the part of diverse groups to develop relationships and to engage in the community-building puzzle, rather than ‘hunker down’. This is not to suggest that this is a process without challenges between individuals and groups, but the projects examined here provide valuable insight into how these may be overcome. In particular, they indicate that the primary feature for social dislocation, or lack of social development, is more to do with *context* rather than the issues of *diversity*. Rather, diversity, at least for the residents in this study, is experienced as a creative prerequisite to building meaningful long-term relationships. Key to this process is the creation of public places conducive for community gathering. Following Kahn’s (1996) research, subsequent chapters examine ways in which individuals and groups in the DRA struggle to find their own ‘place, while struggling to understand that of others’ (Kahn, 1996:167). Moreover, I am concerned with how individuals come together to create public spaces where ‘*my* view and *their* view meet at points of inclusion, exclusion, and overlap to create a sense of *our place*’ (Kahn, 1996:167, emphasis added).

Three projects explore this intention further over the next three chapters. First, the World Café demonstrates the use of abstract ‘space’ for developing a shared understanding of long-term development. Second, *Friends of Merlin Woods* highlights the importance of transforming ‘spaces’ into meaningful ‘public places’. Finally, the Youth Theatre Project explores the role of public theatre, and combines both the creative element of ‘*space*’ and the enduring aspect of ‘*place*’. Together, these elements of social life offer a pathway through some of the challenges associated with a socially dislocated setting.

Chapter 6

World Café Experience

This chapter explores how the World Café experience, developed by Chris Taylor, community members and the author of this research, could support meaningful dialogue to create a shared vision for future development in the DRA (The World Café experience took place between January, 2012 and 19th June, 2011). It was an attempt to explore ‘how we gather’ and the quality of that experience, but it is important to recognize that this was not just a meeting place, rather a method, one designed to enable people to explore how a range of social patterns (often articulated through common narratives) either shape or constrain experience.

World Café was a temporary creative workshop that brought together different members of the community. It became a creative opportunity for shared interaction and dialogue, enabling new friendships to develop, by deepening our knowledge of what it means to be, or relate to, a ‘stranger’. This was a space *in-between*, in the sense that it was a suspended moment, where people were encouraged to leave pre-conceived ideas about ‘reality’ and enter a creative space for inquiry into the lives of others, as well as how to use the imagination to envision shared futures (sustainable development).

That the World Café was a creative space for exploration is important, but it also led us to reflect upon how such encounters could be reproduced outside of the project’s short life-span. In order to do this it became important to consider what had taken ‘place’ within this space, not just what was contained in the conversations or the information gained. In order to do this we needed to consider what ‘space’ means in everyday life and how it is experienced? How could it be representative? What became evident during the session was that people wanted the experience to endure, articulating a desire to bring these experiences into everyday life, so that as many voices as possible could be heard.

This chapter outlines the World Café experience, offering general insights from

my diary of the events as they unfolded. The experiences are summarized, rather than detailed accounts, largely because I hope to provide a *sense* of what occurred during these meetings, rather than distilled statements. This chapter is more concerned with an attempt to understand shared encounters, rather than individual opinion or beliefs. This may be problematic, in that the observations are subjective, based on my own experience of the encounters. However, they provide points for reflection. These brief points for reflection provide only a backdrop for the second part of the chapter that describes in more detail the World Café experience, on 19th June, 2011 and the method used.

6.1 Gathering for World Café

On January 3rd 2012 Fr. Martin Glynn described how, over Christmas, he had talked to many people during the festive period. He reflected on these conversations, and noted that he had been overwhelmed by the commitment and enthusiasm of people in the parish for bringing together all the different cultures.

A discussion at length ensued, one that concentrated upon the possibility of a new form of development, one ‘that is young and vibrant; one where people look forward to joining in’, that was relevant outside of the Christian Church’s remit and should be extended to include people from all and no faiths. We acknowledged that cross cultural encounters can be fraught with difficulty: ‘A lot of this can be caused by confusion and a lack of understanding of different customs, norms and behaviours’, and that ‘although there maybe conflict and difficulties, we have to see them as challenges to be overcome’ (Fr. Martin Glynn, January 3rd, 2012).

I suggested that an answer might lie in the experience of conflict (discord, contradiction, divergence, variance, and dispute). I added:

Maybe it is the fear associated with conflict and difference within these kinds of social contexts, rather than conflict itself. Maybe, therefore, it is important to transmute or transform the experience rather than the fact. For instance, an individual may never change their faith, or a particular way of expressing that faith or custom, but they may change how they experience themselves when in contact with another from a

different cultural background. Experiences can change, are evolving and are shaped by day to day interaction.

(Anna King, January 3rd, Café Mocha, Roscam).

We considered engagements that had supported difference as something to be valued. Over the last number of years people had responded positively to social events (the various events organised in the Castlegar Hurling Club; by the Principal Paula O'Connor at the Merlin Park Primary School; the DRA Development Company Ltd and the Family Resource Centre, as well as Parish socials). There appeared significantly less tension (and in many instances none at all) between different cultural groups. Differences appeared to be put 'aside', as people used the created 'space' to share experiences and explore new sport, art, music and dance and, importantly, build relationships through social encounters 'that matter'. The challenge was how to encourage these positive experiences into everyday life; how to build a future that would reflect the quality of these social events. Fr. Martin Glynn, commented:

Over Christmas it became clear to me that the recession has revealed the importance of long-term sustainable development. It is essential that we explore new ways to tackling social development from *within* communities in this period of austerity.

I was talking to a parishioner over Christmas, we talked about the importance of sharing with each other how we want our community to develop; about taking a long term view... what do we want our community to look like in, say 2022?

(Fr. Martin Glynn. 3rd January, Café Mocha).

We decided to bring these ideas to the larger community for discussion. Fr. Martin Glynn said he would bring a few of the people he had been talking to about these ideas to a meeting and asked whether I would facilitate these encounters to tease out these ideas to a community wider than the Catholic Church. It seemed to both of us that, for these ideas to have meaning in practice, there was a need for participation and communication with as many people as possible. Given that I was not a Catholic, and that I was in many ways 'neutral' because of my role as a researcher, with no other

attachments or vested interest, it seemed sensible that I would become a steward to ‘hold’ the ideas in place for a period of exploration.

On the 11th January, 2012, in the Clayton Hotel, Doughiska Fr. Martin Glynn and I met with Godwin Enaiho, Magret Adebayo, Magnus Ohakwe and Paul Shelly (a number of other people could not attend) to discuss how we might galvanise as many people as possible to discuss the future of the community. We explored creative ways in which the community together could ‘envision’ their future “to provide a shared voice and vision for social and economic development”, and how to ‘develop from within’. We tentatively called this project ‘Project 2022’.

Project 2022 evolved as a community driven initiative where the focus of discussion was upon “*what do we want our community to look like in 2022 and how will we make it happen?*” Within two months the Project 2022 team was joined by Dan Hurley, Chris Taylor, Nuala Keady, Bernadette Joyce, Anna Murphy, Sanober Jaffry, Damien Tummon, Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirostaw Kuzenko, Claire McCole and many other people unable to attend all meetings, but had nevertheless demonstrated a commitment to the project. Although there were differences in priorities between group members, there was a consensus that the project was worthwhile.

It is important to note that initially conversations were concerned with ‘problems’, and how to overcome them. For example, Godwin Enaiho, demonstrated a political drive and expressed the need for the group to engage in institutional and political change. Magnus Ohakwe strongly argued for a cultural shift in the way Irish people perceive ‘foreigners’, observing that:

They needed to re-orientate and understand change. My son is a black Irish person; people need to catch up with this change. I want to feel safe in my community. I want to be able to walk out the door and feel that people are not going to somehow think that just because I am black that I’m a danger to others. The other day I was walking home and a Garda stopped and asked me where I was going and where I lived ... do they stop white Irish people in the same way? I think not...

(Magnus Ohakwe, 11th January, 2012, Clayton Hotel, 7.30pm – 9pm).

We all discussed the complexity surrounding these issues, acknowledging that these changes would take time to understand. Paul Shelly observed:

Change has occurred in Ireland: most people up until a few years ago were Irish, white, Catholics and that because of this we need to be patient and balanced in our approach to change.

(11th January, 2012, Clayton Hotel, 7.30pm – 9pm).

Magret Adebayo wanted to concentrate on projects for young people that addressed work opportunities. Issues of racism in recruitment were noted; ‘that there were no black people working in Dunnes or Lidl (Magret Adebayo. 11th January, 2012, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska, 7,30pm – 9pm).

After a period of time discussing the problems, it was interesting that when people were immersed in the imaginative exercise of visioning what the future might hold, a shift occurred toward *potential and possibility*, and a more positive approach emerged. The bridge mooted that might help to create this future from the present took place through a discussion of method.⁶³ I suggested that the way we organise these projects would influence future developments and that Block’s approach could be useful:

⁶³ It is important to note that this is the point when a clear transition occurred from my involvement in community being one of an ethnographer and volunteer to one of action research, as I began to share with the group my experience and insights. Group discussions became very exciting, as we chatted about ideas and shared knowledge. During this time a shift in my research approach took place with regard to my engagement with these groups. After reflecting on the different events, experiences and conversations conducted throughout this period of research I felt that ‘becoming more involved in the core dynamics of the community’ was important. First, because I had the skills to facilitate the needs expressed. Second, because I did not simply want to document what was unfolding. I also wanted to understand new ways for communicating these experiences. Third, it is impossible to really ‘know’ what ‘goes on’ for other people, unless you become part of that experience. If I was to understand the practice of building a community, then *I needed to build it too*. Thus, I concluded that the most productive way of understanding the complex social encounters in a contested environment was by being involved in the dynamics and organization of specific projects. Arguably, only then, would it be possible to unpack the residents’ lived experience and

Every gathering, in its composition and in its structure, has to be an example of the future we want to create. If this is achieved in this gathering, then that future has occurred today and there is nothing to wait for (Block, 2008:75).

How we gather (method), and the questions we ask at a gathering, have an enormous influence on what is created, the kind of experiences and the quality of the relationships built. As Block suggests, very often the questions asked are more important than the answers gained. Successful community transformation occurs with the following type of questions:

“How do we choose to be together?” and “What do we create together?” These are different from the primary questions for individual transformation, which are “How do I choose to be in whatever setting I find myself? and “What am I called to do in this world?” (Block, 2008:75).

On the 18th January, 2012, we deliberated upon the importance of ‘how we gather’, convinced that we had to include as many people as possible in any process of envisioning the community’s future. We also discussed the character of Project 2022, with attention given to whether we would have separate group meetings, such as a sports group or youth group, or whether it would be more rewarding to have a single workshop. Would this generate better information and/or enhance the quality of social engagement between different groups of people and nationalities?

There were a range of ‘positives identified’ if a large group format was to be adopted. First, it would introduce a symbolic dimension. By amalgamating groups into one, it would be possible to reinforce a sense of ‘togetherness’, thereby reducing isolation. As Paul Shelly pointed out, if we ‘bring all voices to the centre’, it instils a sense in which the ‘community works together’. In addition, as Godwin Enaiho suggested, this would afford an ‘opportunity to meet new people’, ‘make friends’,

reflect on both the actions and deeper motivations (and constructed meanings) of the ‘social’ during periods of change.

reducing the possibility that decisions would be made by a small group of vested interests. I noted that this would also help to ‘break down cultural barriers’, ‘through processes of communication, familiarisation and engagement’. What is more, it would ‘enable opportunities to share goals’. In Paul Shelley’s opinion it offered the ‘potential to stimulate a debate that offers meaningful insights’, and that such a format should lead to the ‘cross fertilisation’ of ideas, allowing an integrated approach to social development in the DRA (18th January, 2011).

However, the group also recognised that there were negatives we should consider, noticeably the logistical problem of bringing together a large group of people, all from different backgrounds, with a variety of objectives, intentions and needs, which may result in less in-depth analysis and discussion. Small groups tend to generate more intimate, safe and reflective interaction. People feel more at ease, they ‘open up’ and talk about their needs, dreams and aspirations. On this matter, Paul Shelly suggested that we meet with a colleague of his, Chris Taylor, who was the organiser of World Café events. The World Café approach used a large meeting, but utilised smaller group interaction. Finally, a discussion took place about how small group gatherings held in preparation before one large session, would tease out some of the issues pertinent to certain groups and interests. It would also inform the process.

Paul Shelley set up a meeting with World Café facilitator, Chris Taylor, who had worked with business organizations, youth groups and community organizations throughout Ireland. In our first meeting on 24th January, 2012, 11am, Galway Bay Hotel, we discussed how we might work together on Project 2022. From January 2012 to present, Chris Taylor and I met on numerous occasions, which included regular feedback to the larger group. One of the key challenges that we discussed was the idea that ‘community’ may bring about emotional reactions, especially if people have migrated from places they call home, having left their family, friends and loved ones. Community may produce different patterns of engagement based on whether people feel the need or desire to participate in practice or retreat into more familiar networks. Furthermore, other

issues that may affect an individual's participation in a community may include cultural or economic factors such as taboos or constrained opportunities in social life due to being a lone parent or from having a disability or emotional challenges. Financial constraints may also hinder the sense of confidence to have something to contribute to the wider society. (Discussion between Chris Taylor and Anna King. Salthill Hotel, Galway; 13th February 2012, 3pm in Salthill Hotel, Galway; 27th February, 2012, 11am, Salthill Hotel, Galway)

It needs to be stressed that the World Café experience was a process that was put together with a number of individuals in consultation. The day was, therefore, not isolated, but an experience that had taken months of careful consideration. For instance, conversations between Godwin Enaiho (originally from Nigeria), Elizbieta Nikiel, Mirostaw (Polish) and Anna Murphy (Irish) during World Café training, raised the idea that the World Café process could help 'break down stereotypes and create new forms of social awareness, as long as people's individual experiences and differences were valued by the group' (12th May, 2012. Family Resource Centre, Doughiska). Chris and I had to consider how this could be achieved.

Other valuable points were raised during a meeting when I introduced Chris to other members of the community. George Dolo spoke about how important the DRA community was for him because it helped build his confidence and overcome some extremely difficult times. But he had also had some very challenging experiences of racism, and therefore 'it is essential that we keep in mind at all times the importance of respect for everyone, even if we don't understand the other person; that there needs to be some way of bringing people together to talk about these things' (Conversation between Chris Taylor, Fr. Martin Glynn, George Dolo, Bridgid Oyelola, and I at the Good Shepherd Parish, 30th January, 10am, 2012).

These conversations in the community (and many more) were the building blocks that helped develop the World Café methodology. In most conversations a positive approach to development was the preferred approach, one that regarded difference as

potential rather than a challenge. This posed a quandary for Chris and I. Although many people were clear about the need to ‘appreciate difference’ (as strongly argued by Godwin Enaiho, Elizbieta Nikiel, Mirek Mirostaw and Anna Murphy during World Café training, 12th May, 2012. Family Resource Centre, Doughiska) how to achieve this, required teasing out:

We can overcome challenges and create solutions together from different experiences that people have had in life. This is an example of resources of differences. We need to learn to tap into these resources

(Conversation between Godwin Enaiho, Elizbieta Nikiel, Mirek Mirostaw and Anna Murphy during World Café training, 12th May, 2012. Family Resource Centre, Doughiska).

General reflections on the meetings

Before moving onto the World Café experience I would like to share some reflections. During the World Café meetings we discussed developments that had taken place in wider community gatherings, such as a changing narrative concerned with the positive dimension of diversity in a social setting. This was an issue that appeared to offer possibilities and had an enormous impact on the social dynamics of the group leaders of World Café.

The provision of a ‘space’ to talk in a creative way during these meetings inspired participants. In this sense, the key to the method used was that it was non-directive, drawing upon ideas of the emancipative power of the imagination, as well as a fundamental commitment to participation and ‘representative thinking’. These are not easy experiences to bring alive and support and in general it was an approach most were unfamiliar with.

As group discussions evolved, and became more open to the potential for diverse interactive social encounters, the character of group discussions appeared more vulnerable. Group meetings did not demonstrate certainty or confidence, although everyone agreed and supported the new approach. It was as if everyone *felt* the possibilities, but did not *know* how to articulate or express this fully. Where we ‘got

stuck' most of all was when we fell into wanting to define in more clarity the overall objective. In other words, when attempting to put shape on what was otherwise supposed to be a non-directive exercise.

The challenge for the group was to balance the dual purpose of giving justice to creative inquiry, as well as providing sufficient structure to enable the project to proceed. We wanted to explore possibilities, rather than provide 'solid answers'. Based on the quality of the silences during some of the meetings, rather than any expressed emotion, I concluded that this sense of vulnerability might have been induced by a lack of confidence or familiarity with this approach. This required a shift in our gaze from concentrating upon 'success' (perceived or otherwise) to an acceptance of failure (in the more conventional, goal orientated sense). It may also be the case that integrating these more creative experiences into the 'established knowledge' of the social world is difficult, because they open up possibilities that may challenge our sense of 'place' within the realm of social norms and the associated attachments that build our sense of self. In other words, it challenges our security and sense of belonging. It is possible to argue that the fears, confusions and insecurities demonstrated in these meetings may reflect 'real' life, and that these group meetings had become a microcosm of the lived experience.

Throughout Project 2022, the practice of community building thus evolved into a process, rather than a goal. It moved into a new social territory, one that required a measure of faith (some may call this risk) and a degree of mystery. What is also interesting is that it may very well be that in these exploratory places of insecurity we, as a group, subconsciously held space for others, in what was later to become larger community group gatherings. It is during these moments of anxiety and confusion that, over time, we built a new kind of social strength within the group, one that may not have been articulated overtly but was, nonetheless, transmitted between people. This may have been due to familiarity and commitment to the project that was built over time, but I believe that it was also due to the quality of the conversations and the openness of

individuals to work with more creative methods of inquiry (Diary reflections on the journey toward Project 2022. 20th January, 2011).

The World Café experience

The large GAA hall, usually cold and empty, was brought to life on June 19th, 2012. Tables were placed in a circle by Michael Ford, Dan Hurley and Mirostawa Kuzenki with a centre piece of flowers created by Miriam Kivlehan from her garden bringing a personal dimension to the event that is significant because it supports encounters that matter.



Figure 49 Flowers by Miriam Kivlehan. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Many people from the community helped prepare for the day, including Elzbieta Nikiel (from the Polish Association, Come2gether), Nuala Keady (representing people with disabilities), Sanober Jaffry (Muslim representative), Fr. Martin Glynn (Catholic priest), Paul Shelley (from Galway 2040)⁶⁴, Caroline Keane Quinlivan (Youth and Traveller representative), George Dolo (from Liberia) , Godwin Enaiho and Magnus Ohakwe (from Nigerian community) and Simeera Malik.

⁶⁴ Galway2040 is a Galway City development initiative – see: <http://galway2040.ie>



Figure 50 Some of the World Café organisers. Photograph by Peter Brennan.

It is possible to argue that the commitment and enthusiasm of everyone created a really caring environment. The room dividers, decorated by Lisa Duiganan and Anna Murphy, were used to contain a smaller space in the centre of the room. The children from the local primary school had taken a number of weeks to paint pictures as a visual interpretation of their experience of community. These pieces of art work added vibrant colour to the room, and made the place into something warm and inviting, adding a special quality to the space. Magnus Ohakwe, in the picture below, was one of many people who commented that the ‘pictures brought atmosphere to the room’.



Figure 51 Magnus Ohakwe. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

The atmosphere in the room reflected what the architect Christopher Alexander (1979) calls the search for aliveness:

The search which we make for this quality, in our own lives, is the central search of any person, and the crux of any individual person's story. It is the search for those moments and situations when we are most alive (Alexander, 1979:x).

The pictures provided symbolic interpretations of what community means to people, not only because of the subject matter, but because young people had created them. There was a sense that by engaging in the day we were bringing attention to one of the most important aspects of social development; the health and wellbeing of the young people in the area. The children's voices, however young, made an impact, even though they were not in attendance. The pictures were very much a focus of attention for many people

during the day, inspiring discussion and interaction, as well as providing a sense of ‘presence’ that lifted moods, generating a conducive place for community gathering.

Importantly, the room, through the act of decoration, was filled with intention: the interior of the hurling club had been transformed from a bleak atmosphere to one favourable to creative envisioning, making possible new friendships and bonds. It was a representation of what Alexander (1979) would argue, engenders a positive social experience:

The specific patterns out of which a building or a town is made may be alive or dead. To the extent they are alive, they let our inner forces loose, and set us free; but when they are dead, they keep us locked in inner conflict (Alexander, 1979:x).

The motivation was not to direct or control people’s experiences, but to provide a setting that would generate a sense of comfort and ease, where the tensions often associated with meeting new people were softened. As people arrived there was a sense of anticipation and excitement, though, as often in new social contexts, there was a degree of nervousness. In attendance at World Café were more than 60 people from 9 different nationalities (Pakistani, Nigerian, Liberian, Irish, English, Polish, Ukrainian and Libyan and Yemen, Ghanaian, Indian) and three different faiths: Catholic, Muslim, Pentecostal).



Figure 52 World Café participants. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

6.2 Methodological Process for the World Café Experience

There were two interconnected processes used for the World Café experience that both influenced and shaped one another in an organic, fluid way. First, the use of creativity to activate new experiences. Second, that creativity was used in a social way, through interaction and dialogue. The motivation was to build a shared picture, even if matters were contested. Differences were regarded as very much part of the process. For instance, differences were used as a starting point for discussion, but always in the context of sharing, rather than as isolated, private experiences. Difference, therefore became a point of contact.



Figure 53 World Café experience. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

The method was designed in such a way as to facilitate letting go of the ‘old’ (the past or preconceived ideas), suspending the ‘I’ (the sense or preoccupation of self in isolation) and co-creating the ‘new’, by engaging in a shared, creative experience. The idea here was not that ‘old’ was ‘bad’, or not to be valued, but more a way of creating ‘space’ within consciousness for newly emerging ideas, themes or experiences. Thus, the

emphasis was upon suspending preconceived notions. Crucially, this method was not offensive or threatening. It did not ask people to let go of who they are, or in any way suggest who they were or, that their judgements were wrong.

To begin the day there was an ice-breaker: getting to know each other. People were asked to walk freely around the room; find someone with whom they had never met, and share the question: “What is your best experience of community?” The rationale: to surface an individual’s best experience of working or celebrating together in community (to begin the process of connecting the imagination with the social), as well as to mix up the groups. The second part of the process, referred to as ‘downloading’ by Chris Taylor, was to give space to articulate what participants felt were problems in their community. The idea was that these ‘problems’, once acknowledged, could then be suspended, providing a creative space for envisioning a way through ‘problems’ and generating potential for a more rewarding experience. In addition, the process was designed in such a manner as to work through the ideational aspect of imagination, toward giving form through practical suggestions for the implementation of ideas.

We used questions as a tool to get participants to engage in narratives that had been identified in conversations in the wider DRA community. For example, participants of World Café were invited to explore creative ideas about how a community of difference may be appreciated. Questions were used in a ‘three dimensional’ sense: the answers were not necessarily important (although useful). What was essential to the process was *experience*. The kind of questions asked, and how they were delivered, was important to the quality of the experience gained. Through the use of ‘teasers as invitations’, varying tone and pauses, the questions became ‘alive’, as individuals internalised and entered into the ‘spirit’ (energy) of the World Cafe experience (a highly subjective observation; one based upon ‘feelings’ that had been stimulated through my involvement in the process, rather than examining the event as an outsider).



Figure 54 World Café participants. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

As the day unfolded participants were given space to give form to their experience via communication, either verbal or written. People responded very well to the invitation. As stated by one participant: '*this is an exciting opportunity to plan for the future, together* (World Café, 19th June, 2012). People discussed in groups a specific topic and together came up with a statement that reflected the participant's feelings and/or thoughts. They gave structure and form to these experiences through the written word, or via pictures. In a simple way it was informative and promising, and a huge amount was revealed through the sequencing and use by participants of the following words: *exciting, opportunity, future, together*. These words (put together in this way) demonstrate that participants were fully engaged with the process. For example, '*this is*', grounds the experience into the present and indicates a degree of engagement. As the phrase implies participants had moved from being invited to participate to actually being part of the experience (it is impossible to describe what something is without a degree of internalisation). Therefore, the process (method) moved from something outside of the

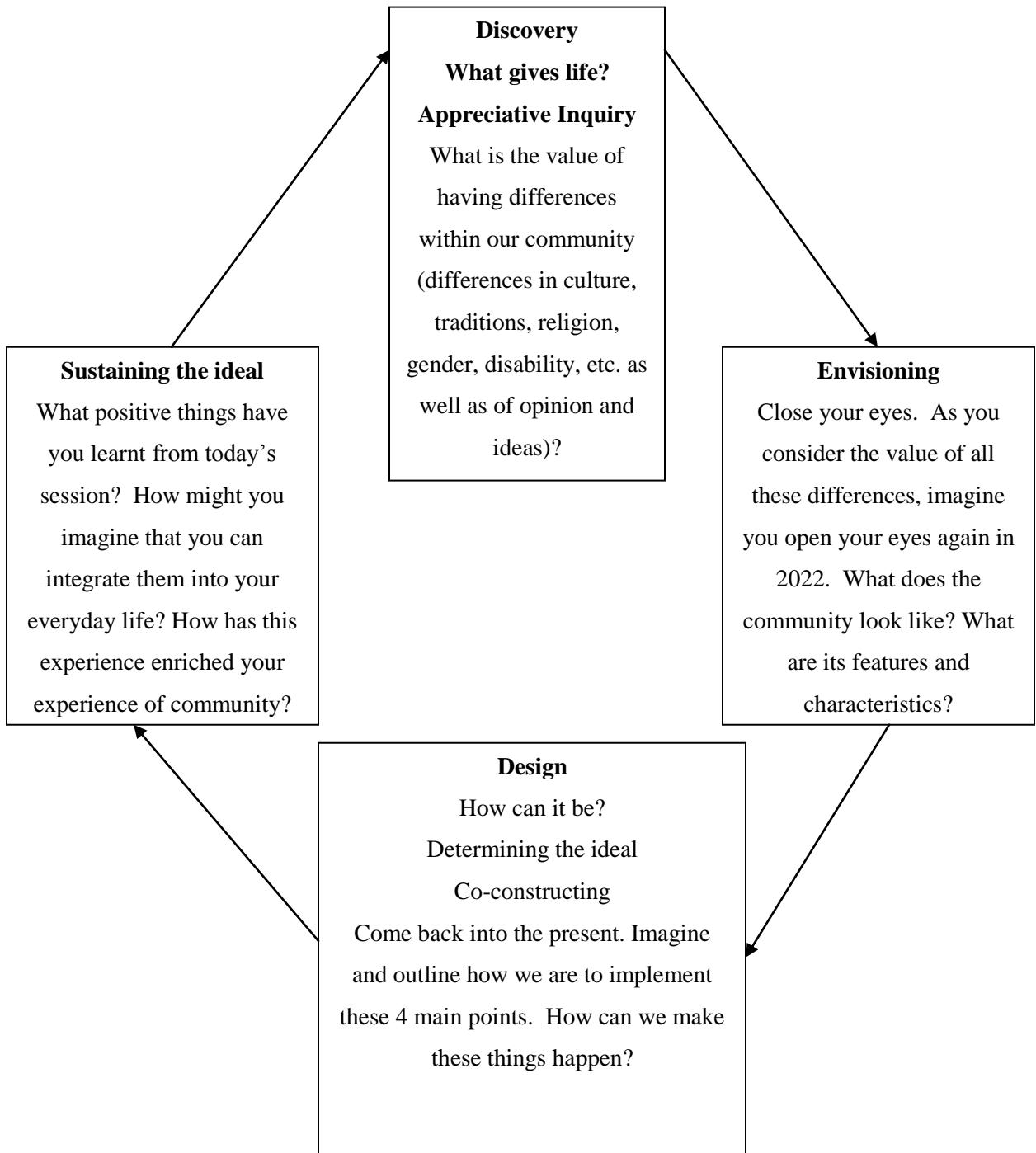
self (dissociated) to being part of the self (associated). The use of the words: ‘*exciting*’, describes the quality of the experience, as well as something rewarding, and identifies how individuals interpreted the exercise. ‘*Opportunity*’ shows that participants have entered into a space for creation and, ‘*to plan for the future*’, brings the future into the present, reflecting the act of creating something sustainable. The phrase, ‘*together*’, suggests that the transformative experience has been shared.

The questions had been designed to emphasize the social experience after ‘downloading’ the personal. Therefore, a point was reached during the session where it was essential to connect with others, to co-create the picture being drawn of the future:

Today has kick-started open-mindedness and commonality between us all.

(Statement generated through group methodologies, World Café, 19th June, 2012).

It was achieved through a process of getting individuals into small groups to explore an idea together. After a short period of time everyone moved to a different table, where the same ideas were discussed, but with different people, ensuring the process of cross-dissemination of ideas, as well as an opportunity to build a shared picture of the future.



World Café Process. Developed by Chris Taylor and Anna King: Monday, 27th February, 2012: Salthill Hotel, Galway). This diagram shows the kind of questions asked and the sequencing of experience.

6.3 World Café Findings

The World Café experience demonstrated the positive power of group methodologies, to create psychological and emotional spaces for dialogue, a process that seeks to generate conversations about how social development may be stimulated:

We need to be able to find new ways to facilitate and motivate parents of children to socialise during children's events

(Statement generated at World Café, 19th June, 2012).

It also defined a set of social and economic issues that should be addressed, such as a community centre and sports facilities.

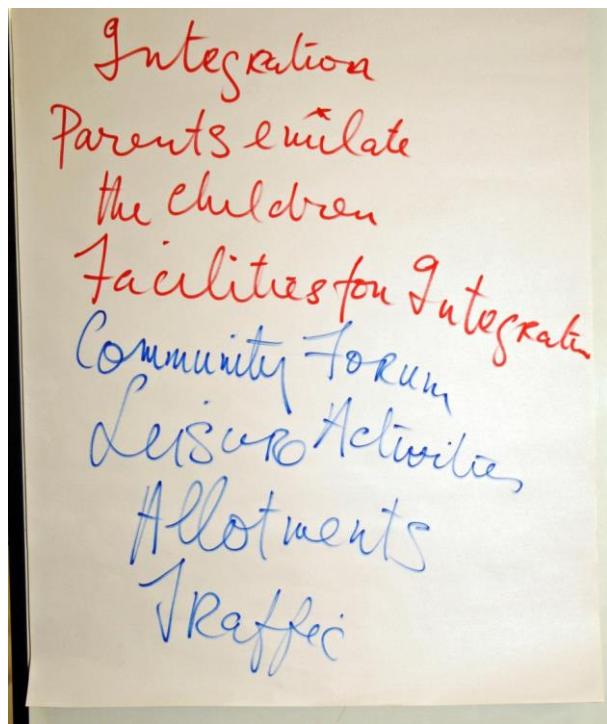


Figure 55 Issues discussed by World Café participants. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

The World Café experience was also successful in other ways. It provided space to explore the future within the present, by projecting people's minds toward what *they*

would like *their* community to look like by 2022. As a method it allowed us to explore the value and meaning (for participants) of difference within a shared context. The World Café experience, which is based on the idea that meaningful social development requires communication with as many different individuals and groups as possible, provided a platform for collective action:

This is an opportunity to plan for the future, together.

We should not leave here today without action.

We need to establish a set of principles to live by such as equality, nobody should be isolated.

(Statements generated by group methodologies, World Café, 19th June, 2012).

The event was more than just an opportunity for people put across their views. It developed out of the recognition that narratives can have a powerful effect on the residents' lived experience. The World Café provided a space in which shared dialogue could envision the future. It explored what kind of experiential building blocks were necessary for social development, as well as demonstrates how these methods may complement development strategies. Crucially, it is a participative process, with community members involved in the creative method of inquiry in a non-threatening environment:

Today made me realise that everyone has something to offer.

I met new people from the community for the first time. It was a great experience.

(Statements generated from group methodologies, World Café, 19th June, 2012).

The following teases out some of these issues.

The method used the idea of a Café as a place for meaningful conversation and the day used two key processes: the role of the imagination and narrative to create

change, and the use of shared interactive forms of engagement for personal and social group transformation. For these processes to be effective it was crucial for ideas to be shared, not just with those sitting in close proximity, but with as many people as possible, and preferably with ‘strangers’. It embraces the idea of transience as a positive element to the community building exercise, with people moving freely between groups. For example, the commonly held view that it is difficult to build strong bonds in heterogeneous communities where there is a lack of cohesive cultural repertoires, was ‘turned on its head’.⁶⁵ As well as challenging certain preconceived ideas (such as transience being detrimental to community-building, or that social fragmentation is undesirable), the method held within it a key to discovering how positive experiences may occur from ‘movement’ and ‘difference’ or ‘strangers’.

In the World Café event this tension was creatively reconciled. In other words, it demonstrated how it was possible to forge strong bonds or friendships between different individuals when they are brought together through the process of *creating* something together. The key to this activity as a method is that it is designed to build a *social* picture of the future by disseminating through shared interaction. Indeed, at the end of the session a shared picture was presented that was gathered via creative processes.

Two important observations demonstrate the success of this method: first, the ‘words and descriptions’ given by a group at the end of the session presented a future that is not owned by any specific group, because it was created together. Second, the World Café experience builds on Block’s argument that every gathering needs to be an example of the future we want to create (Block, 2008:75). Through the process of visioning the future, relationships are built in the present, but they may influence the future in a positive way.

⁶⁵ This assertion is concerned with a temporary experience, such as the World Café. Chapter Seven explores this idea in more depth and offers an example of how public theatre can support repertoires of belonging in diverse cultural settings.



Figure 56 World Cafe participants. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

In combining these two processes an element of social abstraction occurred: what is generally accepted as a ‘normal’ form of social interaction (for instance, conversations in cafés with friends or family) was supplemented by an artificially changed social dynamic (World Café method); participants were invited to sit with ‘strangers’ and to consider their future. This scrambling of experience occurs when the familiar (café context) becomes the unfamiliar (strangers). It offers a new way of understanding the self in relation to others, demonstrated in the following quotations:

We need to see that change is a positive thing. Not to be afraid of it and not to resist it.

Suspicion and curiosity can be turned around and lead to difference being regarded as a positive experience.

(Statements generated through group methodologies at World Café, 19th June, 2012).

These are statements that reveal people were using the ‘familiar’ to discuss the unfamiliar. It was a method that allowed new social opportunities to evolve, as well as provide a space to discuss the complex issues in a diverse social context. The

conversations were transformative, in that individuals *experienced* the complexity, moved through it and created a new experience. The use of creativity (imagination) in this way allowed the World Café experience to unfold in a positive fashion, tapping into the *potential*, rather than the known (the past, judgements, opinions, norms). It places an emphasis upon ‘what if,’ rather than ‘what is’. Ordinarily, being up close up and personal with individuals that appear different could be a daunting encounter, but the method used was non-threatening, weaving the experience through creativity.

The World Café experience also reinforced the idea that creativity can bring people together in meaningful ways, while at the same time retaining a sense of self (identity), as people brought their own ideas and experiences to the conversations. The World Café event provided experiential evidence that demonstrates how abstract processes, delivered creatively, may lead to non-threatening exchanges that are conducive to the creation of a sequence of repertoires for social, symbolic and physical structures to build communities of difference. Therefore, creativity may be an essential part of the community-building puzzle. This is highlighted through the following statements generated during the day:

We need to celebrate creativity in the community as a tool to bring people together.

This has created a new zeal and energy for community.

(Statements generated through group methodologies at World Café, 19th June, 2012).

Certainly, the World Café experience was an opportunity to explore a method of dialogue and exchange that was fluid enough for individual creative expression, but sufficiently structured to give form in everyday life. For example:

I think we are naturally afraid, so it is only natural to find change difficult. We are made up to identify what is similar to us to keep us together. We need to find more of a collective link – to educate ourselves to respect others.

(Statement generated through group methodologies, 19th June, 2012).



Figure 57 The World Café experience. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

The ideas and aspirations that came out of the World Café experience appeared to forge unity in a curious way. From photograph 58 it is possible to see that there was positive body language, displays of interest, gentle consideration and serious thought given to each other. The World Café experience also provided an opportunity to understand community gathering as patterns of social sequences, each contributing to the other and contained within a whole (context). For instance, everyone contributed, through their silences as well as their verbal conversations. Silences often provide punctuation, a space for reflection and allows creativity to manifest. Smiles became an invitation for others to respond. All responses were valued. Some were soft, quiet or gentle; others excited, articulate and strong, all, however, provide texture and substance.

Sequences of engagement when woven together through the World Café method created a sense of unity. It was an inclusive experience, which bestowed legitimacy on

any outcomes. Each encounter was built around a process of building experiences through dialogue, movement and expression. ‘We shared each other’, and then moved to another table carrying with us the information gained from the previous exchange but, more importantly we shared the *quality* of that exchange. The same topic was then re-examined by another group, allowing a different vantage point (spatially and socially). A common theme was explored by new groups of people, different hues of the same colour come to life and a more subtle and sophisticated story emerged. The process provided an opportunity for participants to *feel* their conversations and the method enabled people to reflect on themselves as social creators. World Café became the community that was desired by those that attended (as evident from many of this chapter’s photographs).

The World Café experience provided a method for bringing different groups together that gave space for diversity and difference to be expressed in a constructive way. And yet, while everyone moved through a process together, individuals retained a strong sense of self and individuality. The process offered a way of exploring and uniting both the individual and shared community identity. For example, the act of creating together resulted in a bond between individuals that would normally have no opportunity for engagement (or desire to do so). The day provided evidence that difference was something valued and that it could contribute to establishing more rewarding experiences in community. This can be seen in statements generated during the day:

Differences bring colour to the community – both visual and through interactions.

Discover creative talent in community and show case it. Celebrate difference!

Important to celebrate difference through food and lifestyle; enhance one-ness. Want to find new ways of working together.

(Statements generated through group methodology: World Café, 19th June, 2012).

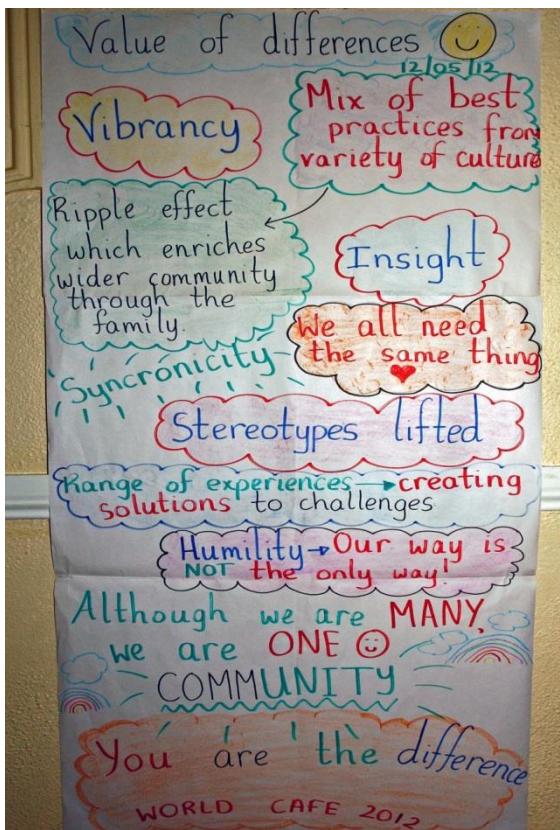


Figure 58 Issues discussed at World Cafe. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Tools were used throughout the day that enabled a space of unity and togetherness to be ‘held’, even though differences were strongly apparent. The ‘holding’ of space was achieved through a process called stewardship. Chris Taylor had previously run two training workshops for leaders from the various different communities, with a focus upon ideas of stewardship. The World Café experience required leaders to ‘hold a vision’, rather than direct or lead. For the World Café event each steward was assigned a table that they remained at when everyone else moved. The idea here is that they became carriers of the messages and themes raised. In addition, it was important for these individuals to understand the deeper intention behind the purpose of the day, so as to guide and invite the process. They would explain to the group the difference between describing the past (what is wrong with my community) to imagining the future (what is possible, what can we do to create something new). The primary role of the stewards was

to listen and observe responses, responding only when required, not to direct how experiences unfolded.

The idea of active listening was also important to the World Café process: the ability to understand that listening is more than what is being said, it is also about what people mean by what they say, as well as the capacity to draw upon new dimensions to a conversation (potential). By introducing empathy into our conversations, it is possible to '*mediate*', rather than construct conversations. What is central to this argument is that the conversation becomes a shared 'experiment' (something jointly explored). In the case of the World Café experience, the stewards acted as 'mediators' of a shared dialogue. This type of conversation was important because it gave space for imagining how others might feel, or what they might mean. Because participants had the imagination at their disposal, it was not essential to 'know' the person(s) with which they were conversing. In fact, as Sennett (2012:20-21) has argued, over familiarity may actually hinder conversation, as we may assert preconceived notions, rather than explore new options. Conversation is, therefore, an experiment, an invitation for others to join in, where different experiences offer opportunity for expansion and growth.

During World Café, Chris Taylor shared an approach to conversations that considered four levels of listening (referred to as presencing): I-in Me (I am conversing about myself through an understanding of myself), I-in-It (I am listening to the 'thing' or topic that you are talking about), I-in-You (I am listening and engaging with you as well as listening to what you are saying) and the I-in Now (being present with the moment and giving space for new constructions to be built through a process of co-created communication): presencing (as introduced by Chris Taylor during a leaders workshop: 12th May, 2012 – 11am – 1pm, Good Shepherd Parish Centre, Roscam, Galway). Questions throughout the day were designed to take people through a journey toward 'presencing': downloading, suspending judgement, going inward, connecting with others (presencing), going outward, visioning and implementing.

The day produced a number of experiences that displayed responsive and promising social encounters. It was acknowledged that listening to each other was an important part of the day's process:

Communication is vital; it is so important to listen to each other. Some people fear change – the GAA for example, failed to realise that hurling has changed. We feared change and we have suffered because of it. We need to see that change is a positive thing. Not to be afraid of it and not to resist it. We need to listen to new ideas.

(Statements generated through group methodologies at World Café, 19th June, 2012).

Certainly, the day inspired hope: the statement below shouted out by a group of people, sums up the desire to work together for change:

Yes we can!

(Statement generated through group methodologies at World Café, 19th June, 2012).

The excitement and the energy in the room at toward the end of the day was palpable. It was also inspiring. Clearly, exchanges, as documented below, imply meaningful and positive experiences:

I feel enriched from World Café.

This sense of excitement is fantastic; I have never seen it before. New experience for us Polish people, I have never had this experience before. It was wonderful. I feel more informed.

(Statements generated through group methodologies at World Café, 19th June, 2012).

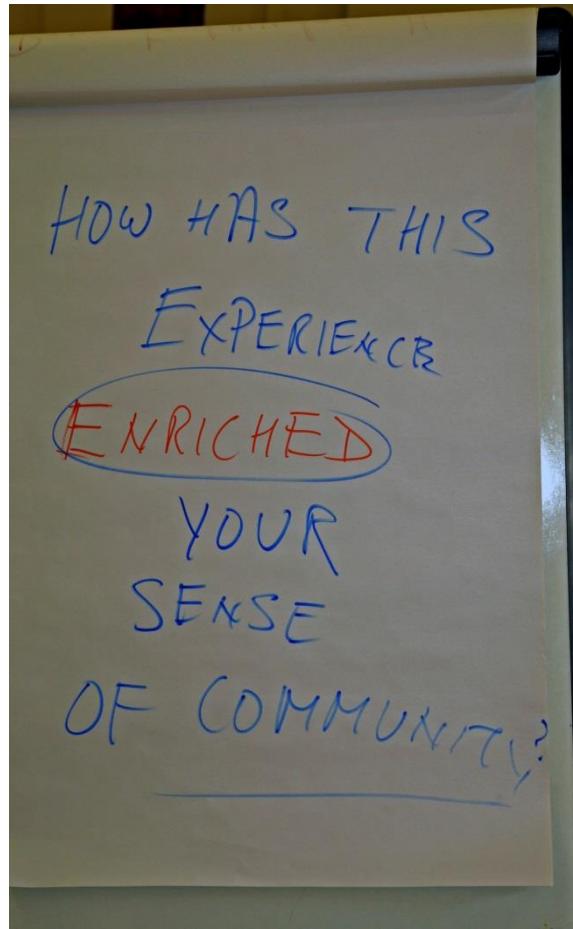


Figure 59 Example of question asked. Photograph by Peter Brennan.

For many, the World Café had opened up new possibilities for both themselves and the community:

We feel positive about new possibilities; we have to bring this into the community.

Need to keep it all going.

(Statements generated through group methodologies at World Café, 19th June, 2012).

As well as generating ideas, the World Café also created an environment for personal and shared experience that led to change. People learnt new things about other participants:

It gave us an opportunity to meet new people and appreciate others point of view.

(Statement generated through group methodologies at World Café, 19th June, 2012).

However, while the World Café experience provided a space for a creative and generous exchange of ideas, it was strongly suggested toward the end of the session by many that this form of exchange should be continued. This was evident in two ways: a strong consensus and shared will to make change; to do something and not just talk about it.

This is reflected in these varied statements:

The problem is how to create a model – how do we work and blend different needs.

Extremely important for community to work together; facilities are not enough we need good dialogue, integration and support. Start small, but publicise what gets done - to inspire new leadership.

The desire is there for integration – we just to need to act on it!

Everyone needs to be involved in working this process out.

We need to work together for the common good.

(Statements generated through group methodologies at World Café, 19th June, 2012).

Although there are no miraculous solutions to the challenges inherent in social life, what many of the statements generated during the day reflect is the positive dimension to the World Café experience as a stepping stone toward a more compassionate approach to working with difference and diversity. We may not be able to define this World Café experience fully, or indeed reproduce it, but evidence gathered that day strongly suggests that maybe difference (as experienced on this day), when woven into a creative experience, stimulates our ability to share, co-operate and build something together. Although evident in many ways throughout our life course

(especially with family and friends), these aspects of life tend not to be formally encouraged within wider social contexts. Although the World Café experience was to a large extent an ‘artificially’ created methodological process, what is important is that the day revealed tangible ways in which sharing and co-operation can be encouraged and supported through the practice of creating something together as well as attention given to the ‘act’ (process), and not just the outcome.

The World Café experience, however, went further than just bringing people together. It was an opportunity to build the future in the present and, in-so-doing, to understand in *more depth* how to create shared meaning between people that *may* lead to a *more* rewarding social experience within diverse and often conflicting contexts. The italics here indicate that one overarching solution was not sought. They also suggest that in any complex social arrangement there will never be completion. A level of insecurity is therefore inherent within the human condition. If the complex nature of human existence, with all its contradictions and unknowns, is to be taken into consideration, it is important that development processes remain *receptive*. What this means is that the process is not about finding one method or solution to fit all contexts, but finding a useful developmental framework that can adapt, depending on need and circumstance. It becomes important to understand ‘failure’ and ‘success’ in a new light; what worked today, may not work tomorrow. Here, what is important is that for this process to work, failure would need to be reframed as part of a journey toward understanding, not as something negative or feared. Failure would need to be understood as illuminating the pathways of conscious action. Ironically, for positive social experience to grow, it is important that perceived failings (judgements, encounters or opinions) are understood, rather than denied or eliminated.

The World Café experience indicates that one way of overcoming the irregularities of social life is to create contexts that inspire and invite positive experiences for those engaged. But, even the term positivity is subjective. What is positive for me, may be limiting to you; raising the issue of difference once again. Certainly, it is possible

to argue that the use of creativity within the World Café process facilitated an opportunity to *explore* a range of conducive means (rather than positive) by which meaningful encounters may take place for as many people as possible. It did this through the building of a shared picture of the future, by assembling many different parts of the puzzle together, into varied patterns and sequences, each part contributing to the whole. The group ‘owned’ the larger picture, not just one or two individuals. The conducive larger picture (context) was the commonly shared desire to explore a new, more compassionate form of social development within the area.

There is a further matter important to consider; what happens to these kinds of exchanges once they are taken out of the context of a semi-structured method -World Café? And, outside of the positive experience gained by certain individuals, what did we learn from the day about social development within the wider community context? For both the author and community activists, the World Café experience offered further pieces in the on-going construction of the community-building puzzle, but it also raised further quandaries. To describe the DRA narratives as changing from ‘difference being regarded as something to be dealt with’, to ‘something to be embraced’ and nurtured’, (albeit a powerful shift) refers to changing attitudes and ideas (in some community contexts, not all). It does not necessarily indicate how this shift can be embraced as a social development process. It is, therefore, compelling to tease this issue out a little further.

Through the World Café experience it was possible to observe how such shifting patterns of thinking can change how individuals experience the world. Within the larger community context, however, it is often not quite as simple, and much of social life is lived out within non-conducive community-building spaces and contexts. From this point of view the World Café experience was unique. A more refined understanding of the complex transition of moving from conducive community-building narratives to other forms of community experience is therefore required. Moreover, it became essential to consider the most appropriate medium for change, one that embraces the method behind

the World Café experience, but lends itself to working with the complexities inherent within social life. As one participant stated:

When we pray together, there is no difference – role of ceremony is important. We need to find a vehicle that provides some kind of ceremony to bring us together, but allows for all faiths, and people with no faith.

(Statement from participant post World Café event, 19th June, 2012).

It became evident from the World Café experience that these vehicles for change had to take into consideration the contradictory ways in which aspirations or narratives are realized. It may be possible to hold a particular view that ‘difference is desirable’ within certain a social context, whereas in other, more unfamiliar or challenging social encounters (within the same community) a different social narrative may influence other responses, ones that may be contradictory. This raised the question, what do these changes in narrative mean in practice? How do they change, evolve and engage with other narratives? Equally important is the question of what kind of structure would best contain and support these narratives. As one World Café participant asked: ‘How can we seize this opportunity?’ In other words, how does this transformative energy become realized into sustainable patterns of development that are grounded in structure and form?

Here, an understanding of social life as energy may be insightful. It is possible to argue that nothing can occur or change without energy; all experiences are connected to some kind of energetic transmission and exchange. But, arguably, what is important is the character of the energy produced. Is it uplifting or heavy; free or attached; creative or conservative; inspiring or limiting? It is possible to see change (or reproduction) as part of a sequence of certain types of energetic exchange. Certainly, the World Café quotations demonstrate that the energy produced had been positive, creative, uplifting and inspiring:

People generate energy when together; we need to re-create this in community.

During World Café people were working well together. We all want the same thing and we all want to be part of something great - The day gave positive energy to move it forward.

(Statements generated through World Café group methodologies, 19th June, 2012).

World Café provided a process where agency developed through a range of social sequences that galvanised energy, commitment, inspiration and will. Here, the method allowed important dialogue and communication. Differences did not necessarily suggest obstacles, but provided opportunities, adding richness, texture and colour. The experience pierced through the familiar and brought the unfamiliar up close, providing meaningful ways for participants to better understand individuals and cultures that are different. The World Café experience was, therefore, not just a fact finding exercise with a list produced at the end. It was an organic, fluid process, where the *quality* of engagement was important, not just the fact that it occurred and produced a result. The World Café experience illuminated three important aspects to this argument: the importance of how we gather, the quality of the experience, and the need for social development projects that are uplifting, rewarding energetic exchanges. Importantly, it illuminated the need for further research to discover a structured way to continue the good work achieved. In other words, how such experiences can be sustained. The next two chapters explore projects that provide the space and structure from which the World Café experiences can become realized more fully: *Friends of Merlin Woods* and the Youth Theatre Project.

Chapter 7

‘Getting Back into Place’: The Experience of *Friends of Merlin Woods*.⁶⁶

Places, we realize, are as much as part of us as we are part of them, and senses of place – yours, mine, and everyone else’s – partake complexly of both (Basso, 1996: xiv).

This chapter develops some of the themes raised in *New Forms of Gathering* and considers the interplay between public places and social change through the case of the *Friends of Merlin Woods*. Public spaces have never been particularly prominent on the Irish political agenda and local estates have never been recognised as well-managed. As the landscape of the DRA shows, incentivised property speculation has produced a large urban sprawl, occupied by ‘ghost estates’, incomplete roads drainage problems and possessing little in the way of ‘green’ spaces. Indeed, in many ways the DRA displays all the characteristics of an ‘anti-commons’, in which the ‘ownership of the necessary inputs has been too divided to permit efficient usage’ (Lemley, 2003: 534). Much of this physical space is privately owned (or now under the control of the NAMA) but the unregulated drive to develop has ignored the important role that public infrastructure performs for the private sector. The result has been a drab legacy, particularly in some parts of Doughiska, one dominated by a collection of low maintenance shrubs and trees, a monoculture aimed principally at reducing costs and increasing the profit of private-sector management companies responsible for this landscape. This is a privatised environment, one that tends to recognise biodiversity only as something that is possible in the ‘wild areas’ outside of the city .

After five years of austerity little has changed in this narrative, indeed those areas of public space that remain, such as Merlin Woods, is under further pressure to be ‘released’, so that it can provide the private sector with an opportunity to regenerate Galway. I argue here that the fashioning of social life in this way reduces shared agency

⁶⁶ This title was inspired by Edward Casey (1993), *Getting Back Into Place*.

as public places are, by their nature, spaces for shared encounters that matter; public spaces are where social life is shaped and understood, where people talk about their common affairs.

In a campaign to oppose this type of market-driven development the *Friends of Merlin Woods* have constructed an alternative narrative, one that seeks to firmly root the woods in ‘place’. It is envisaged that once relocated in ‘place’, it will no longer be a peripheral resource, but a dynamic environment for artistic, environmental, cultural and educational performance, where young and older people engage in meaningful encounters that enhance the community’s well-being. In so doing they aim to give a new identity to the woods, a process that involves understanding how ‘the landscape in which the people dwell can be said to dwell in them’ (Basso, 1996:102).

This chapter addresses the relationship people have with place and, in particular, one type of public place: a natural space, known locally as Merlin Woods, where I want to explore the complex interaction between space, place, agency and change. Merlin Woods runs through Doughiska into Galway City via Merlin Park Hospital. The woodland is surrounded by housing estates on its northern, western and eastern boundaries and the old Galway to Dublin road on its southern boundary. It is owned by the City Council (North) and the Health Service Executive (South). It is a bio-diverse area with oak, beech, elm, spruce, hazel, sycamore and ash trees and a huge variety of wildlife, as well as the home of important heritage sites (Merlin Castle, remnants of the Merlin Park House, built in 1812, and graves dating back to the 17th Century). Despite the fact that this is one of the few remaining green spaces left in Galway, the City’s planning department has proposed a bus corridor through the woods.⁶⁷ And yet, as Peter Butler, a *Friend of Merlin Woods* explains, in Galway

⁶⁷ This is despite Merlin Park Woodland being identified as an ‘Area of High Biodiversity Value’ in a habitats inventory of Galway City (NATURA 2005). Such moves also contradict the *Galway City Heritage Plan, 2006-2011* and the *Galway City Biodiversity Action Plan, report, 2009*, compiled by Dr. Amanda Browne and Dr Janice Fuller. The

There is no park. Galway City had a great opportunity in what is now Foster Court to build a central park similar to St Stephens Green. They basically sold it off for land. The only open central space is owned by the University. The town lacks a central park. It gave it away. There is Barna Woods on the West side and some space around Terryland, but on this side you have to go out to the sailing club in Oranmore.

Nothing is on East side of the City. To me a town needs a park. While we have the river to walk around in town, there is no social space for recreation and playing with kids. It is about community.

(Interview, 10th December, 2013, Galway. Interview with Peter Butler, member of *Friends of Merlin Woods*).

The principal focus of this chapter is the way in which the residents of DRA have attempted to create a convivial place in which to build the daily routines of life that make community. However, there is also a strong caveat: place-based communities are not always positive places. They can lead to prejudice, exclusion and opposition to new ideas and people. Amin and Thrift (2002), for example, maintain that while diversity is thought to be negotiate in the city's public spaces, in reality they are often territorialized by particular groups, and many places are spaces of transit where there is little contact between strangers (Amin and Thrift, 2002).

Goffman's work, which took a different slant, suggested that most of the time we simply follow social codes of conduct in order to avoid colliding with other people (civil inattention). He argued that, as a rule, people do not interact in public spaces unless there is an obvious reason to do so (Peters, Elands, Buijs. 2010:94). These codes of conduct can also be established to exclude or include certain groups, and research on natural open spaces shows that both a particular cultural disposition and behavioural codes are key

summary stated that the woods should be safeguarded from any further development and that conservation should be a priority.

These reports contradict the City Council's other priorities: the road is part of an 'integrated transport solution' for Galway City that is to be achieved by implementing a previously adopted transportation strategy for the City: *The Galway Transportation and Planning Study*, the *National Spatial Strategy*, *Galway City Development Plan 2005 - 2011*, *National Development Plan and the Gateway Innovation Fund*, (GIF).

factors that can discourage minority, ethnic communities from using those spaces (Morris, 2003, cited in Peters, *et al* 2010:94). Nevertheless, as the example of Merlin Woods shows, interactions do take place and civil inattention can be broken. The presence of an event or amenity such as the mandala art or organised nature walks draw strangers together. This type of external stimulus, or what Lofland (1998, 2000) refers to as triangulation, is successful only if these public places are open and accessible, places to which people attach meaning.

I am also particularly concerned with how people from different cultural and social backgrounds have (re) negotiated the cultural landscape of Merlin Woods into an inclusive, shared space for community-building. If Merlin Woods is to be a successful public place, where people can communicate and share moments, then people need to meet as equals on a ‘neutral ground’ (Peace, 2013:25). This chapter demonstrates how Merlin Woods has become a place for the community to share meaningful moments and (re) negotiate a changing narrative, one that puts place-based social development centre stage. This is in stark contrast to the incentivised property development that has blighted this area. Instead, the *Friends of Merlin Woods* want to showcase the benefits the wood can bring to community life. They highlight a range of valuable assets that it provides: biodiversity, a healthy environment in which to interact, as well as being a rich educational resource with enormous potential for sustainable ventures.

The chapter explores how the *Friends*, as ‘everyday makers’, have achieved enormous success through a Facebook campaign.⁶⁸ It provides a brief analysis of how Facebook as a mode of communication can be a powerful driver for change, bringing people together physically to socialise and build a community. Additional themes that are discussed here include the importance of heritage in the area; the use of historical narrative to access the imagination as a tool for social development and how performance

⁶⁸ There is a small committee of people who are key to this project: Caroline and Colin Stanley, Noel Barbour, Aniko Tasnadi, Brian Fitzsimons, Peadair Seoige, Grace Jennane and Peter Butler. However, through events, meetings and other social events the group galvanize enormous public support and engagement.

in a physical environment through story-telling, theatre, art and education can help people develop a deeper sense of belonging. These activities can stimulate the imagination and provide opportunities for such crafts to transform landscapes into places full of meaning and significance. That these crafts should be made accessible to all members of a community is central, providing key opportunities for participation and relationship building. If we are to understand how placed-based thoughts, when combined with the imagination, can be valuable in a socially displaced setting then Basso's reflections are useful:

Places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-refection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become...The experience of sensing places, then, is thus both thoroughly reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic. As places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process – inward toward facets of the self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternatively both together- cannot be known in advance. When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anyone's guess (Basso, 1996:107).

While Basso (1996) focused on the relationship that American Indians (Western Apache) have with their landscapes, his arguments have relevance to understanding how newcomers to an area may feel dislocated from their own homelands, or are alienated in their new social or economic circumstances. Following Basso, I argue that it is possible to (re) negotiate a 'sense of place' through the craft of performance (theatre, art, ritual and storytelling) and that precisely these types of social encounters that can animate places for those who use them.

7.1 Friends of Merlin Woods

Colin Stanley (originally from Leicester, UK) and Caroline Stanley (Irish) have lived in Sean Bhaile for 12 years and formed the *Friends of Merlin Woods* to protect the wood, which they thought was

not just a wood for this area. It's a wood for the whole city. It's one of the oldest woods within the city. There isn't anything like Merlin Woods that is this big with such a mixture of trees, such biodiversity and history. So, you have a fantastic park that could be utilised for local tourism and local employment. There are so many opportunities. Like walks for history. We have a local guy, Norbert Sheerin. He does it for free. Everyone who has done stuff for us has done it for free, because they love the woods.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

For Caroline Stanley, development at Doughiska had been blinkered, with little regard for the environment. Instead, during this period the focus was on urban development:

This used to be our country walk. Sean Bhaile was one of the first estates to be built. It was kind of shocking. There were no amenities ...it was all housing... nothing, absolutely nothing, no schools, nothing. When Sean Bhaile was built they [Galway City planners] had an area left for a community centre, but they never put one in. They had the money, but it just wasn't a priority. I suppose as well it was such a new area that there was no community. Just people being put into houses; nobody knew each other. It takes a while for people to adjust to living in a new place and to bond.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).



Figure 60 Area in the woods where the road will be built. Photograph taken by Peter Butler, (originally from Kinvara, Ireland and who now lives near the Castle in Doughiska).

From the outset there was a concern that the bus corridor represented a continuation of such development practices and, that there was a larger agenda afoot:

This is costing millions; you don't need a road...so why are they doing it... if there's a main road there and all of the services and electricity are put in, the Council can then use this to build social housing estates. The council is coming under pressure to build more housing.

(Interview, 10th December, 2013. Galway. Interview with Peter Butler, member of *Friends of Merlin Woods*).

The road will go straight through the woods. They justify the road as part of a bigger plan – the Ardaun thing. I think they are thinking of developing the woods further down the line for housing or building work.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

Others, such as Principal Paula O'Connor, had heard that the bus corridor would be used exclusively by buses running only from Galway to Dublin:

We were told at a meeting with council official that this bus corridor will be of no benefit to people in the local community. There is no bus stop along it. It's for the kind of large buses that commute. It's not a stop along the way for locals. From what I understand from the public meeting is that held in the Clayton about a year ago, that this was part of the main infrastructure for the whole of Galway City – to get the buses straight in from the Dublin road. I think it only saves three or four minutes off of the time it takes to get to town, in total journey time... to have this bus corridor cutting through... you work so hard, and everyone in the community has worked so hard to develop a sense of belonging and that sense of ownership and a sense of responsibility to look after our local environment and amenities and for a big industrial bus corridor to go through it, I think it will undo a lot of really good work.

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

The Galway Bus Strategy, 2007, however, states an additional purpose:

The Ardaun Corridor is to link the proposed development area at Ardaun to the City Centre, via the Dublin Road. The Ardaun Development Area is to accommodate 18,000 people over the coming 10 years. The area is to be a self-sustaining corridor, where opportunities for achieving a mix of uses will be maximised in order to contain journeys and travel and where it will be possible, owing to critical mass to have a dedicated public transport system. This will include for the facilitation of key road projects, promotion of rail options, bus priority measures, improvement for cycling and pedestrian facilities. The corridor will consist of a new “bus-only” road through

Merlin Park to the proposed development area east of the N6 (Extract from Galway Strategic Bus Study, 2007:64).

The Ardaun Development is still on the 2011 – 2017 Development agenda. It has angered *Friends* that a Council map indicates Merlin Woods as located South rather than North of the existing Dublin road. The line indicating the corridor running through the woods contains no reference to the woods or any trees, a serious error on the part of the Council (unless it wished to downplay the significance of the woods).

But the *Friends* have challenged this particular interpretation of development and the Council's disregard of the woods' significance. This may not be politics as it is traditionally portrayed: debates taking place in Leinster House, or the oppositional stances drawn along party political lines, but it nevertheless has major political implications. The *Friends* regard the bus corridor as part of a short-term development model, one that tends to downplay or ignore a holistic approach to woodland conservation. In this vision, bio-diversity takes a back seat, as other, 'more important', economic considerations take precedence. For example, the *Friends* were concerned that 'the river has been switched off for drainage' as part of the overall development of the area. As Peter Butler points out,

This is the dry riverbed (*pictured below*) of what was for centuries the Merlin river, flowing from near the roundabout in Doughiska to the South Woods. There used to be a good flow of water in it, supporting a full eco-system. So where did the water go ? - it was diverted, by the developers of the estates built between Merlin Woods and Doughiska road, into a storm water pipe that now runs under Merlin Woods. Yes they violated the conditions of their planning permission. The rainwater running ...off roofs, roads, etc, was to be piped back into the stream. But they just ran it into the council's storm water pipe. And nobody in the Council's Housing or Environment or Parks Departments noticed that they had done it, until this year when we asked Cllr Frank Fahy to investigate it. A budget planning meeting is to be held next month to decide next year's Council's budget. Please email your City Councillors, asking them to include enough money in the budget (not much!) to pump the rainwater back into the stream bed as it flows through the woods. Let's restore this river, and bring back the species that depended on it.

Extract from Peter Butlers Facebook page, 6th December, 2013.



Figure 61 Merlin Woods dried up river bed. Photograph taken by Peter Butler.

Colin Stanley: We are trying to help the biodiversity to the woods and return the river...

Caroline Stanley: A river is a real way of cleaning the woods... its positive energy. It's...

Colin Stanley: ...life itself is water. It's turned off. It goes through a pipe that goes through the woods and comes out at the hospital. But, it's been contaminated with some sort of horrible stuff by the time it gets there... we don't know who did the drainage, but it hasn't been done properly.

Caroline Stanley: It was all about the house building in the area.

Colin Stanley: they have lowered the water table for the entire woods. It is possible to turn it back on with an artesian well. It would fill the

rivers right back down to the hospital. We are getting the water tested at the moment.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

7.2 An Alternative Social and Environmental Narrative.

Residents potentially derive benefits from green areas that extend beyond the economic. Public green areas, particularly those of good quality, allow vital occasions for people to develop social ties, especially in green spaces that encourage longer visits and specific activities associated with the area (Ka'zmierczak, 2013:1). Indeed, Ka'zmierczak's research suggests that it is the *character* of the visit, and whether the green space ranks highly as a place to frequent, rather than the number of visits that improves social ties. In this sense, Merlin Woods provides an extremely high quality green space as the woods have a number of useful community amenities, wide pathways, open areas for picnics and social events, as well as extremely diverse flora, fauna and natural habitat.



Figure 62 Early morning ramblers group meet every Tuesday for a stroll in Merlin Woods. Photograph taken by Caroline Stanley.

In an attempt to create an alternative narrative, the *Friends* have renegotiated the symbols and meanings of the area. For Caroline Stanley, the woods are a natural oasis of ‘health and community well-being; these areas are healthy, reinforcing the view of Cattel *et al* (2008). ‘It’s the only place you can escape the traffic. You can feel the quality of the air in the woods. It needs to be left as a traffic free area’ (Conversation between Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013). This is a view that can be found in the work of Chiesura who has argued that urban parks and open green spaces improve the quality of our lives (Chiesura, 2003:129). Besides

important environmental services such as air and water purification, wind and noise filtering, or microclimate stabilization, natural areas provide social and psychological services, which are of crucial significance for the liveability of modern cities and the wellbeing of urban dwellers (Chiesura, 2003:130)

This is also a set of ideas that resonate in Ulrich’s (1998, 1984) work, which suggests that natural green areas, such as parks, can reduce stress and are vital to physical rejuvenation and mental and physical health. In contrast to the incentivised property development that disfigured the natural landscape of this area, the *Friends of Merlin Woods* wanted to display the benefits the wood could bring to community life. Thus, for example, on a number of occasions Caroline Stanley referred to how the woods could bring about both a personal and social sense of connectivity:

I had to get used to living in an estate... get used to living in a built up area. I found it kind of claustrophobic. Having the race course or the woods to walk in was a ‘god send’; it was somewhere to escape to. This was important. That was why we ended up thinking about Merlin Woods, the more we used it. And then we found out about the road being built. So we thought we would get together to fight this.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

It is not just that the area is a natural space that matters, but also the quality of the environment, especially how its spatial properties affect its functions (see Kaplan,

1985:174). How we negotiate ourselves through space is important. In Merlin Woods, for example, there are a range of accessible pathways that meander through the tree line. These spaces rank highly because they contrast with ‘wide open, undifferentiated vistas or dense, impenetrable forests’ that ‘fail to provide information about one’s whereabouts’ (Kaplan, 1985:174; 1989). Being able to connect to our sensory ‘compass’ to help guide us through the natural environments is important when considering accessibility and functionality of public places. From both Caroline Stanley’s comments, and Kaplan’s research, we can identify certain anchor points that are essential for feeling ‘safe and comfortable’. The quality of such reference points is key to whether experiences are positive or not. It affects whether we participate in public places, what we create and how we sustain them.

Time is also an influence on the experience of public settings. Peters (2011), for example, points out that ‘in general, people who have lived in the neighbourhood for several years feel more connected to certain places than people who have lived there for just a few years’ (Peters, 2011:167). While confidence to negotiate Merlin Woods develops over time, and with regular use, it is imperative that newcomers feel at ease, and discover a ‘common compass’ through the woods. This is crucial if we are to make the area accessible to everyone. This is an issue that has been identified by the *Friends*; ‘its pathways are very good’, they are a major attraction to groups:

We identify the groups using it and then support them. Scouts use it ...
Foroige use it... Pope Jean Paul group use it...there are big wide paths
so it's safe for them to use it for wheelchairs.

Caroline Stanley explains how the *Friends* came into being as ‘an umbrella group that brought together all the people’ who use the woods:

The group started working with the schools cause we had identified that they were already going down there. We knew the brownies were going down there...a teacher uses it from Moneenageisha School, who uses it for orienteering.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

For these groups the pathways provide an opportunity to engage in conversations that, over time, create a sense of bonding. Such casual interactions result in people feeling ‘at ease and comfortable’ in public places (Peters, 2011:167-168). As Caroline Stanley notes:

Caroline Stanley: We had a good few nationalities on the biodiversity day... they all loved it... I tend to look at the issue of diversity as just about people, rather than nationalities. Different people on different nights. Lots of kids came; they *loved it*... especially to the bat walk.

Colin Stanley: It does amazing things for them as well at that age. Things that they don’t forget...

Caroline Stanley: Even the woodland art we did for national recreational week...

Colin Stanley: it gives them connectivity ...in your life... a better understanding of the seasons...and things like that and how cycles work...

In order to increase participation in the woods, the *Friends* have used a variety of approaches, such as art and music, to provide new ways in which to negotiate through the woods:

Caroline Stanley: That’s where the art came in; ye know, that’s where the schools came in; that’s why we are doing the history. In heritage week we are having lunchtime walks in the hospital grounds to get the hospital people involved. We like to work with everybody; it’s about how we can spread the word about the woods in the most diverse way possible. Tree detective last December, that was the first event that was not a litter pick ... we have butterfly walks...

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

Caroline and Colin Stanley and the *Friends of Merlin Wood* have deliberately resisted any move to limit the group’s strategy to a focus on the environmental issues. This attempt to reclaim a public space extended beyond the environmental dimension to

become a deeply social experience that contains an environmental theme. Here, it is possible to discern much of what Bang and Sørensen (2001) terms ‘the role of the everyday maker’, where civil engagement is no longer organised along party political lines (ideologically) and is couched in networks rather than hierarchy, where there is a choice either to engage or disengage from any given context (Bang and Sørensen, 2001).

As Peter Butler explains

the reason why this particular group is quite successful is because it brings together a certain accommodations of skills. My background is that I was the press officer for the anti-incineration campaign in Galway. A very successful project, very grass-roots... *Galway For a Safe Environment*...and I was campaign manager for the Green Party candidate. So, I'm coming from an activist, political, lobbying, press awareness. Whereas Colin and Noel bring the photographic evidence that excites the average person. Caroline is a good social organiser of things and then you have other individuals involved. Luckily, we have also had a gap politically in the environmental space in Galway, with the departure of the Green Party in terms of visibility. Into that space then, at least one or two politicians' have wanted to step in. Councillor Frank Fahy, Councillor Nuala Nolan have also come to prominence and have an interest in the issues. Although we are trying to get as many councillors involved as possible, because we don't want to be perceived as being aligned with individual councillors, as this is not a popular thing to do.

(Interview, 10th December, 2013, Galway. Interview with Peter Butler, member of *Friends of Merlin Woods*).

Bang and Sørensen (2001) argue that everyday makers are people who organize politically at the local level among partnerships and governance networks in neighbourhoods and re-define the relationship between citizens and the state. The everyday maker considers ‘knowing as doing’, in other words local knowledge is a central driver of community action. Everyday makers decide whether to engage or disengage, depending on the context. While this is not political commitment grounded in the traditional ideological forms of opposition, it also is not political apathy. Everyday makers’ activities are very political when it comes to ‘small’ politics (Bang and Sørensen,

200: 152-155). They represent an attempt to make sense of the challenge, both ideologically and practically, that ‘big’ politics no longer seems relevant to many people.

As Peter Butler observes

With Merlin Woods there is no controversy at this stage... there is no one with chain saws cutting down trees, so we are in a situation where we may have to wait until the next election.

We will continue to gather our story and make pledgers. At the moment it is low key in that sense, but the pollution in the river are high publicity. We have contacted the EPA for taking action against the council, for instance. However, we have gone for the low key approach, to just see if they will just fix it with the suggestion that if they don’t, it will be followed by action. We are trying to go for the non-confrontational approach because confrontation is dangerous in the sense that people get tired, you have to raise the ante all the time, that’s not for everyone. We are at the moment trying to decide whether to call for a public inquiry about the pollution of the river and into the drainage. Which puts us in direct collision path with some members of the Council who would be blamed for that if it goes that far. We don’t want to alienate the decision-makers after the election... we don’t want to go to war. Not much money is needed to fix the problem.

(Interview, 10th December, 2013, Galway. Interview with Peter Butler, a *Friend of Merlin Woods*).

The group’s first step was to set up a Facebook page that would give a ‘voice to woods’ and those that use it.⁶⁹ Facebook is an important resource, for it allows the dissemination of information to a wide variety of groups that extend beyond environmental activists. As Peter Butler, a *Friend of Merlin Woods* explains, the decision of the group to set up the Facebook a deliberate attempt at raising awareness because without a budget, without any money to work with, we had to rely on social pressure on councillors and give people a way of engaging with the project. And that... became... very successful, and building and building...

⁶⁹ There are nearly at 10,000 listeners from the Angry History Podcast on Merlin Woods <http://www.angryhistory.com/2013/06/24/irelands-historic-merlin-woods/>

We are being careful of extremists. There are different intentions in the group. But, our weakness is that we have no finances; we couldn't even afford to put an ad in the local newspaper. If this went into planning appeals, calling witnesses etc... we couldn't go that road. The *Galway for a Safe Environment* had to raise 40 thousand euros over the duration of its campaign, through fundraising, donations... Because of social media we don't need the newspapers or the radio. They no longer have the monopoly. Social media bypasses these methods. We have created an open group that is shared. I've invited councillors, TDs to raise awareness that this issue is bubbling up. This approach seems to be working.

(Interview, 10th December, 2013. Galway. Interview with Peter Butler, a *Friend of Merlin Woods*).

One of the most successful aspects of the campaign has been the litter picking: 'it's innocuous', and allows the group to gather because 'it would not have been wise for the Council to victimise us for cleaning up'. The litter pickups have been central both in raising awareness and galvanising support (Interview, 10th December, 2013. Galway, with Peter Butler, a *Friend of Merlin Woods*). Traditional forms of social action, such as the anti-incineration campaign in Galway relied upon signature collections on the street.

7.3 Facebook advocacy and sharing knowledge as a form of social activism

In contrast, signatures for *Friends of Merlin Woods* are being gathered through Facebook, which is less time consuming and requires less people. The Facebook page of the *Friends of Merlin Woods* has acted as a forum to re-embody public space, creating opportunities for collective mobilisation. This kind of activity, which includes physical participation, Facebook advocacy and sharing knowledge is an emerging form of social activism, one that bridges the symbolic space (internet) with place (the Woods). This has led to a powerful new place-based political discourse, where humans have a 'dialogic' relationship with place; places shape an individual and the individual shapes a place (Casey, 1993).

Facebook also allows (at least in the short-term) for a less ‘confrontational’ form social activism. As Peter Butler and Caroline Stanley explain

We gathered the famous 22 thousand signatures. We needed to convince the councillors to take a stand and if it had been just a handful of us it would not have worked. We got these at every shopping centre, in town; we were constantly out getting signatures physically. It was a lot of work.

(Interview, 10th December, 2013. Galway. Interview with Peter Butler, member of *Friends of Merlin Woods*).

Caroline Stanley: there’s a lot of interaction going on in environmental groups... but we tried not to make it about environmental issues, which would limit our target group. Our target group is everybody... it’s everybody... if we can put on an event in the woods that targets somebody we will put it on... the target is to make the woods about everything.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

Taking a long-term perspective, the timing for the Facebook campaign has been critical:

Time was all we were missing. We needed time to build up the case. We were lucky in the sense that the original funding was for the development of the Ardaun with a bus route. But that was a 35 million euro project that didn’t get funded. So because this plan is on hold there was no *imminent* threat, which is both a blessing and a problem in the sense that nothing excites people like an imminent threat, but at the same time it gave us time to build up this case and we are presenting this to the environment SPC⁷⁰ on the second week of January, 2014 and presenting two other SPC’s in the third week. A year ago we would not have been able to do this, to look at their case and present an alternative case. We have a lot of research now done. We are also lucky with timing in the

⁷⁰ SPC is a Strategic Policy Committee is part of Agenda 21 where voluntary organisations meet with councillors and officials for the purpose of debating policy. It’s an exercise in local democracy beyond councillors.
(Interview, 10th December, 2013. Galway. Interview with Peter Butler, member of *Friends of Merlin Woods*).

sense that it's been around for two development plans and not gone ahead and councillors don't feel the obligation to fund a road when there is no money for it. We possibly may have to wait until the new development plan which is three years away, so this is a really long-term project. And what makes this possible is Facebook, because we don't need any money.

There would also be a feeling that overdevelopment is the source of our problem, with a 64 billion public debt, not underdevelopment like in the 1960s. So, the mood has switched against at any cost we must develop and expand. The growth driven agenda that Bertie and others would have driven no longer is in favour, because people can see NAMA and the ghost-estates and the negative equity. Councillors can now go a different tack. There is an opportunity to be more reflective.

(Interview, 10th December, 2013. Galway. Interview with Peter Butler, member of *Friends of Merlin Woods*).

There was a further aspect to the 'good timing', in reference to an election next year:

so the timing is good as councillors are going to be vulnerable to unpopular decisions. We had to make sure that the popularity was high. So, the petition was a deliberate way of raising awareness to politicians. And there is also a load of letters from resident associations. Timing is everything!! Then we identified the empty river, the polluted pipes.

(Interview, 10th December, 2013. Galway. Interview with Peter Butler, member of *Friends of Merlin Woods*).

Extract from Peter Butlers Facebook Page:

From the recently published 2014 Draft Budget for Galway City Council... It is intended to bring reports on the proposed bus only corridor through Merlin Woods and the Kirwan roundabout before the Council in the second half of 2014.

In other words, put the proposed new road through Merlin Woods back on the agenda after the local elections. Presumably in the hope that the 13 (of 15) Councillors who told the Council in May to stop this madness (because there is no need for this road, just add an outgoing bus lane to the Dublin road) will be replaced by new Councillors who

will agree with the madness.

Our work, to stop the Council from sacrificing the Medieval forest that is Merlin Woods to development and developers, is far from over. The other thing that needs to be in next year's City Council budget is enough money to stop the pollution that has been for years running into the (dry) river bed of the Merlin river near the castle. The source of the pollution is a storm water pipe which was supposed to be carrying rain water. But the developers of the Ard Alainnn, Coillte Mhuirlinne and Sruthan Mhuirlinne estates connected kitchen waste water pipes to the pipes which collected rain water off the roofs. The planning conditions were that they should have connected those pipes to the sewerage pipes. Again somehow nobody in the Council's Housing or Environment or Parks Departments noticed that they had done it, until this year when we asked Frank Fahy to investigate it. A simple, and inexpensive solution is available to fix it, namely connecting the pipe carrying the polluted water into the sewerage pipe from Doughiska, where they cross over in Merlin Woods. Again please email your City Councillors, asking them to include enough money in the budget (it doesn't need much) to fix it

(Facebook Post by Peter Butler, 6th December, 2013).

Facebook has also been a powerful compass to help people to negotiate the woods. It has become a resource through which information could be disseminated on a whole range of features that the woods bring to the community: bat surveys, butterfly transects, nature walks, festivals and art activities⁷¹:

Since October 2013 it's really taken off. Up to a thousand people use the page and there are local people who don't usually use Facebook using it. It hasn't been hard. There are people on your side, so many

⁷¹An example is the Facebook Post by Caroline Stanley, 5th December, 2013: In around 1913-1914 a young Lieutenant Richard E Cusack was looking at butterflies and moths in Merlin Woods ...some of the species he found were the Brimstone and the Painted Lady...so they have been in the woods for at the very least 100 years ..takes a bit of searching (LEPIDOPTERA COLLECTED IN IRELAND BY LIEUTENANT R. E. CUSACK. the Irish Naturalist May 1919 57)
https://archive.org/stream/irishnaturalist28roya/irishnaturalist28roya_djvu.txt

people had been thinking the same way as us, but they had no one to turn to. Now they have the group. We have to keep building and building and we will get there bit by bit. It's better to work with the council; we have never gone against them.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

A crucial feature of the Merlin Woods Facebook page is that it is interactive: it brings the woods into the real-world lived experience through both online and physical interaction. While Facebook is the group's primary source for both advertising events and campaigning against further development, it is equally important that the page stimulates physical activity in the woods.

In a very short period of time the *Friends* have gained a significant public profile, stimulating interest in both the future of the wood and issues related to the environment. Their online petition, for example, has gained 1,500 signatures (as of 25th November, 2013). Crucially, however, it serves to reinterpret how we 'see' knowledge, or how we experience knowledge. For the *Friends*, the woods allow us to explore educational resources while rooted in place:

Colin Stanley: During the week we had a dawn chorus at half five in the morning... bat walk, history, nature and bio-diversity walk. Something every evening and a photo exhibition in the library. Everyone got together who is on the Facebook page and took pictures.

Caroline Stanley: ... and they may walk in there now and look at things and go 'there's that picture I saw on the page' or people might post a picture and say 'my husband said that this was an Orchid, is it?' Now, it might not be an orchid, but he took the picture. It's a real way of knowledge sharing, because we are learning ourselves.

Colin Stanley: There are a few people we've found on the internet who help us identify stuff and a couple of people within the group.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

And, of course, Facebook offers a further dimension. It allows people to interact with the wood, even when you are not there. Here, Colin Stanley suggests that pictures are striking, in the sense that you can really get a sense of the woods from the pictures:

Colin Stanley: Pictures paint a thousand words. It can bring you there... for some people who maybe don't realise what's in the woods, it helps them realize ...

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

Through the use of this technology 'creative knowledge' can be shared. The art and photography in the woods can be linked to a vast range of locations (Merlin Woods Primary School, Family Resource Centre and people's homes), ensuring that the woods become a source of inspiration, even to those that are geographically located elsewhere, it becomes alive:

The Facebook campaign has been brilliant. If you go to the woods now, it is a lot busier than when we started in October. People now want to know where the woods are. Or they have lived in the area and never knew that they could go into the woods, or that there were all the pathways through it. The council don't actually have any signs saying 'Merlin Woods' is this way. They're not showing it; they're not pointing it out to people; they're not doing anything for it. All they have done is some wood management for two weeks of last February.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

The 'word' may be spreading, but both Caroline and Colin Stanley are cynical about the planning department's motives, and are deeply concerned about the fate of the wood.

Caroline Stanley: We now have twelve councillors saying that they want the road removed from the plan. The planners have gone away to look at an alternative. But... I don't have any hopes that the alternative will be any cheaper. That's the way they always look at it with planners... If they want something to go ahead the other plan will probably come back too expensive

Colin Stanley: The obvious alternative plan is to put the buses down the Dublin road when there is a bus lane there already...

Caroline Stanley: We haven't even really started yet... I can't believe that we have got as far as we have. In October when we were talking about it we didn't realise we would get twelve councillors on board by this stage, did we... that was our aim, but we didn't know how.

Colin Stanley: We knew that we needed 10 to get it removed. But, we have twelve, but it's not removed yet.

Caroline Stanley: We won't stop till it's removed. *It's not an option.*

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

Awareness in any social and political campaign is important, and one of the significant advantages of Facebook is not only the size of the potential audience it reaches, but that it is medium that is free. This is always important for small fledgling groups that need to increase their exposure. When the group was formed, local people were unaware of how real was the threat of losing the wood. As Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School, observes:

It's amazing, people say to me, 'of course they're not going to build on the woods, they couldn't do that'... 'the wood is such a great amenity', or 'they can't cut across the doors of the school', 'they can't do this...', but, they can. It seems as if they are going hell for leather for it, so we have objections and concerns about that. You have visions of digger's just landing out. Nobody knows when it's going to happen.

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

How the internet and social media are affecting the social foundations of democracy and what happens before people choose to be involved in interest groups or political parties has risen to prominence in academic debates (Chadwick, 2006:84; Putnam 1995). Putnam believes that the internet leads to passivity, a view shared by Nie and Ebring who argue that because the internet removes people from place, it becomes an

‘isolating experience’ (Nie and Ebring, 2000 cited in Ward and Gibson, 2009: 30). However, Ward and Gibson suggest that overall participation levels may not be in decline, it is just that the public are now willing to engage more often in ‘single-issue campaigns’ and unconventional forms of political protest (Ward and Gibson, 2009: 26). Indeed, information technologies may be seen as a way of expanding support for campaigns, potentially diversifying a campaign’s social base. The appeal of the internet, e-mail and political blogs lies in the potential support that can be canvassed. However, the internet has also been promoted as a mechanism through which it is possible to ‘deepen activism’, allowing contact on a more regularized basis. Ward and Gibson maintain that this can help develop trust and commitment, values crucial in debates about social capital (Ward and Gibson, 2009: 28).

Those more positive on the potential for new technologies suggest they have the capacity to alter ‘the spatial conditions of existence, overcoming the constraints of physical location and allow real-time communication. The argument runs that this allows a ‘global reach’, removing boundaries so that people can ‘imagine’ a local-global dichotomy.⁷² ‘What is important is that it is not only the places that are generated that are imagined, but also the places from which they are separated’ (Green, Harvey and Knox, 2005: 805-806). How we make and sustain places is an experience that involves the ‘cultural imagination’, one that is shaped by political and economic interests of the place in which the individual dwells.

So, it is not just a ‘cyber space’, but is as much about the ‘experience, imagination and construction of physical space’ (Green, Harvey and Knox, 2005: 805-806). For example, projects such as Manchester City Council’s (UK) information city project

Constitute an exercise in spatial imagination and place-making that involved attempts to reconfigure spatial ‘location’ using the new technologies. This was not only an attempt to restructure ‘senses of place, to borrow a phrase from Feld and Basso (1996), but also an attempt to alter spatial relations in practice, using

⁷² See Anderson (2009) for an examination of the processes that created ‘imagined communities’,

the logic of electronically mediated ‘networks’ to archive this transformation’ (Green, Harvey and Knox, 2005: 807).

The term network is important here, and for Green *et al* it involves more than just ‘connections’, but describes the relations that ‘belong’ to the network. Any description of a network involves a description of the ‘desired outcome’ of the project, defining it and constituting it. A network can be understood in the context of the place-based project in which it is tied up. These networks are more open and flexible than the ‘traditionally bounded communities’, with little in the way of clear centres. However, though networks are associated with the potential to overcome ‘distances’ and difficult connections, there is still the difficulty of establishing a ‘community sense of belonging’ (Green, Harvey and Knox, 2005: 807)

Certainly, Tonn remains positive on the potential role for computer technologies, arguing that they can play a useful role serving ‘on the ground’ communities that are not defined by spatial boundaries’ (Tonn, 2001 cited in Chadwick, 2006:90). These community networks tend to be free of charge and provide a social hub, creating content specific to the community. These networks are seen as a response to the difficulties encountered in modern democracies where people are likely to have irregular jobs, or move between locations, thereby reducing the time available to them to establish and sustain local connections (reducing social capital) and where there are fewer public spaces to meet (Chadwick, 2006:92). Networks are beneficial because they allow people to communicate according to their own constraints, and people may engage more because they are less fearful of the difficulties associated with face-to-face discussions. These networks can be ‘great good places’, which encourage dialogue and are particularly useful for disadvantaged or older people (Tonn *et al*, 2001, cited in Chadwick, 2006: 93).

Many of the community networks that have been formed have been far less successful than originally anticipated. This is because they have been ‘insufficiently embedded’ in the goals that people pursue in spatial boundaries. They tend to be motivated by the desire to get people to use the technology, rather than ‘solving the

problems' people encounter (Bannon and Griffin, 2001 cited in Chadwick, 2006: 102). However, studies of the internet's effect on social networks has been positive, where sociality has increased, particularly in the case of internet cafes (see Ferlander and Timms 2001). Unlike Putnam's approach, this type of research tends to focus on less on 'strong face to face ties' and more on the strength of weak ties. Hampton's research on Netville, for example, shows how 'large dense networks of relatively weak social ties' enabled local collective action against a developer (Hampton, 2003 cited in Chadwick, 2006: 105). There is more to being in a community than simple geographic location. It may be that communities, especially those organized around political issues, are developed and sustained through common interests and beliefs. However, I wish to suggest that places matter, and that actions formed around a community with shared interests are likely to be more successful.⁷³

In a short period of time, internet based campaigns have expanded (Shell to Sea in the west of Ireland or Uncut UK) using email to organize, fund raise and reach out to new constituencies (Chadwick, 2006: 118). It is cheap and accelerates the dissemination of information. But there are reasons also to be cautious about the 'success' of internet based campaigns. Such campaigns can often be dismissed as 'cheap talk'. The internet makes it 'easy', there is less 'effort' required than in traditional forms of grassroots political protest and the tendency, at least in examples such as the USA where politicians appear more influenced by individual hand written letters than electronic forms of communication (Chadwick, 2006:121). However, this may not be the case in the Irish

⁷³ Social capital theorists draw a distinction between bonding (inclusive) and bridging (exclusive) capital, where the former depends on networks that are 'homogenous and inward looking'. In contrast, bridging capital relies on outward looking, diverse ties. For Chadwick, it seems possible that the internet offers the possibility of increasing bonding capital because it allows 'access' to find people with similar beliefs or disposition. Bridging capital may be more difficult, but even here he suggests that it depends on the type of networking that the internet allows. Bonding capital is less dependent on the media, reliant more on real-world encounters. However, bridging capital is dependent on ties across geographical spaces. And yet, it may be the case that such contacts are easier to sustain through the internet (Chadwick, 2006: 107).

context where its political voting system appears to increase the importance of the ‘local dimension’ to national politics.

7.4 An Alternative Economic Narrative

A crucial element of the *Friends* campaign has been to challenge an economic narrative that had detrimental social consequences. It is impossible to put a *value* on the Woods, ‘it is more than about business’, it is about ‘*community*, as well as being *valuable in its own right*’:

Caroline Stanley: We are not talking about a financial plan ... to us...is it? It's not about finances...*It's about people! That's where we are coming from... it's really about people.*

Colin Stanley: The reality is... that it is the people that use Merlin Woods... what it does for the people of Galway City is far more valuable than any road they can put in there.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2014).

That development narratives are divorced from the social life of the community are concerns that are not just articulated by *Friends of Merlin Woods*, but also by other members of the community, such as Principal of Merlin Woods School, Paula O'Connor, who felt that the decision to plan the bus corridor did not take into account the local community at all. The corridor would create a divide between the school and the public areas that the children use was also of huge concern to the principal:

We are trying to build a sense of community and here they are planning a bus corridor to run right through it and divide it literally, physically will cause another divide...

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

Friends of Merlin Woods are supporting an alternative development narrative, one that seeks to counter the tendency to privatize space that resides within a market driven

philosophy. In contrast the *Friends* have sought to become the official ‘stewards of the castle’. They propose an alternative vision, one that does not seek short-term gain through development that may be sponsored by banks or wealthy individual/ groups that have little or no interest in what is left to a community once their venture is complete, but long-term sustainability, understood in terms of what is of value *for* the community, as decided by that community.

The *Friends* accept that generating employment is crucial for a community’s healthy relationship with the woods, but they argue that there are sustainable ways in which this can be achieved. They hope that any economic value that the woods hold will be used to sustain the woods as well as other ventures and businesses in the area:

Caroline Stanley: ...that it is about people who come into the city to visit it as a tourist. We can actually create a place where people could get employment ... we can create a place...we can create an income.

Colin Stanley: Generate employment for the historian...for example...

Caroline Stanley: We have loads of ideas about what could be done.

Colin Stanley: Or even somewhere for people to go for a cup of tea. That would pull people in.

Caroline Stanley: We could set up a whole cooperative that was about culture and arts and employment.

Colin Stanley: We could hire the cottage out to someone to provide ice cream... we have to make it generate money.

Caroline Stanley: Even down this road.. the amount of tourists who have asked me where there is a coffee shop. The area needs cleaning up.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2014).

This alternative economic narrative, one that instils participation at its core, seeks to reconnect Merlin Woods with both its hinterland and people. Another dimension to this

argument is how a place is experienced (and shaped) by how ‘others’ perceive it. The *Friends*’ starting point was, ‘Why can’t the DRA become a centre of excellence for culture and the arts?’ For many authors the focus on suburban areas tends to focus on social problems (see Wacquant, 2008; Power, 1997). In contrast, the position of the *Friends* is to highlight the positive dimension to this suburban area, a narrative that elevates a regard for their ‘sense’ of place, home and community as a priority. In this sense, it aligns closely with Robertson (2012) who moves away from the idea of the of the suburban edge being either a site of ‘nothing’ or a container for social deviance, to an understanding of a place with layers of history, multiple connections, and far-reaching social and symbolic practices (Robertson, 2012:37).

In the Ardaun development plan, the woods are unrecognised as an asset in itself, thus representing a forgotten resource. Colin Stanley admits that the first time they conducted a Google search for the wood, ‘All we found was a little blog that said that it was a dark, dirty, murky woods on the way to Galway...’ (Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013). Since October, 2012, the *Friends* have sought to rectify this omission, and their campaign focuses upon the social, economic and natural benefits of the wood. For instance, the community are encouraging people to use the woods for orienteering, rather than travelling elsewhere:

Now that Dick O’Halloran (member of *Friends of Merlin Woods*) has done up an orienteering map they can save money. It would have cost 500 euro to go to Connemara or somewhere... Merlin is just up the road... that’s big reduction in cost.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

Involvement or participation is an enduring feature of this alternative narrative, one that seeks to distance itself from those initiatives that have imposed a predefined model of development. Nowhere is this more evident than in the example of Galway

Council's art initiative in the area of Sean Bhaile, known by locals as the 'the blue dogs'. As far as the residents were concerned, they 'just arrived':

Caroline Stanley: Nobody knows how that happened... they just arrived. Even one of the guys who lives in the estate went up when they had the opening and he was told to leave, that it was nothing to do with him.... All the houses were built and everyone was living in them. We didn't even get an invite to the unveiling... A neighbour went out, and he was shooed away... nothing against the artist, but if we were given a choice about what we wanted in the estate we wouldn't have chosen the blue dogs would we?

Colin Stanley: No....

Caroline Stanley: They are ugly... they are irrelevant... to our estate...

Colin Stanley: Makes you wonder why how much they cost and what the connection was...?

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2014).



Figure 63 Blue Dogs. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Similarly, little or no consideration appears to have been given to the fact that the bus corridor would create a ‘divide’ between the school and the public areas that the children would use:

If we want to use the play pitches that we have full access to we have to bring these four and five year old children across the bus corridor. I asked them if there would be a walkway and we were told no!! We would literally have to cross a bus corridor to get onto our playing pitches. We would also have to cross the road in order to bring the children to the woods. We would have to cross the corridor to bring the children to the playground. It makes no sense to me...We don't want it.

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

I would be hugely concerned about the road going through the woods. Not only would it diminish the amenity, but on a safety level to have a bus corridor running right outside the doors of two schools is really worrying, and there is the pollution.

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

7.5 The Craft of Building Community

The experience of the *Friends* is similar to that of the residents of the Fearann Ri Fionnuisce, Caistlean Thorlaigh estates, which came together to resolve a ghost estate.

The *Friends* are a community voice, where the term community represents a form of social organization that can mediate between personal and institutional contexts.

Interestingly, new forms of social action in the DRA strongly indicate a shift toward more collective forms of agency. Caroline Stanley acknowledges the power of the shared encounter:

Caroline Stanley: There are people, like in Tur Uisce, who have been fighting the bus corridor, as the road was supposed to go around their houses. They had been fighting a long time. They removed some of the bus corridor from outside their front doors. So, there's a kinda thing that people don't like the road... it has a bad reputation.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2014).

Although any shared encounter can be charged with potential challenges, it is the simple act of unification around the shared cause of ‘saving’ *Merlin Woods* that has brought back the social element to community life. Community has become a craft of creating something together, for the benefit of the whole. Regular ‘litter pickups’, for example, perform both an important aesthetic and environmental function, but act also as ‘a great way to meet people and build a sense of community’ (10th September, 2013. Conversation, with Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, Caislean Thorlaigh).

In any public place litter is a problem and, in a wood, this can be compounded by both illegal logging (likely to increase as other sources of energy become increasingly expensive) and drinking. Both Caroline and Colin Stanley believe such issues can be ameliorated in time:

Caroline Stanley: There are no bins. We are working with them [City Council] now about littering and illegal logging, which are the two main antisocial behaviours, and drinking of course is another. But, the drinking would not be so bad if people put their cans in the bins. The illegal logging is worse. They are cutting down young ash trees. If they were cutting down the pine, they would be doing you a favour, but they’re cutting down the trees that need to be rejuvenated. The biggest issue is that they need educating about which ones to log. But the reason they are cutting the ash is that’s what sells for firewood.

Colin Stanley: People talk about anti-social behaviour in the woods. You can’t blame the woods for the rubbish in it. The rubbish on Galway City streets is as bad. It’s everywhere.

Caroline Stanley: Look at Race Week... *it's society*. Look at the beaches. If there are no bins, pick up your rubbish and bring it home. Everyone blames someone else. People need to take responsibility for their own rubbish. We could give up with Merlin, doing the litter picks, because every time you go back there is more. But, at least for a few days after you done it you walk through and it looks good. And if we keep doing it more and more people will become conscious. We were

doing it one day and a man walked out of his house and said: I'll give you a hand. If it's only one person you wake up to it...

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2014).

While this takes time, people are responding:

Colin Stanley: ...and that's the thing... people use the woods ...when we are litter picking people see us. They ask what we are doing. It helps community because it makes you talk about it.

Caroline Stanley: then we put it up on the page and people say 'I meant to go' ... but, even by them saying that they meant to go, someone else sees it on the page and then they may come.

Drinking outdoors or 'bush drinking' as it is known by young people in Galway, is not peculiar to the woods, but is a concern. However, the *Friends* are more concerned with the rubbish than social engineering:

Caroline Stanley: I don't think we should dictate to someone... like someone else said to me that we need *to cut out the drinking in the woods*. I say that this is not the biggest issue... it's the litter and the logging. I don't see anything wrong with someone going for a picnic or glass of wine. It's the mentality of drinking that is the issue.

Colin Stanley: All we want is for them to bring their rubbish home with them. We are trying to get bins in the drinking areas. It's about education as well.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2014).

For both Caroline and Colin Stanley, the educational value of the woods is a vital element to this exciting process. However, education is understood not in the traditional sense, a classroom setting with formal assessment. Rather, this is place-based education, where conservation is learnt through creative engagement: art, butterfly transects, bird watches, bat and nature walks.

Following events such as walks organised by the botanist, Matthew O'Toole's *Magical Merlin Woods* guided tour on 16th November, 2013, the results or observations

are disseminated through Facebook. Photographs are uploaded and people comment. For instance, on 24th - 25th July, 2013, pictures that were taken in Merlin Castle were uploaded and later identified by a Facebook member as European Cave Spiders. Entries on the page range from casual comments, such as 'the holly looks great today' (November 16th, 2013) to those that detail extensive educational projects, such as the discovery of a Long-Eared Brown Bat in Merlin Castle in October, 2013, as part of the Bat Conservation Project. The *Friends* also have on-going projects (Mammal Survey, 10th October, 2013) that are seasonally specific. The group has also made available, free of charge, a booklet identifying butterflies in the woods. The butterflies were photographed by Colin Stanley and recorded with the National Biodiversity Data Centre by Caroline Stanley as part of the Irish Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. Once a week, between April and September, 2013, the *Friends* walked the same route through *Merlin Woods* and recorded what they saw.⁷⁴ They have also compiled a thirteen-page booklet identifying *Merlin's* wild flowers, with thirty-seven photographs. The preservation of *Merlin's* two Barn owls and two breeding red squirrels are also very important to the *Friends*.

Caroline Stanley: I was saying to someone: I have learnt so much in the last six months... If I was reading a book I would have learnt nothing. But, I'm out there. It's about going out and saying: what is that thing... and then go to the books to find out – rather than going to a book and then trying to find it. We are trying to identify everything in the woods, cause no one else is going to do it.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

⁷⁴ Green-veined White, Large White, Small White, Wood White, Orange Tip, Brimstone, Red admiral, Painted lady, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Common Blue, Small Copper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Speckled wood, Silver-Washed Fritillary.

These resources are available to both schools and the general public. Principal Paula O'Connor, of Merlin Woods primary school also appreciates the educational benefits of being located near the wood:

We are ideally placed beside an idyllic natural resource. The children should really be seeing the changes in nature, seeing nature in its natural state, animals in their habit and learning about all these things not from a book. We need to be able to visit these places. So we go very regularly visit the woods, go on nature walks and trails... we are very lucky to have it close by. And as they get older I would love there to be orienteering there for the children, and have full on extended activities down there. We are blessed to have this amenity in our area. We are a city school with countryside and nature at our fingertips. I think we have to instil a sense of pride in our environment and nurture for our environment in the kids. We got our green school flag the second year we opened. We are really environmentally aware in the school and having the woods nearby the children get to see 'why do we have to be careful', 'what's so important about if the trees are gone, the birds won't have anywhere to nest', all these things are important.

(Paula O'Connor, Principal of Merlin Woods School. Interview 9th August, 2013. Connaught Hotel, Galway City).

For the *Friends*, heritage is vital, confirmed by a dedicated week-long exhibition in the Ballybane library, displaying old pictures and stories about the area.

Caroline Stanley: Also conservation of the castle is important. That's what I was saying to Jim Higgins, the heritage officer. It needs to belong to the community, or be in our care. Then we could use it... rebuild it and use it as an information point and a heritage centre for the area. We could even maybe restore the old cottage. There's loads of projects...



Figure 64 Merlin Woods Castle on the edge of Doughiska development. The castle is architecturally a Norman tower. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

But heritage is not just about old buildings, or simply about education. Heritage has value because it brings texture to social life. These sites are full of meaning and significance and, while the histories of some areas carry trauma, it is important that histories, memories and what these events signify, are teased out and understood. Here, the work of McAuley (2006) is of value, because she draws our attention to how history is interpreted, sometimes at the expense of whole populations or communities (such as the ‘history wars’ in Australia between Anglo-mainstream populations and the Aboriginal minority). McAuley believes that engaging creatively in ‘remembering the past’ alleviates public grieving for past atrocities and helps reconstruct new, more equal futures, where more inclusive interpretations of the past take place. She argues that we

need imaginative ‘interventions’ to activate and reactivate certain memory sites, and we need to take seriously the idea of communal grieving and communal memorialising. Such remembering goes to the heart of what it is to be a responsible citizen because, unless we deal properly and honestly with the past, we cannot live decently in the present (McAuley, 2006:173).

While the *Friends* are not dealing with the kind of cultural trauma described by McAuley, I have two points to make about her comments in relation to the woods. First, that engaging in historically place-based stories can help us contemplate what kind of future we would like to create. Second, that we can use these experiences *preventatively*; imagining the kind of experiences that we don’t wish to re-create. In other words, we learn from the past. In this sense, ‘being remembered, an experience becomes a different kind of experience’ (Casey, 1987 xxii).

Colin and Caroline Stanley are deeply concerned about the bus corridor going through an old site:

The road will come through from the roundabout from the end of main Dublin road. It will cut across this green field, which is council land. In this field there is an old road, Bothar Na Cailligh (Witches Road or the Hags Road). Locals believe this to be the old Oranmore to Galway Road. This road could be destroyed. I think that it should be preserved. It will divide our community in half. It will trash two incredible things like a 12th century road and the woods itself.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2013).

Some could easily say ‘what’s the use of this old road’ (pictured below) to which I would respond that it provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the type of futures we want.



Figure 65 Bothar Na Cailligh (Witch's Road or The Hags Road. Photograph by Colin Stanley.

If environmental education is enhanced through engagement with place, we need also to appreciate that modern narratives tend to focus predominantly on the present or the future, whereas I argue that what is also crucial to environmental conversation is the need to engage with the past. One of the ways in which this can be done is through storytelling and place-based public performance. This is not a passive experience because it transforms the spectator into a performer. Storytelling reconnects those in the present with the experiences of the past. While we need to resist excessively romanticising the past, there is a considerable body of literature that maintains that when stories are performed they can help to renegotiate the future (McAuley 2006; Schaefer and Watt 2006; Edmondson, 2000). Engaging with ancient sites also has an intergenerational value: place-based knowledge helps us to appreciate conservation because it reveals the amount of hard work over long periods of time that created the woods. It helps us appreciate that rich biodiversity forms complex systems that take a long time to achieve (Browne and Fuller 2009).

Thus, Norbert Sheerin, who helps the group run local history walks, describes how the woods owe their legacy to three generations of the Waithman family who were described as ‘great forestry people’ (Sheerin, 2000:68) The heads of this family followed a tree planting programme that has culminated in the richness of the area today. Place-based stories, such as the Waithmans’, provide us with intergenerational stories that can encourage us to use our imaginations to re-visit the past and live the stories for ourselves.

In 1876 Robert W. Waithman purchased Merlin Park. Wyndham Waithman’s second wife, Dricca Waithman, was asked by Jim Fahy of Radio Telefis Eireann, ‘about loneliness’, where she spoke of the beautiful trees and referred to the location as “...God’s own land...” implying the question how could anyone be lonely in such wonderful surroundings (Sheerin, 2000:68). By engaging with historical place-based stories, contemporary generations relive the Waithmans’ experience, learning to appreciate some of the more subtle elements to the woods that are concerned with human-nature relationships. Such stories conjure up the emotional attachment that people have over many generations have with the wood. They also provide an opportunity to reflect upon how natural environments can become places for inner contentment and solace, something that is hard to measure, but clearly important to people. Merlin Park House was demolished in the 1940s to build a sanatorium for patients with tuberculosis. Here, Sheerin notes that

It is sad to consider that two people who dearly loved and cherished this house were chosen from history to witness its demise... Only its leafy woods remain as evidence of cherished hands which planted them, rich green in spring and summer, golden brown in autumn. A witness to nature’s cycle, ensuring a coniferous resource for generation to come (Sheerin, 2000:690).

There is a further important issue that the work of the *Friends* has highlighted; that natural woodland areas are symbolic spaces that invite *possibility* because they are not *constrained*, unlike those that are ‘finished’, ‘manicured’ or closed. These are areas, I would argue, that stimulate the imagination, which is a valuable community resource, one

undervalued in much of the social development literature. In contrast the literature on place and performance (Lewis, 2006; McAuley 2006) provides an insight into the subtle, yet powerful manner in which humans use the imagination as a form of agency. For Lewis (2006), areas such as Merlin Woods are not a void or ‘sterile wasteland’, but rather are ‘pregnant with possibility’ (Lewis, 2006:286). I argue that shared imaginative work, when conducted in public spaces, can be a crucial element in the community building-puzzle, and that the work of the *Friends* is an example for how this can be realised because it links imagination with landscaped emplaced stories. This is because it is how meaning is attributed to a place, a place to which people now feel they belong.

Relationships to place are

are lived most often in the company of other people, and it is on these occasions-when places are sensed *together*... Relationships to places may also find expression through the agencies of myth, prayer, music, dance, art, architecture, and, in many communities, recurrent forms of religious and political ritual (Basso, 1996:109-110).

A particularly striking example of this has been the use of mandalas in the woods. Mandala is Sanskrit for ‘circle’. It is an ancient symbol that has been used in Hinduism and Buddhism as it represents the Universe. Sometimes mandalas are temporary creations, made from natural materials. The aim is to reveal the impermanent nature of life, reaffirming the need to take care of ourselves and our environment. As part of the bio-diversity week, the *Friends* built an artistic interpretation of a mandala in the woods, which combines an artistic expression of an ancient symbol, with ideas of recycling and conservation that have succeeded in bringing together a number of residents to use their collective imagination. The *Friends*’ mandala was made from flowers, pine cones and stones, a symbol made public. By creating a public piece of art out of the wood’s raw material allowed a group of people to collectively engage in the symbol’s meaning. The *Friends* have brought Lewis’ ideas of imaginative emplacement to the fore:

Caroline Stanley: Sharon Lynch lives on the other side of Merlin Woods and was happy to help out, as she is an artist. I had the idea of doing a Mandala in the woods. I needed a project that would use free

material, that was engaging and that would not be bringing anything into the woods. Everything that went into the Mandala was already in the woods. We must remember that if we pick flowers, we pick some flowers... we don't strip it bare, because what we are leaving is for the birds and the bees... we have to look after nature as well... But, if there is an invasive species you can take as much of that as you want. There are loads of pine cones on the ground you can take as many as you like. Things like bluebells you don't go near them cause they are only in a small section of the woods. But the garlic flowers, you could pick and the dandelion...

Colin Stanley: You can pick two or three from there, so you are not striping the woods.

Caroline Stanley: About 200 people came to the overall event. 45 people came to the history walk. The bat walk was also popular.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2014).



Figure 66 A Mandala created by artist Sharon Lynch and the DRA community member, for the Friends of Merlin Woods National Biodiversity Week, 20-26th May, 2013. Photograph by Colin Stanley.

On one level the mandala confirms that a public space has been reclaimed, that it is no longer empty but suffused with new meaning. It becomes a public space collectively (re) created through shared imagination, serving to inspire ‘conversations’ and encourage social interaction between strangers. Thus, as Lewis (2006) has argued, there is enormous potential for places to ‘be other than they may seem’ (Lewis, 2006: 284-285). Here, such activities are a place-based invitation to discover and explore the ‘unrealised depths’ inherent in ourselves (Lewis, 2006).

That the group used only material from the woods to create the mandala is significant, demonstrating respect for natural resources, as well as providing an example of how people can ‘work with their imaginative landscapes’.



Figure 67 Making of a Mandala. Heritage Week, Merlin Woods, Doughiska, 15th - 26th August, 2013. Photograph taken by Colin Stanley.

The mandala is sensitive to its setting, and provides a powerful image of how we can shape the environment sustainably, a matter of import to Lewis (2006) who argues:

I am always depressed...when I note the standard practice in Sydney of completely levelling a plot before a new house is built. All trees, plants, and other features are commonly reduced to rubble, to a flat featureless plain, as a prelude to the new (often ugly, to my eyes) structure being erected. This wilful creation of empty spaces out of live places needs to be consciously opposed and exposed, where ever possible (Lewis, 2006:287).

The mandala in Merlin Woods is a symbolic ritual representation of how we should treat places and offers an example of what Lewis would describe as ‘going gently into a place first, appreciating its features, and then actively engaging in the imaginative process of reconfiguring it for a particular purpose’ (Lewis, 2006:287). For the *Friends*, a ‘particular purpose could be found in the problem of drinking in the woods. The response was to locate the mandala ‘in a drinking area’. And yet, as Caroline Stanley points out, ‘No-one touched it...’, demonstrating how shared imagination can influence positive behaviour. In this sense, the *Friends* have listened to ‘the voice of the woods’. They are engaging in a new narrative, one that is sensitive to the ecological and symbolic life of the wood. They have asked ‘how will the wood respond, benefit or be affected by our activities’ and they have also asked ‘what can we give to the woods, rather than what can the wood give us?’ Here, I would argue the *Friends* are ‘living with the woods’, rather than *using* it in more traditional terms.

The *Friends* have also sought to use storytelling and the role of the imagination as a tool for changing social behaviour. In the woods there is a

fantastic beech tree... there is a history behind the tree... It's a great story about a local carpenter from the area. The carpenters used to do go into Merlin estate and say I want to buy a tree... select one and chop it down... and take it away... he was going to select that tree and he went 'hang on there's a bend in it.. It's not going to be good enough'... so that tree survived because of its bend... it survived because it had a fault.

Colin Stanley: A relation of the Fahy family from the area did this research. He said it was a true story. He called it the grandfather tree...

Caroline Stanley: That was the nice side of the story... that this tree had survived probably between 150 and 200 years in this area. It has a lot of history to it. No one knows how many times was it going to be cut down; how many times has it come through and survived... it has a story.. it is a survivor... in one way...

But there have been a number of young lads who have committed suicide there. And they keep putting the rope back over it... at least that's what I have heard... that the rope keeps being put up if taken down... But sometimes you only hear half-truths... you have to be careful about what the truth is... I wouldn't personally tell the story when we are on walks - that this is the place where someone committed suicide. Cause, I don't think we need to dwell on the sadness that's in that area. Because it's not the trees fault or the areas fault. It's just that this is a good place to hang yourself because it has a good bow or branch or whatever... And then unfortunately, what happens quite a lot is that one guy would hang himself and then four weeks later his friend would hang himself. That happens quite a lot I think...

I was thinking more about writing a story about the history of the carpenter looking at the tree, or the families like Wakemans or the Blakes... any of the families even around the castle grounds... I think we need to focus on the positive things... because sometimes if we idolise suicide or anything... like that, you reinforce it... I'm not saying you shouldn't talk about it. There is a time and place to talk about things, but we are not a group to be talking about suicide. We are a group that wants to support the positive things about the woods. It has a bad enough reputation with the anti-social behaviour that goes on there without us enforcing any more ideas about it. Our idea was always to ...

Colin Stanley: ... highlight the positive use of Merlin Woods and to object to the council's proposed road through it.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2014).

It is possible that a theatrical re-enactment of the carpenter's story might reduce the negative energy associated with the tree. In so doing, it might even have a more

dramatic effect; providing inspiration to young people in the area to seek help, as the story symbolises how something once perceived as ‘imperfect’ had been its strength and that our ‘weaknesses’ have a historical and situational meaning and if rearticulated may be understood and ‘healed’. Such ideas allude to the potential for landscaped stories to be therapeutic, or as Basso would prefer to put it (1996), landscaped stories make us wise: ‘wisdom sits in places’ (109). I would argue that these kinds of gatherings are valuable community building encounters, because they take place in public areas and awaken the social dimension to daily life.

Saving a wood from destruction, building pathways of participatory education through outdoor art and environmental projects, or bat and butterfly walks, is a social craft. Contributing to the ‘life of the woods’ makes a connection between people, their history, environment and future. Through the group’s work the woods have become alive with meaningful social encounters as groups gather for regular walks and events, such as the Biodiversity Week, 20-26th May, 2013 and Heritage Week, 15th -25th August, 2013), activities that have created what Basso (1996) describes as a ‘sense of place’ (Basso, 1996: xiii; Feld and Basso, 1996), where ‘groups of men and women have invested themselves (their thoughts, their values and their collective sensibilities)’ into a place that they now feel that they belong.

Colin Stanley argues that the community needs to hold on to the last public green space on the outskirts of the city:

Colin Stanley: The reality is that Galway City will develop along the motorway. Within the city limits this is the last green space. It’s the last public space to service places like Renmore, Castlepark, Mervue. There are a lot of people who live there...

Caroline Stanley: Public space is what we are talking about... and that’s what it is. Within the woods it’s a community space that brings the whole of the East side together. You know, that’s what we actually found out in biodiversity week. It’s something we didn’t really think about... but, when there were people in there...there were people from everywhere... what we found was that all of a sudden you have this

connection between Doughiska, Ballybane, Mervue, Roscam...the woods built these connections.

Colin Stanley: ... it gives you something in common...

Caroline Stanley: ... it's a common bond for the East...

Colin Stanley: it's a common place that brings people together.

Caroline Stanley: it brings all these places that think of themselves as *individual* and all of a sudden you become 'the East' ...your Galway City East, *together*... this was one of the things that really came through during Biodiversity Week.

(Conversation with Caroline and Colin Stanley and Anna King in the ARD Family Resource Centre, Doughiska. 29th July, 2014).

The alternative forms of gathering created by the *Friends of Merlin Woods* have been successful in a number of ways. They have galvanised support to call to an end to unsustainable development practices and have sought to bring isolated groups and individuals together, generating a real sense of community spirit. All of these encounters are situated in place, either through online communication (Facebook), or through physical engagement in Merlin Woods. That there are rich physical elements to the natural habitat that are healthy and appealing to people is important, but it is not the only benefit. Thus, while there are strong arguments that defend woodland conservation, the Merlin Woods project highlights another critical issue: the symbolic potential inherent in a natural habitat. However, before this can take hold, the dominant interpretation of space and place has to be challenged and renegotiated. For the DRA, the urban development that took hold in a dramatically short period of time has led to a form of 'landscape identity crisis', where the meaning people attach to their local environment is challenged and uprooted with an influx of newcomers and mass urbanisation. The *Friends'* campaign is part of an on-going and powerful (re) negotiation of the DRA's physical and symbolic landscapes on the parts of both new communities and more

established residents. It is an on-going project, but one that can be expected to reap significant rewards.

Chapter 8

Public Space Theatre as a Form of Gathering: the Role of the Creative Arts in the Community-Building Puzzle

To my question, ‘Who needs theatre?’, then, I would reply, we all do—not for its superior aesthetic qualities, which it reveals so rarely, certainly not for its comfort or convenience, not even for its capacity to move forward in space and time in a culture of canned images, but because it represents *social history in the making*, both on the stage and in the audience. *It signifies that community we have forsaken*, the accidents and *risks we would rather avoid*, the sweat and gristle we prefer to disguise, *the labor of humans working against the odds*... theatre represents an act of confidence—banal and dangerous and inconvenient like life, and like life, *still capable of inspiring hope* (emphasis added).

(Robert Brustein, 1987).

Underpinning this chapter’s themes are the narratives that set the stage for the theatre group, the voices of the community and the stories they told. These conversations established the importance of culture⁷⁵ in everyday life, and how Irish (and non-Irish) identities change in a socially-dislocated environment. I maintain that a nuanced understanding of social life, one that recognizes the tensions inherent in the community-building puzzle, can be achieved through the lens of public theatre. This raises the prospect of employing a role for the arts in social regeneration.

⁷⁵ As identified in chapter four, culture here is defined as something experienced (norms and values), something expressed via artefacts, customs and practices as well something that links individuals from the past to the present and onto the future. Cultures are made up of interconnected habits, practices and ideas about how things should be done and they are more often than not unconscious and they involve accepted forms of feelings and accepted understandings about the world (Edmondson, 2001:61). Furthermore, ‘cultures confer meaning’, and meaning is ‘intrinsically a public matter’. Cultures shape thoughts, feeling and activities by giving them intelligibility within a public sphere’. In other words, ‘the things we do colour ‘what we get done, even though they do not force us to do it’ (Edmondson, 2001:62).

While Sennett's work (*Theatrum Mundi*) sheds new light on the use of the arts and performance for bringing 'life' to cities, this research offers an insight into how theatre can be a mechanism for regenerating the social and physical environment of a multicultural community in Ireland. In this sense, it follows a path more familiarly associated with that of Hall (2012), who argues that local contact *matters* when living with difference and change. This research highlights the importance of creative spaces that are conducive for meaningful engagement and the role of place-based performance in long-term sustainable development.

There are four valuable themes that public theatre delivers to which I wish to draw attention and examine in more detail: the way in which dramaturgy assists in developing the confidence of young people, providing useful skills for adulthood. The importance of storytelling and interactive dialogue (not instruction) for critical reflection, and the role of the imagination and fantasy as a form of agency. Finally, how the 'making of theatre' creates a space in which groups can organize and collectively engage, forging a sense of belonging.

8.1 Setting the Stage for Making Theatre

The DRA's shifting social and physical landscape has presented a series of challenges to the community: social dislocation, alienation and / or the difficulty of engaging in social encounters with 'strangers'. These were themes raised in the Geraghty Report (2009), which identified a range of troubling conclusions about the area's social profile, chief amongst which was the risk of a rise in offending behaviour, especially amongst young people. It also noted the potential for the segregation and growth of 'parallel communities', the increasing isolation of older members of the community as well as sustained transience and possible 'ghettoisation' (Geraghty, 2009:100; see also Frecklington and Carney, 2013). Throughout 2011-2013 these concerns were the focal point of community discussions and it was, in Dan Hurley's opinion, everyone's responsibility to ensure that young people could flourish. There were, he had said, grave implications if 'we failed to step up to the plate':

The youth now will grow up into adults and see that the community didn't provide for them. It will determine how they see the community into the future, which will be carried on to their children, and various successive generations.

(Dan Hurley, spokesperson for the DRA Development Company, Ltd, 23rd September, Interview, Castlegar Complex, Roscam).

It was not just the lack of services for young people that was identified, but issues relevant to how young people grow up. Thus, Magret Adebayo expressed the need for 'role models in the community', stressing that

if we don't do something soon for our children then they will be influenced by negative influences. When I first moved into Sean Bhaile, there were no problems. Now, we have many problems. It is so important that facilities are made available for young people and children. Otherwise, trouble is down the road...

(Magret Adebayo. 11th January, 2012, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska, 7,30pm – 9pm).

The World Café experience was a participatory project that had employed creative group methodologies to explore shared views about living in a community, identifying both a need for increased services for young people in the area and for structured social events that encourage cross-cultural encounters. Three related issues were prioritised: the importance of how we gather (method), the quality of the experience and the need for social development projects that provide uplifting, rewarding energetic exchanges (June, 19th 2012). Importantly, it illuminated the need for further research to discover a structured way to embrace diversity and difference. This chapter explores how public theatre can provide the symbolic and physical space from which the World Café findings can be realized. This ethnographic research suggests that public theatre offers a social 'space' that is more than just a creative form of expression or performance; it can offer individuals and communities, including people with different values, an invaluable and constructive opportunity to encounter one another. In so doing, it sheds light also on other interesting insights: the importance of creativity in the community-building puzzle and the role of the imagination in stimulating agency and change. The chapter is divided

into three parts. The first part provides the narratives from which the Youth theatre project evolved. The second part is an overview of the group's main performance: *An Táin*. Part three is an analysis of the contribution 'making theatre' has had for this community.

8.2 Part One: Prelude.

On a cold June afternoon a group of teenagers met for the first time to explore whether they would take part in making theatre. The Castlegar Complex was freezing cold, and it would take at least two hours before the room was warm. I didn't have the keys to get into the office to turn on the heating, hardly the most auspicious of starts for the first day of theatre. The young people arrived in dribs and drabs, almost dragging themselves in as if under duress. There wasn't as many as we had hoped. New arrivals took their seats that had been arranged in a circle. They kept their coats on, and no one talked to each other. Their hands were shoved deep into their pockets, looking down either at the floor, or their mobiles. Myself and Nuala flustered around chatting furtively to try and lift the energy in the room. Everybody ignored us. I felt like a useless flapping hen with a clutch of new born chicks. It struck me that this was not an environment conducive for any kind of acting, let alone a meaningful encounter. The dull lights seemed heavy on my heart as I looked upon the bedraggled scene before me. Somehow the old chairs, the broken down cupboards and old carpet seemed worse than I had previously noticed. Nuala rang Michael Ford to come and sort out the heating. She seemed less perturbed, her usual matter of fact self: 'It will be grand', she said.

I pulled the curtains to the area in the centre that was used for the purpose of the church. The room looked even worse after this, for the religious paraphernalia was at least a splay of colour and visual stimulation (for me at least, no doubt the teenagers didn't even notice). The curtains didn't fully close because the rung above was so old. I had visions of the whole thing falling down, as I tugged them with anguish. I pulled a chair to fasten the images out of view, light still shone through the cracks, and if you followed their shafts it was possible to still make out shapes that signified symbolism and

ritual. I silently hoped that nobody would mind. No one, I thought, would come back; it's a complete disaster! In came Conal. Undeterred by the environment, he immediately 'got to work'. His presence alone seemed to warm the room. A few ground rules were introduced, most notably, no mobile phones! Reluctantly, they were turned off. And then... warm up exercises; I cringed... oh no... surely they are all too old for games, this was all such a bad idea...

We begin with a prelude to the young people's narratives, the objective of which is to outline the kind of conversations that shaped the style and tone of the theatre project. It is important to note that these narratives are taken from adults speaking about what matters to them. What unfolds later in the chapter is how such ideas were translated into experience for the young people involved. Drawing its structure from Brunstein's quote, part one is arranged in the following pattern: *social history in the making*, which outlines how identity, culture and heritage matter. It introduces the reader to the value of 'getting involved', how community activity can overcome the tensions involved in making a new home in a culturally unfamiliar environment, why inter-generational dialogue matters and how identities evolve. *That community we have forsaken* provides a story of how one family overcame dislocation caused by migration and how participation in a culturally diverse social environment can alleviate these problems. In *the labour of humans working against the odds* I show how a simple encounter with a 'stranger' can enrich lives. It elevates the importance of place, the land with which we identify ourselves, and the role of place in belonging. Once again, the central concern is why people gather, in this case for theatre, and how the themes became embedded into the life course of the project.

8.3 Social History in the Making

Outlining the background to the theatre project is significant, because issues that matter to people need to be established. Moreover, pausing on some of the narrative underpinning the project, which evolved from 2009 onward, was crucial to developing a deeper understanding of how public theatre can contribute to an awareness of social life

in a diverse setting, confirming Brunstein's view that theatre is more than about performance, it is about what matters to people.

Conversations during the research were varied and rich with imagery about far-off lands, cultural practices or the need to hold on to the things that represent identity. For people such as Nuala Keady, there was a tangible sense in which her cultural identity had been potentially threatened by change. There was, she argued, a need to 'hold on to Irish traditional culture', as well as to recognize a growing demand from other people grappling with the task of making new homes for themselves (Conversation with Nuala Keady, 19th June, 2012). As the ethnographic research unfolded it became clear that this was not an easy task, especially given the lack of public spaces for encounters conducive to exploring (and resolving) such difficulties.

Nuala Keady became involved in the theatre project because she wanted to make a difference and because she cared about how all of these issues could be worked out. Nuala had no previous experience of how theatre could help to resolve such tensions, but following the positive feeling toward the World Café experience, and her son's involvement with a theatre group for people with disabilities (he has Williams Syndrome), called *The Blue Tea Pot*, she was enthusiastic about its potential to give people from different cultures space from which they could communicate, adapt and belong. She was also deeply committed to providing new opportunities for young people in the area (Discussion between Nuala Keady and Anna King concerning the Galway Film Centre application for an award to make a community documentary out of the theatre projects evolution, on 27th April, 2012, 147 Túr Uisce, Doughiska, as well as well as discussions on 1st May, 2012 at the Galway Film Centre.)

For other members of the new communities, what seemed to matter was being involved in community work, rather than just being 'accepted'. Randy Asante, for instance, felt that it was essential that Ghanaian people had opportunities to retain their own sense of identity, as well as to 'integrate' and 'contribute to the wider community' (13th June, 2012. World Café Evaluation, Clayton Hotel). On another occasion, he

explained that one of the reasons he became involved in setting up the Ghanaian Union was to provide support for Ghanaian culture, while at the same time helping people to adapt to the difficulties associated with migration and settling into a new area:

I moved to Ireland in late 2007. It was a bit strange at first, but the people are really really nice, the Irish hospitality is really great - you always get a cup of tea and good conversation when you first meet someone. So far my experience has been really good and interesting, I'm happy with it.

When I moved into Galway, there were a few Ghanaians living here. Myself and a few colleagues thought it might be a good idea to get ourselves into a group to look after the welfare of Ghanaians, and to also help us adapt into the Irish environment and everything. So we have managed to put together a group. We are about 37-40 people. We meet every month and we look at general issues to do with welfare, if anyone is having any problem, we see how best we can help. We also liaised with other Irish groups, like the intercultural agency and all that.

The objectives of the group were to get involved in community work. One thing I realized being a migrant working and living in Ireland, is that most of us come with an idea of working and succeeding in life... you realize that all the attention is on work, work work. But, I feel that if you live in a community it is good for you to integrate. To see how best you can also contribute. You are coming from a different culture – there might be a lot of things that you can benefit the community that you are living in and you might also learn a lot.

We have children so it is important to integrate and call Ireland our home, *because it is our home away from home*. One of the objectives of forming the Ghana union, Galway, was to get involved in community. In 2008 we set up a group called Friends of Galway, before the Ghana Union.

We were working in conjunction with the Environment Department of the Galway City Council. We would go around every Saturday to the hostels and mobilise the guys and go around doing litter collection; we went around parks and beaches picking litter. When that project finished we were looking for other ways to get involved. I'm also involved in a youth project where we train young people to play indigenous instruments from Ghana.

(Randy Asante, 6th September, 2012, Castlegar Complex. Interview for film documentary with Niamh Heery and Anna King).

As Randy Asante's views reveal, adapting to a 'home away from home' is a complex process, one that seeks to retain a sense of identity while at the same time building homes in new cultural traditions. For Randy Asante and his friends, one way of achieving this was through the practice of getting involved in community activity, as this forged relationships, creating a sense of belonging and 'usefulness'. At the World Café evaluation he explained that

we felt the best way of dealing with this challenge was to come together as a group and explore possibilities. At first we did this within our own group, but now we really want to get involved with more activities within the community. I'd really like to get involved in the youth theatre project because of this. The project sounds really good.

(13th June, 2012. World Café Evaluation, Clayton Hotel).

From this point on Randy Asante and his friends became centrally involved in a number of projects.

I volunteer on the theatre project. I come around every day to make sure the children are okay...I also open up and close the place. I've got a few Ghanaians involved in the food group, we also have some in the dance group.

(Randy Asante, 6th September, 2012, Castlegar Complex. Interview for film documentary with Niamh Heery and Anna King).

George Dolo views resonate with Randy Asante's, to the effect that asylum seekers want to 'be involved, to feel useful and valued by others in the community, rather than isolated in hostels' (Interview, 10th February, 2011, Café Mocha, Roscam).

There was a fascinating theme that ran through such narratives: the potential for shared cultural encounters that matter. It was suggested during these conversations that cross-cultural encounters could inspire new leaders, role models or create environments

conducive for human development. Randy Asante's speech at a celebration of Ghana's 56th Independence Day in Doughiska was a call for action:

We need to package and present our traditional and cultural values.

We need to respect the culture and values of other people more especially of this land.

We need to encourage community dialogue with other community groups.

We need to develop shared understanding and take interest in what is going on in our communities.

And most importantly as we become more open and inquisitive, we need to use the opportunity to share and explain our own culture and ideas to our new community.

(Randy Asante. March 9th, 2013. Clayton Hotel, Doughiska.
The first event in Galway to celebrate Ghana's 56th Independence Day, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska).

What is really interesting about this speech is the idea that if we are inquisitive about another's culture, it is possible to discover mutual opportunity to express identity. Randy Asante also highlighted the importance of 'belonging', 'identity' and 'place', as well as the need for a structure that supports these aspirations:

As a people, more especially for us here in the diaspora, we need to establish who we are and develop structures that will help promote our vision, our ideas and our culture while embracing the cultures of others.

(Randy Asante. At first event in Galway to celebrate Ghana's 56th Independence Day, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska).

For Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko, these issues were considered in great depth.⁷⁶ For them, it was the cultural dimension to social life that mattered, particularly the importance of culture to young people:

⁷⁶ While this interview took place after the Youth Theatre's first production, both Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko were (and remain) actively involved in both the World Café experience and the theatre group. I had numerous casual conversations with them about such matters during this two year process, and their ideas and experiences very much shaped the direction of this thesis. I realised when writing up the project,

Elzbieta Nikiel: it is important to me because Polish culture is my childhood. It is what I always remember. And I miss it. Now I feel like a teacher, to show the young people our tradition, because they live in a different world now. I never know this world, because we live in Poland and only know our culture. But now we are open and we see a lot of other cultures, which is okay, but we have to show our young people the culture where your father and mother and grandfather came from. We are trying to share our tradition. It is my task to show the young people...

Julia Nikiel: it is something that she must do.

(The inflection in this comment was that Elzbieta felt compelled, as if it was her life's work. It was as if it was a 'calling').

Elzbieta Nikiel: Sometimes the young people don't like this, but I feel that it's important. Julia needs to know her culture. She does not feel this now...she does not understand, but, she will want to know these things in the future.. let me explain. We moved a lot in Poland. Different parts of Poland have different cultures. I didn't know who I was because of this. I didn't have an identity. One day I thought *who am I*. Now Julia does not understand this, but maybe in 20 years she will ask '*who am I*'. I went back to our family home. I saw the houses and I went to the cemetery. I saw gravestones with my father's surname on. I felt connected. I knew then that I was close to this place in Poland. I felt stronger because of I felt that I belong. People need to know who they are. Julia feels Irish, but it is still important that she knows her Polish culture.

Julia Nikiel: I feel Irish. I have got used to Ireland rather than Poland. When I learnt English, I thought... wow, but when I got used to it I felt it was much better. It is easier.

however, that my observations or comments alone were not sufficient to do justice to the enormous contribution to both the community and to this research that they have had. I therefore visited them for a more formal interview post production, from which these remarks are taken.

Mirek Kuzenko: Culture and tradition - it's been taught to you by your parents. It is very important to teach the next generation about our culture. To teach Julia's children...

Julia Nikiel: And my children's children.. and my children's children children..

Elzbieta Nikiel: The children don't like to listen to their parents. But, her children will listen more. I think grandparents have much more influence than parents. I always speak to Mirek. We take every grandchild out for holidays. To show and speak to them about our culture, to show them photographs.

(4th September, 2013. Conversation with Elzbieta and Julia Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, 24 Caislean Thorlaigh, Doughiska).

Elzbieta Nikiel talked about the importance of culture as a conduit to discover her identity; 'who I am'. While it is impossible to discover whether she is right in her assertions, and certainly many people may experience otherwise, this chapter explores Elzbieta's Nikiel ideas about the importance of culture through the lens of public theatre. One of the reasons for this is that, like culture, theatre tends to be socially and historically co-constructed, it involves more than just the actors, it cannot be created in isolation, and is therefore not a private practice and, through enactment, time and space can be contained or expanded depending on the intention (for example a simple narrative about a small locality, while specific in nature can be applied universally to understand experiences that are geographical or historically distant). While allusive in nature, culture exists in a context, and when it is realised through the spoken word, contained within an artefact or piece of art, or lived out in practice, it is a way in which we make sense of ourselves in relation to others. Culture can also situate us in place, bring meaning and sense to our lives.

Culture was identified as important to the many people I spoke with over the four years of ethnographic study. It matters so much to Elzbieta Nikiel that she felt compelled to pass both her personal experience of culture onto others, through stories of past generations, as well as engage in more general cultural customs, such as traditional dance forms, music and wearing her national dress on special occasions. There was a sense from this conversation with Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko that we were participating in the past, present and the future (*making history*) through engaging in cultural practice.

8.4 The Community We Have Forsaken

For Randy Asante, Nuala Keady, George Dolo, Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko (and others) their identity was linked to a need to belong to the place that they call home. For Nuala Keady, experience of home was essentially located in Doughiska. For others, it was more complex, involving the use of imagination, as *home* existed in far-off lands. In both the Geraghty report (2009), and my observations during this research, the issue of being dislocated from the place people regard as home, can be troublesome, leading to alienation or sub-group clustering (social dislocation). However, to Conal Kearney, whose family had lived in Roscam for many generations, social dislocation is also about a sense of separateness from the land in which one dwells, and to the ‘stories and magic that these places hold’ (Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012).⁷⁷ For

⁷⁷ Conal Kearney, Director of the Youth Theatre Project, has travelled extensively in Europe and America, but has chosen to relocate back in his homeland of Roscam. He holds an M.A. in Drama-therapy from NUI, Galway and a B.A. in community and local study from N.U.I. Maynooth. He trained as an actor and Mime at *The Ecole Internationale Marcel Marceau* in Paris for 3 years in the early eighties. He has also worked as an actor for 25 years, mainly with the Abbey Theatre, Druid, Irish Theatre Company and R.T.E. Kearney held the position of Artistic Director of The Floating Theatre Company, taking community theatre to schools on a converted river boat to villages and towns along the inland waterways of Ireland, for over ten yrs. He recently directed a production of *The Gift of Lightning* at The Waterloo East Theatre in London.

him, a connection to these stories is a way in which young people in particular can gain a sense of belonging to both their heritage and others. ‘Belonging’ for Conal Kearney was ‘about the past, how it shapes the present, but importantly how it influences the future’ (Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012).

The quandary of how to enable people to feel that they belong to a place with which they have become newly acquainted is complex, because each individual may have a different sense of what belonging means. One’s own aspirations and quality of life are also contributory factors in developing positive feelings of being ‘at home’. Our history, as well as the present, essentially shapes all of these considerations. The extent to which our history and our previous generations shape our identity, and how we engage both in the present and future, was crystallised for me in Mirek Kuzenko’s story of both his grandfather and father’s dislocation from the place they regarded as home. Before World War II, Mirek Kuzenko’s grandfather’s home, Oreszkowce, near Lviv, was part of the Polish empire:

Mirek Kuzenko: My father’s family have an interesting story. When I was young, four years old, my Fr. would all the time tell me about the other place.

Elzbieta Nikiel: Mirek’s grandfather, and his wife and three children were taken by Russian soldiers’ during the Second World War. The soldiers came and said you have 15mins to gather a few things. They were put on a horse and cart and taken to a train. The train was not fit for people, it was for animals. They were taken to Siberia. They were there for two years. Sadly, the mother died from the conditions.

Eventually, the Russians needed more soldiers to fight against the Germans, so they came to the camps for Polish men. But, when they all arrived in Kazakhstan there were too many and the Russians threatened to send Mirek’s family back to the camps. His father managed to bribe someone with money to stay in Kazakhstan. There are many things that happened, but for now what is important is that Mirek’s father ended up going off to war and the grandfather was sent back to Siberia.

He has a private practice for personal acting and has coached a number of international actors, including Colin Farrell.

After the end of the war the place where Mirek's father was from was still occupied by Russians.

His grandfather returned, but his old house had been destroyed. All that remained was a mound of rubble. He lived there until many years later. Mirek's father, who had thought his father had died long before, was talking to stranger on a train about his lost family. The woman turned and said 'but I know your father, he is alive.' From this encounter they were re-joined. His father went on to spend the rest of his life trying to find the rest of his family.

(10th September, 2013. Conversation, with Julia and Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, 24 Caislean Thorlaigh, Doughiska).

In 1992, Mirek Kuzenko's father wrote a diary of all these events and gifted it to his son:

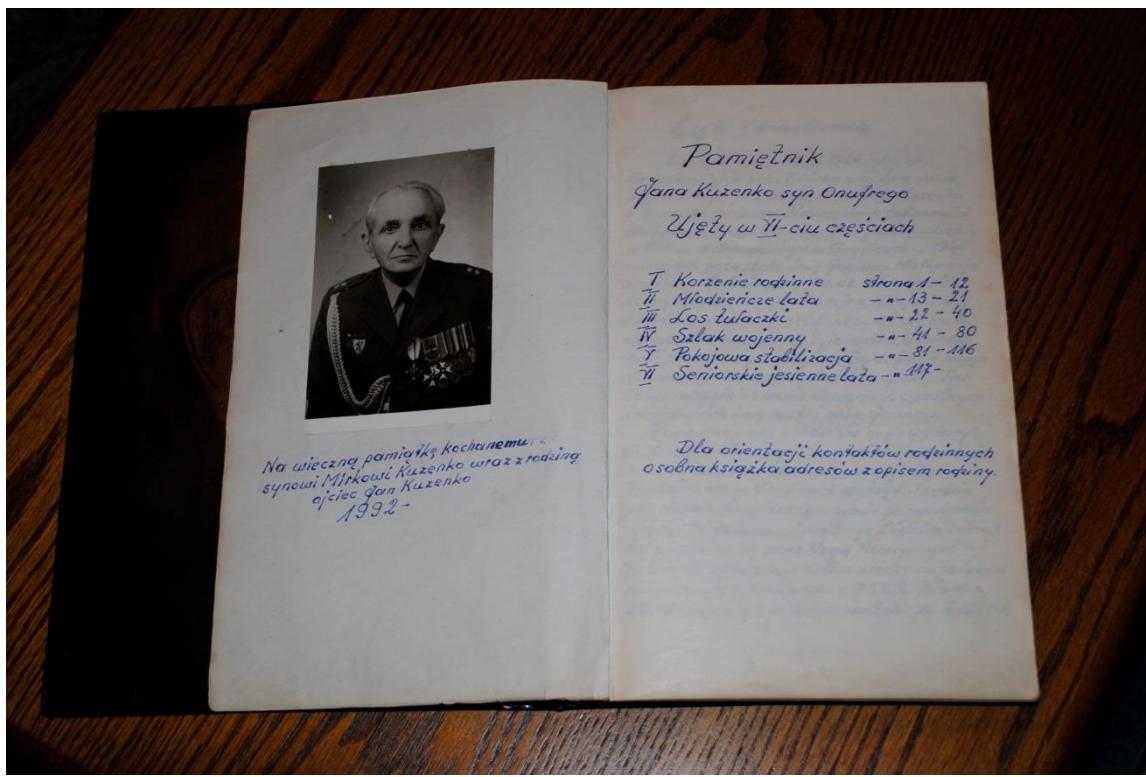


Figure 68 Memoir of Jan Kuzenko. Photograph taken by Anna King.

Translation: the eternal memory of beloved Mirek Kuzenko.
Memoirs of Jan Kuzenko, son of Onufry.

1. Family Roots page1-12
2. Teenage years 13-21
3. Wandering fate 22-40
4. War trail 41-80
5. Peace stabilization 81-116
6. Seniors' autumn years 117

Elzbieta Nikiel: In this book there is everything about his grandfather and father's life. His father wrote it in 1992 about the whole history.

(10th September, 2013. Conversation, with Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, Caislean Thorlaigh).

While many of the people who moved to the DRA may not have had such dramatic stories of loss and reunion, the experiences of Mirek Kuzenko's grandfather and father still affect Mirek Kuzenko and his family. Importantly, it was after meeting a stranger on a train that Jan Kuzenko discovered that his father was still alive. This led him to search for his family after years of estrangement. For Jan Kuzenko, it was a stranger that gave him back his 'life' and the people he loved. It is an example of how encounters with strangers can lead to something very positive. While it is impossible to draw general conclusions from such a meeting, it does demonstrate profoundly how a moment can change the course of a life-time, reaffirming the benefit gained from social encounters that matter, even in a constrained social context.

Importantly, this conversation with Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko demonstrates the power of story-telling and how it recreates a sense of belonging when dislocated from home or estranged from family. It seems that the diary had significance beyond the 'facts' of a family life. The story for Mirek Kuzenko draws upon the type of challenges associated not just with migration, but how to make sense of changing social and physical landscapes: the sense of loss, unfamiliar norms and customs, the fear that sometimes accompanies meeting strangers, and the struggle to 'make a life' in an unfamiliar place. The overwhelming emotion expressed by Mirek Kuzenko when he tells the story may indicate how it is possible to contain and cope with life's challenges. It

may also be that this diary shows us the importance of the journey (the story), that we do not just arrive somewhere, either within ourselves or to a place.

Mirek Kuzenko leads a very happy life. The story of his father is the ‘place’ where the painful experiences are primarily stored. This demonstrates how powerful the healing process of making stories can be, thus alluding to the importance of story-telling in community life. It also illustrates how humans become ‘attached’ to physical places and the enormous sense of loss from such attachments.

Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko both talked passionately about the lack of discrimination between different cultures when they were growing up. They conceded that meeting ‘strangers can sometimes be frightening, if you are not familiar with their customs or ways of life’, but they still believe firmly that diversity and difference is what makes ‘a rich community’. The phrase, ‘home away from home’, used by Randy Asante (and others), was revisited, but this time with an additional consideration:

Mirek Kuzenko: Next year I am going to visit my old home and bring back a bag of earth...

(10th September, 2013. Conversation with Julia and Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, 24 Caislean Thorlaigh, Doughiska)

While he loved his life in Ireland, it was important for Mirek Kuzenko to go back to this place, ‘to find some treasure, maybe something still exists in the rubble’ and to ‘find families in the area who may have stories of my family’. Here the earth takes on a symbolic importance, as Mirek Kuzenko used his imagination to revisit his homeland through his father and grandfather’s eyes. There is a sense that keeping history alive is important, and that this could be achieved through continued story-telling:

Mirek Kuzenko: I will continue to write the diary.

Elzbieta Nikiel: Mirek gets very emotional about these things. He feels this very deeply.

(10th September, 2013. Conversation with Julia and Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, 24 Caislean Thorlaigh, Doughiska).

8.5 The Labour of Humans Working against the Odds

The chapters in the diary identify ‘family roots’ and the ‘wandering fate’, experiences that Mirek Kuzenko has embodied, not just through his journey to live in another land, but through his endeavours to weave together a sense of connectedness with his new community, Doughiska. Although their roots are important, Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko think that it is ‘an extremely positive experience being part of this newly emerging community’ especially being part of a ‘diverse, multicultural community’ (4th September, 2013. Conversation between Elzbieta and Julia Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, 24 Caislean Thorlaigh, Doughiska). He and Elzbieta Nikiel have pursued this through community activities that include setting up the Polish Association: Come2gether, organising events, litter picking and community gatherings to improve their local environment. They were involved in both the World Café experience and the Youth Theatre Project, so that they could become embedded in Irish life, as well as develop opportunities for young people.⁷⁸ For Elzbieta Nikiel’s daughter, Julia, who regards herself as Irish, engaging in Irish culture is important. She was involved in the theatre group because ‘all she wants to do is dance and act, she loves it’ (4th September, 2013; Conversation with Elzbieta and Julia Nikiel and Mirek Kusenko and Anna King Caslean Thorlaigh).

⁷⁸ As a result of general comments when I was first started working out in the DRA I was for some time under the impression that Polish people were not particularly interested in ‘getting involved in community activities and that they preferred to stay within their own close knit groups’ (comment made by resident in Café Mocha, 6th June, 2010). While for many different cultures it may be a personal preference to not engage in social activities in the wider community, during my research in the DRA I was particularly struck by the wonderful events that Polish community organised over the last two years, including a Polish and Ukrainian *fun day* over four weekends in June, 2012. Events also included festivals, litter clean-ups, youth groups, volunteering (a group re-painted the Castlegar Complex hall), art exhibitions, cooking for neighbours. Polish residents were also involved in resident associations and the local Merlin Woods Primary school committee, making videos of cultural encounters, and the Galway St Patrick’s Parade, 2012, the World Café experience and Youth Theatre Project.



Julia Nikiel's rendition of Michael Jackson at the The Tain, September, 3rd, 2012. Castlegar Complex, Roscam.

Not all young people adapt so easily to change, due to challenges associated with cross-cultural engagements, such as school environments being very different from home, or adjustment to completely new social norms and values. This family's experiences highlight the nature of evolving identities; it is possible to see from Mirek Kuzenko's family how three generations of people struggled to make sense of social and place dislocation, and how attempts to build new homes in a strange land were shaped by the past, as well as present circumstances.



Figure 69 - Polish community at the Galway St Patrick's Day Parade, 17th March, 2012.
Photograph supplied by Come2gether Association.

The diary, Elzbieta Nikiel explains, also has significance today, ‘as it can teach us many things’. An extract in the book tells us how ‘there were many different religions in class when his father was at school’ and ‘all religions at this time were seen as equal. Each week priests from different faiths would come and provide services. Children could either stay or leave. There was no discrimination’ (10th September, 2013. Conversation, with Elzbieta and Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, 24 Caislean Thorlaigh, Doughiska).⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Elzbieta Nikiel explains how the area from which Mirek’s Kuzenko’s father came from was culturally diverse: ‘Mirka grandfather lived in the eastern Polish territories in the village Oreszkowce, near Lviv. After World War 2, these areas were assigned to USSR, and now lie on Terytoium Ukraine (1991). Large cities, such as Lviv, were multi-ethnic during the outbreak of World War II. Apart from the Polish who were numerically dominant, Lviv at the time was inhabited by the Jewish, Ukrainians, Armenians, Germans, Czechs, Russians and others. As a result of the post-war resettlement and changes to state borders this area is now dominated by the Ukrainian population.

In his diary, Jan Kuzenko writes; ‘I convinced myself that there were no differences in religion, only the way they are observed’ (cited from Jan Kuzenko’s diary, 1992. 10th September, 2013. Translated by Elzbieta during a conversation, with Julia and Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko and Anna King, 24 Caislean Thorlaigh, Doughiska).

Extract from the diary:

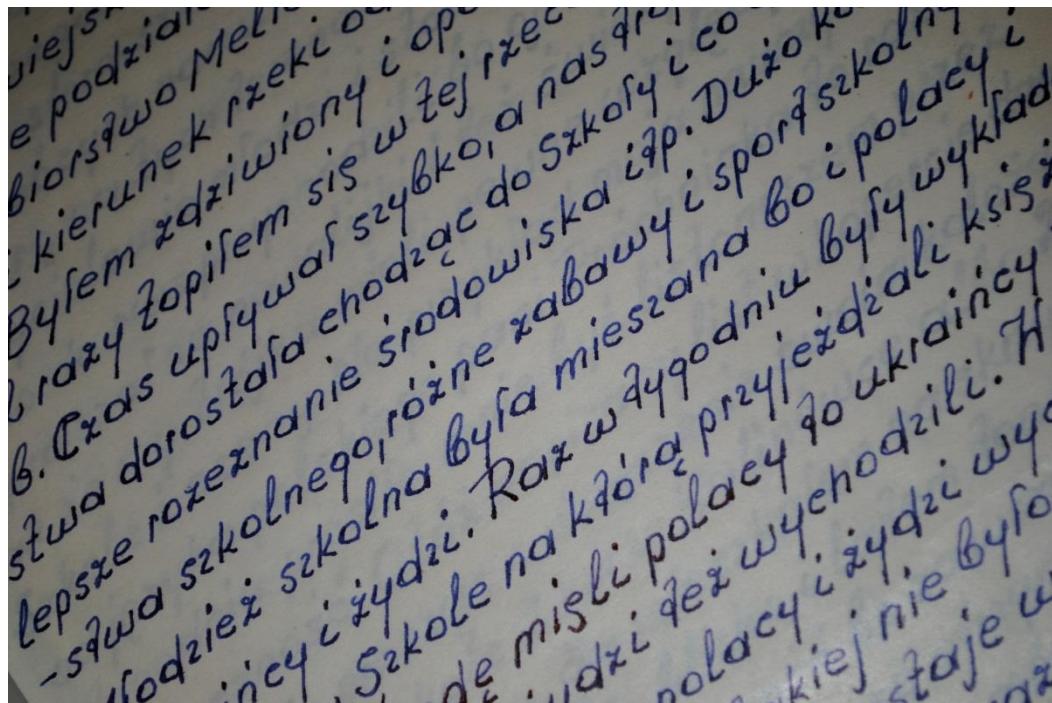


Figure 70 - Extract from the diary. Photograph taken by Anna King

That many different religions have in the past co-existed in such close social groups is an important observation, indicating the need for shared spaces that respect the different

According to the Statistical Yearbook in 1931 the percentage of nationalities in the population of Lviv in 1930 was as follows: Poles 67.2%, Jews 21.6%, Ukrainians 9.2%, Germany 2%. According to the Austrian statistical census in 1909 the population was 187,056 in Lviv. Austrian data from 1906 indicate that the inhabitants of Lviv primarily used three languages socially: Polish, German language with the Jewish jargon and Ruthenian language. Lviv is now the seventh most populous city of Ukraine. In 2001, the city had 725 thousand inhabitants with 88% Ukrainians, 9% Russians and 4% - Poles (Correspondence with Elzbieta Nikiel, 25th September, 2013).

ways in which people interpret (observe) their personal beliefs. This is relevant in the DRA, where a number of different religions co-exist within a small locality. This diary is an interesting point of discussion, especially given that the community has just obtained a new centre that will provide a shared space for the Catholic Church as well as other groups from different traditions or religions.

For Elzbieta Nikiel and Mirek Kuzenko their cultural past is valuable, but they love their new home: ‘We were so happy to come home to Ireland after the summer back in Poland’ (4th September, 2013. Conversation with Julia and Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko). These comments reveal the need to reflect upon how shared identities form, change and are situated in place (both the imagined and the physical). As Mirek Kuzenko points out, our sense of identity is connected to others and how we are treated by others: ‘We do not grow in isolation, we are all connected’ (Mirek Kuzenko, 10th September, 2013). However, the importance of having *places* in which to connect is also emphasised through Mirek Kuzenko’s need to bring back to Ireland some of the land through which he relates to his grandfather.

8.6 Who Needs Theatre?... I would reply, we all do.

The narratives above identify the kind of concerns presented to the youth theatre project. Its original motivation was to pilot a project that would promote social regeneration and community-building, providing young adults access to the arts and culture. The project was, therefore, an opportunity for the DRA community to explore new ways of tackling social development in a period of austerity (Discussed in Project 2022 meetings: 8th February, 2012, 7.30pm, 7th & 13th March, 7.30pm, 26th April , 2012, 7.30pm, 10th May, 7.30pm, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska, Galway). However, the themes raised above were very much interwoven into the theatre process.

It also offered creative ways for self-development and empowerment, as young people journeyed through the challenges associated with making a transition into adulthood (Conal Kearney: 2nd May, 2012, 6pm, Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, Galway and 12th May, 2012, 11am Café Mocha, Roscam, Galway). The philosophy

behind this approach was developed and supported from January, 2012 onwards, by a core group of individuals: Conal Kearney, Nuala Keady, Randy Asante, Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko, Gloria Bennin, Paul O’Grady, Godwin Enaiho, Magnus Ohakwe, Adrienne McPartland, Paul Shelly, Fr. Martin Glynn, Caroline Keane Quinlivan, Dan Hurley, Anna Murphy, Lisa Duiganan, Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Damien Tummon, Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirostaw Kuzenko, Claire McCole, Ester Okeke from Afro Renaissance, Ganna Union, Come2gether Association (Polish community), oscail.org community website (Julius Daree), Castlegar Hurling Club, Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, Merlin Woods Primary School, DRA Development Company Ltd.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Savita Halappanava (Yalagi) was due to represent the Indian community by training a young Indian dancer for the theatre production. The whole community was shocked and devastated when Savita passed away on 28th November, 2012. As identified in the methods chapter, I was centrally involved in these gatherings. My role was to support, guide, facilitate and provide insights gained from my research.

Meetings that were important to the development of the theatre group include: Project 2022 meetings: 8th February, 2012, 7.30pm, 7th & 13th March, 7.30pm, 26th April, 2012, 7.30pm, 10th May, 7.30pm, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska, Galway; as well as conversations and meetings with Dan Hurley: 4th April, 2012, 1pm, Café Mocha, Roscam, Galway; Fr. Martin Glynn: 13th February, 2012, 4pm, 28th February, 2012, 11.30am. Café Mocha, Roscam, Galway; Conal Kearney: 2nd May, 2012, 6pm, Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, Galway, 12th May, 2012, 11am Café Mocha, Roscam, Galway; Ciaran Scully, Chairperson of Castlegar GAA: 30th April, 2012, 10am, Café Mocha, Roscam, Galway; Damien Tummon (Castlegar GAA representative): 25th April, 10am, Clayton Hotel, Doughiska, Galway; Caroline Keane, Quinlivan (Youth Worker committee member with Family Resources Centre & volunteer with the DRA pre-school, Doughiska, Galway and Paul Frecklington, Manager of Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, Galway: 19th April, 2pm, Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, Galway; meeting with Conal Kearney, Siobhan Bradley (Good Shepherd Parish Youth Worker), Anna Murphy (teacher in Merlin Woods Primary School, Doughiska, Galway), Caroline Keane Quinlivan, Chris Taylor, 4rd April, 2012, 1.55pm, Café Mocha, Roscam, Galway; Imam Khalid Sallabi and Sanober Jaffry, Westside Community Centre, Galway: 30th April, 2012; Sanober Jaffry: 29th February, 2012, 1.30pm, Salthill Hotel, Galway, 17th May, 2012, 12pm Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, Galway; Sanober Jaffry and Fr. Martin Glynn: 10.30am, Café Mocha, Roscam, Galway; Lana Svetlan: 4th April, 2012, 12pm; DRA Retirement Group: 16th May, 2012, 2.30pm; Sister Bernadette Joyce (Good

The group supported the belief that social regeneration was a complex process, one that requires not just investment in specific activities or services, but an acknowledgement of cultural differences in community building. The members of this group believed that these issues presented challenges, particularly for young people, especially within the age group of 13 to 20, where a myriad of psychological and emotional changes can cause immense confusion (Sanober Jaffry: 29th February, 2012, 1.30pm, Salthill Hotel, Galway; Conal Kearney, Siobhan Bradley, a Good Shepherd Parish Youth Worker, Anna Murphy, a teacher working Doughiska, Caroline Keane Quinlivan a Youth Worker and committee member with Family Resources Centre & volunteer with the DRA pre-school, Chris Taylor, 4rd April, 2012, 1.55pm, Café Mocha, Roscam; Julius Daree, manager for oscail.org community website: 30th April, 2012, 11am, Good Shepherd Parish office, Roscam, Galway).

On the 9th June, 2012 the DRA Youth Theatre project was launched. While all the group members spent a considerable amount of time ‘recruiting’ actors from their own groups and associations, Nuala Keady was key to driving diversity in representation. The use of posters, leaflets or advertising was unnecessary; Nuala Keady simply walked around the neighbourhood and as one conversation led to another, she was able to meet people throughout the DRA, identifying groups we had hitherto had no contact with, highlighting how invaluable ‘local knowledge’ can be.⁸¹

Shepherd Parish), 23rd March, 10am, Café Mocha, Julius Daree, Secretary of Family Resource Centre and manager for oscail.org community website: 30th April, 2012, 11am, Good Shepherd Parish office, Roscam, Galway.

⁸¹ Paul O’Grady coordinated the group’s communication with all the main associations and organizations in the area. Many local businesses provided either finances or spot prizes for a raffle to raise money to keep the project going.

Project Sponsors: Galway Film Centre, Afro Renaissance, Oscail.org, Winters Property Management, Ltd, Standard Printers, Merlin Park Pharmacy, Briarhill Pharmacy, Alan Bakery, Polandia, Jack Jordans, John Joe McDonagh from Cheshire Home (donated painting), Paul Gallagher (personal donation), Boston Scientific, Curry and Spice, Fringe

The contribution of Sanober Jaffry was also important, as she spent time with the Hindu and Muslim community. She facilitated an interesting meeting with the Galway Muslim Imam, Khalid Sallabi at the Westside Community Centre, (Galway: 30th April, 2012). Here we talked about many things, but what felt more important was that we were building a relationship. Getting to know people from a different faith takes time, patience and a desire to put our own views and feelings aside for a short time to try and understand how other people may perceive and experience the world. Although Sanober Jaffry (herself of Muslim faith) was essential to the design, roll-out and production of the project (as well as our community documentary), getting more people from the Muslim community involved was difficult, because of particular customs that prevent some Muslims from being involved in dancing and performance. However, there were some Muslims at the event, including Sanober Jaffry's family, as well as the Imam himself and his children. The family of our two wonderful actors of Muslim faith also attended. In general, through our work, and because of Sanober Jaffry's open heart and generosity of spirit, I feel some meaningful relationships with the Muslim community were forged. I was particularly inspired by the Imam, who spent a lot of time explaining to me the differences in their groups: 'They may all be Muslim, but they come from very different cultures with different food, dress and traditions' (Imam Khalid Sallabi, Sanober Jaffry and myself at Westside Community Centre (Friday Prayers), Galway: 30th April, 2012).⁸² On these issues, the Imam wisely noted at a cultural night in Westside library, that although this can cause problems, 'without knowing each other, we cannot work

Benefits, Joyces Supermarket, Centra, Doughiska, The Briarhill Health Food Store, Clayton Hotel, Nevin's Pharmacy, Spar, Roscam, Galway Institute of Wellbeing & Reflexology, Roscam, Higgins Furniture, Roscam, B & W Cash & Carry, Express News, Bodkins, Dunnes, Briarhill, Hehirs Bakery.

⁸² There are up to 2,000 Muslims in Galway city. The first Muslim family came to settle in Galway in the 1980s and, now, 30 years later the community has a full-time local religious leader in Imam Khalid Sallabi (Bernie Ní Fhlatharta Connacht Tribune, January 17, 201).

together' (23rd January, 2013). The Imam is actively involved in bringing different faiths together to share stories, experiences and talk about how we may all contribute together to build a more rewarding, safe and peaceful community. This group explores a common language from which we can begin to make sense out of differences. They have cultural evenings to share traditions, but the events are much more than this. There is a respect and interest in each other and a deep appreciation of the need to create more shared spaces for dialogue and exchange.

The enormous amount of time groups from the Polish community gave to painting and decorating the hall for the production stood out, as correspondence with Elzbieta Nikiel confirms:

Hello Anna.

Mirek set the chairs in the room today, please see the pictures to see how it looks. The centre is about 38 square meters. I think that is quite a good place for dancing and the show. Mirek used 200 seats. There are more we can put out.

Have you talked to the Galway Technical Institute, about the wall covers to hang our gallery? Naula mentioned that our school has some tables, which can be used for art, but I have not seen them, so I cannot imagine it. I already ordered the curtains from Polski. Mirek made a sculpture of a column, which just needs painting. We also have sculpture figures of plaster decoration. Our artists are waiting for a message from us about the gallery. Our pastry chef will take a day off to personally serve cake on the eve.

Good night. I think it will be a great success, which I wish you, and I wish all of us. Ela.

E-mail correspondence from Elzbieta Nikiel to Anna King, 23rd October, 2012.



Figure 71 - Mirek Kuzenko organising chairs for the theatre project. Photograph sent by email correspondence with Elzbieta Nikiel.

It is now time to immerse ourselves in The DRA Theatre Group's production of *The Táin* on 3rd November, 2012. First, I introduce the final production before moving into a discussion on the process of making theatre. This ordering is for an important reason, in order to bring the reader closer to the experience of telling a story, with the hope that this may stimulate your own imagination and give an indication of what fascinated the young people. It also provides important knowledge of the characters for when the actors discuss their roles later on in the chapter.

8.7 Part Two: The Cast.

The actor's families were originally from Ghana, Ireland, Poland, Pakistan and Nigeria. Most of them had not met each other before the theatre group, which was significant, as this provided was an opportunity to watch how they engaged with one another and to learn some of

the challenges they might encounter. We also had people from India, England and Israel involved in the production, as well as four different faiths: Hindu, Catholic, Muslim and Pentecostal.

The group met every Saturday from 9th June – November, 3rd, 2012 in the Castlegar Complex, as well as in a number of other locations, most notably the Roscam archaeological site. There were approximately 26 young people aged between 10 and 16. After the first month was there was a core group of 16 young people. Every now and again someone who had not committed to the project would call in to have a chat with adults or have a ‘nose’ around at what the others were doing, demonstrating a sense of curiosity and excitement about the group. I was often stopped on my way home and asked by different young people what we were doing in the hall. When I told them they did not want to join us, but appeared really thoughtful, as if delving into their imaginations to wonder what it may be like to be part of the experience. I felt that this imaginative exercise was in some very small way in itself valuable, as it might in the future lead to more people joining the group, or one of them taking the risk of joining another group. It is impossible to place any limits on where the imagination can lead once inspired.

The final cast evolved out of Conal Kearney working with the group over a number of months. The decision was made based on skill, commitment, engagement, preference (they were asked who they wanted to play) and practice (everyone got to act all the roles before a final group decision was made).

Our story, *The Táin*, combined traditional story-telling with music, dance and improvisation. As well as the performance of the Irish myth, traditional Irish dancing also featured.



Figure 72 McCole School of Irish Dancers. Photograph Taken by Peter Brennan.

Irish dance was creatively worked-in with other cultural traditions and performed throughout the play. This brought a new and interesting interpretation to the tale. Here, Gloria Gyamfi's Ghanaian Azonto Dance (photograph, 7.7),⁸³ Esther Okeke's Nigerian

⁸³ In an email, Gloria Gyamfi sent to me on 13th May, 2013, explained that Azonto is a dance and music genre originating from Ghana. It involves a frenzied set of hand movements that either mimic either everyday activities or are a signal of comical intent. Just like most African dance, knee bending and hip movement are important. The dance has evolved from some rudimentary moves to embrace depictions (role playing) of ironing, washing, driving, boxing, grooming, praying and swimming. Generally, the dance reflects the creativity and sense of humour of the Ghanaian people. The dance, which is usually performed with a smile, evolved from several local dance moves that originated from Ghana during the early 2000s. The basic movements of the Azonto dance is said to have originated in Ga communities along the coast of Ghana's capital, Accra. Azonto is all about creativity and free styling. The dance has evolved with the fast pace dance culture of modern West Africa.

dancers and an outstanding performance by Shamrock, the Polish Folk Dance Group provided great colour and energy to the evening (Photograph 7.8)⁸⁴.



Figure 73 Ghanaian Azonto Dance. Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

⁸⁴ The traditional Polish dance group, Shamrock, were the only people performing who were not from Galway. This is because there were at that time no traditional Polish dancers living in the area. The Polish group involved with the theatre project felt really strongly that they wanted to show case some kind of traditional dancing, so Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko raised money from local Polish people to bring down Shamrock from Dublin. Subsequently, Elzbieta Nikiel has made contact with a local dancer Magdalena Kudzia, originally from Gorlow Wielkopolski, Poland.



Figure 74 Shamrock Polish Dance Group and Dennis Geoghegan, photographs taken by Peter Brennan.

In addition, Dennis Geoghegan's playing of the Irish fiddle and box provided evocative punctuation between scenes, as well as giving ambiance and character to the evening. Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko organised the decoration of the hall with Ilona Konopacka and Illona Konopacka:



Figure 75 Polish Culture

Barbara Jabłonska resurrected a photographic exhibition of retrospective Polish culture:



Figure 76 Polish photographs.

Kamil Guzik provided an exhibition of graphics and sculptures for the stage. The evening culminated with international cuisine prepared by the Irish, Ghanaian and Indian communities. It was a wonderful opportunity for members of different communities to socialise and get to know each other.⁸⁵



Figure 77 Food celebration after the event.

⁸⁵ **Performers:**

Dance Choreographers: Gloria Bennin, McCole School of Irish Dance, Esther Okeke, Shamrock, the Polish Folk Dance Group.

Irish Dancers from McCole School of Irish Dance:

Ghanaian Azonto Dancers.

Solo Dance Performance by Julia Nikiel.

The Violet Dance Group from Afro Renaissance:

Traditional Irish Music by Dennis Geoghegan.

Drums provided by Eamon Carrick.

Room decoration and props: Elzbieta Nikiel, Mirek Kuzenko, Ilona Konopacka paintings, Barbara Jabłonska photography, Kamil Guzik –graphics & sculptures.

Food by: Joan Opoku Ware, Adrienne Mc Partland, Kawal Jit Singh, Curry and Spice - Shoba S. Thyarala and Przemysław Opala – baker

Costumes made by Noreen Fitzgerald.

Brown Bull & White Bull made by Louise Mander.

8.8 The Story of The Táin as told by the DRA Youth Theatre Group

This story is an adaptation of the Irish legend The Táin Bó Cúailnge.⁸⁶ Below is a summary of the play, as performed on the eve of November 3rd, 2012 in the Castlegar Complex. It was produced using improvisation in the style of Commedia Dell Arte.⁸⁷ As performed on the evening of the 3rd:

Dara Mac Fiach: This is a story of power,

Narrator: love,

Dara Mac Fiach: jealously,

Narrator: greed,

Dara Mac Fiach: loyalty,

Narrator: and friendship.

Dara Mac Fiach: This is a story of our ancient culture.

Narrator: This is the story of The Táin.

Dara Mac Fiach: Our story begins in Roscam, in the Kingdom of Connaught.

Narrator: Where King Aileel and Queen Maebh take a walk in their garden.

King Aileel: A good morning to you my dear, I trust you are well?

Queen Maebh: I'm very well, and why wouldn't I be well?

As they wandered around the garden they begin to discuss who has the most wealth:

Queen Maebh: But, of course my personal wealth is greater than yours my dear.

⁸⁶ The original text was from Liam Mac Uistin's (1993) The Táin. O'Brien Press. Dublin.

⁸⁷ A type of performance that originated in the 16th and 17th centuries and characterised by improvisation from standard plot outline.

King Aileel: With the greatest respect my dear, that is not correct as my wealth is greater than yours.

Queen Maebh: What do you mean? Are you telling me that your wealth is greater than mine? *Me, Maebh, the great warrior queen of Connaught?*

King Aileel: Yes my dear, I am telling you that!

Queen Maebh: Well, we shall see! We will count our riches and compare our wealth. I will prove to you, my husband, that no one, not even you, is richer than I, Queen Maebh of Connaught.

King Aileel: We shall see my dear.

Queen Maebh: Yes, we will.

They then summon their advisors and count their wealth. They soon discover that the only thing that distinguishes them is that King Aileel is in possession of a phenomenally fertile bull called Finnbhennach (white bull). Finnbhennach had been born into Queen Maebh's herd, but he scorned being owned by a woman and decided therefore to transfer himself to King Aileel's herd. Queen Maebh is thrown into jealous outrage.

Queen Maebh: what is the meaning of this? This cannot be!!

King Aileel: (laughing)... I am richer than you!

Queen Maebh: Give me one year and I will find a bull bigger and stronger than your white bull!

King Aileel: You may search all you like my dear, but you will never find a bull bigger and stronger than my white bull. But, if that's what you want we will count again in one year.



Figure 78 Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Narrator: Queen Maebh summons her advisor MacRoth.

Queen Maebh: There must be a bull bigger and stronger than Aileel's white bull somewhere in my kingdom?

MacRoth: There is no bull bigger and stronger than Aileel's white bull in your kingdom, your majesty.

Queen Maebh: But, there must be!

MacRoth: Well there isn't!

Queen Maebh: Surely there must be somewhere in Ireland a bull bigger and stronger than Aileel's white bull?

MacRoth: There is, your majesty.

Queen Maebh: What?

MacRoth: There is, your majesty.

Queen Maebh: Why didn't you tell me that in the first place?

MacRoth: You didn't ask, your majesty.

Queen Maebh: MacRoth, don't try to be funny with me or you will find yourself tending pigs on the mountains of Connemara!

Macroth: There is a bull outside your kingdom that is stronger and bigger than Aileel's white bull.

Queen Maebh: We must get this bull!

MacRoth: That will not be possible, as it is in another Kingdom.

Queen Maebh: Where is it?

MacRoth: In the Kingdom of Ulster, on the Cooley Peninsula.

Queen Maebh: Who owns it?

MacRoth: Daire MacFiach owns the brown bull, the biggest and strongest bull in Ireland. But I doubt that he will part with it.

Queen Maebh: Go to Daire MacFiach and ask him if we could borrow this brown bull, and in return I will give him my protection for the rest of his life.

MacRoth: Very well, your majesty.

MacRoth and his guards travel to Cooley in search of the brown bull: Donn Caúilnge. Negotiations with owner of the bull, Dara Mac Fiach begin well and Dara Mac Fiach invite his guests for food and drink. Traditional Polish dancing is provided for entertainment:



Figure 79Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

The evening is, however, disrupted by one of Queen Maebh's guards, who is drunk:

Maebh's Guard: It is just as well you gave us the loan of your brown bull, otherwise we would have taken it by force.

Daire MacFiach: Well, for your cheek, you are not getting my bull and you can go back to Queen Maebh and tell her that!!

MacRoth: Queen Maebh will not like this, I warn you; you will regret this.

Daire MacFiach: you are forgetting that this is the kingdom of Ulster and King Conor will never allow anyone from another kingdom try to steal from me!!

MacRoth: I warn you, the people of Ulster will pay for this!

MacFiach: Get out of my house, before I do something I will regret!!!

The deal is therefore lost and Queen Maebh's messengers return with no brown bull. Unperturbed, and blind with fury, Queen Maebh assembles an army, including Ulster exiles led by Mac Roth and other allies. The army sets out to capture Donn Cuailnge.



Figure 80 Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Narrator: Queen Maebh summons her druid to cast a spell on the armies of Ulster.

Queen Maebh: Tell me, will I return victorious from the Táin.

Druid: You will return safely

Queen Maebh: But, will I defeat the armies of Ulster?

Druid: I see no sign of it here

Queen Maebh: *I must defeat them!!*

Queen Maebh: I want you to cast a spell on the armies of Ulster, so I can defeat them and take the brown bull of Cooley.

Druid: I will put the armies in a deep sleep your majesty...(drum rolling sound) the armies of Ulster are in a deep sleep, your majesty... (drum rolling sound)... Wait!! There is someone who is not asleep; he is immune to my power, your majesty.

Queen Maebh: Who is this person?

Druid: He is a youth and his name is Cú Chulain.

Queen Maebh: *A Youth?* How is he immune to your power? Tell me about him?

Druid: Cú Chulain is a nephew of King Conor. He is a warrior of immense strength and speed, despite his size. There is no one to match him.

Queen: Maebh: How did he get his name?

Druid: He was born Setanta.

Queen Maebh: This Cú Chulain could prove to be a formidable enemy. Tell me more about this extraordinary man?

Setanta was always playing hurling as a boy. One day, he heard his parents talking about a special school at Emahn Mhaca for the sons of noble men. He wants his mother to let him join the school at Emhain Mhaca:

Deirdre: No, you are far too young!!

Setanta: *Please...* I would love to go and besides I have never met my uncle King Conor.

Deirdre: All in good time, in another few years.

Setanta: But, I don't want to wait.

Deirdre: Well you will have to... your father and I are far too busy!!

Setanta: Tell me how to get there and I will go there myself.

Deirdre: You are far too young to go there on your own.

Setanta: *Please, mother, no harm will become of me.*

Deirdre: Oh very well then, be careful and do what your uncle tells you.

Narrator: Setanta arrives at the palace, in Amhan Mhaca. He bursts into his Uncle, the King, who was out walking.

King Conor: Wow there, where do you think you are going?

Setanta: It is of no concern of yours where I am going.

King Conor: Well now, aren't you the cheeky young man? You will find that it is a concern of mine, if you knew who you are addressing!

Setanta: I am here to see my uncle!

King Conor: And who might he be?

Setanta: My uncle is King Conor of Ulster, and he will be none too pleased when he hears of you trying to stop me;

King Conor: Ah you are my nephew Setanta; I should have known, by your energy. I have heard a lot about you from my sister, your mother.

Setanta: Oh your majesty, forgive me, I didn't realise who I was talking to.

King Conor: Please, you may address me as uncle! You are here to learn, study, and work hard. I will take a special interest in you, and you will stay close to me as I promised your mother that I would do so!

Setanta: I will not disappoint you uncle, as long as I am here, I will always be at your service.

King Conor: Good to hear, my nephew.

Setanta quickly settled into the school at Emhain Mhaca and he became the star pupil. No other boy could beat him at hurling, running, wrestling or spear throwing. King Conor was very proud of him. He boasted about his nephew's feats to all his friends and introduced him to all the visitors to the palace. One day the King received an invitation to a feast at the house of Culann. As Culann never met Setanta, the King decided to take Setanta with him. Setanta remains at home to finish a game of hurling. He is to join King Conor later. Unbeknown to Setanta, Culann keeps a savage dog to guard his house. The dog confronts Setanta upon arrival. A fight ensues and the dog is killed. Chulain is angry:

Setanta: Don't be angry, I will find another hound for you.

Culann: But what will I do in the meantime?

Setanta: I will be your faithful watchdog,

King Conor: From now on you will be known as Cú Chulainn; the hound of Culann.

Druid: And that is how Cú Chulainn got his name.

Queen Maebh: This Cú Chulainn could prove to be a formidable enemy. Tell me more about this extraordinary man?

Druid: He is very capable of defending Ulster on his own. There is no one in your kingdom that can match him.

Queen Maebh: Is there anyone outside of my kingdom?

Druid: Yes, your majesty. Ferdia from the kingdom of Munster. But there is no point in asking him. He would never fight him.

Queen Maebh: Why not?

Druid: Ferdia is his foster brother and brothers do not fight each other.

Queen Maebh: Bring this Ferdia to me and I will change his mind.

Druid: Very Well, your majesty.

MacRoth goes to meet Ferdia, but he refuses to meet the Queen:

Macroth: She will think that you are afraid.

Ferdia: *I am afraid of no one!!*

MacRoth: For the sake of your honour then, you better go.

Ferdia: Very Well, I will meet the queen and hear what she has to say;

Ferdia meets the Queen:

Queen Maebh: Are you not the greatest warrior in the land? That is why I asked you here. I want you to do battle with Cú Chulainn.

Ferdia: No, that's impossible.

Queen Maebh: Wait until you hear what I am offering you. I will give you half my treasure and my own daughter in marriage and my everlasting friendship on top of it all.

Ferdia: Those are great rewards, but great as they are, I would sooner leave them with you than go and fight my foster brother.

Queen Maebh: What Cú Chulainn said must be true so...

Ferdia: What did he say?

Queen Maebh: He boasted that *he* could defeat you in battle.

Ferdia: He did? In that case I will be the first man to beat him!!!



Figure 81 Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Queen Maebh: Then he will surely die. *Hahaha...*

Narrator: MacRoth warns Cú Chulainn of what Maebh is planning.

MacRoth: You should know who is coming to fight you tomorrow.

Cú Chulainn: Who?

MacRoth: Your own foster brother Ferdia.

Cú Chulainn: I don't want to fight him; not because I fear him, but because I love him.

MacRoth: Perhaps you should fear him too.

Cú Chulainn: We shall see what happens tomorrow.

Cú Chulainn goes to meet Ferdia. Out of shame and pride, both men start a fight that lasts for three days and three nights.



Figure 82 Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.



Figure 83 Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Finally, Cú Chulainn gives the mortal blow to Ferdia, while the men of Ulster also lose in battle

Cú Chulainn: You should have listened to me, then you would be still alive.

Cú Chulainn is weak and wounded after battle.

Cú Chulainn: I must guard the fort.

Mother: But, you are too weak to fight.

Cú Chulainn: I know that, but my enemies don't. Help me down to the water's edge, while it is dark and tie me to a boulder and leave me there alone. When my enemies see me in the morning they will think I have recovered:

Queen Maebh: Cú Chulainn hasn't moved from that rock all day, perhaps he is weaker than we think.

MacRoth: It may be just a trick to lure your men out.

Queen Maebh: But, look at the way his head droops, he seems too weak to fight. There is only one way to find out. Go down and check on him.

Narrator: Just then a raven flew down and landed on the shoulder of Cú Chulainn. Queen Maebh and her warriiors knew then he was dead, as the Raven would only eat dead meat.



Figure 84 Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Queen Maebh: *At last he is dead!*

Mac Roth: *And you shall be the richest Queen in the land.*

Queen Maebh eventually brings the brown bull, Donn Cuailnge, back to Connaught. However, a fight breaks out between the white bull and brown bull.



Figure 85 Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

The brown bull kills the white bull. He rejoices, but is mortally wounded. He wanders around Ireland creating place names, before finally returning home to Cooley to die of exhaustion.



Figure 86 Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Queen Maebh and King Aileel return to consider their wealth, and in-so-doing, the enormous loss of life:

Culann: Your majesty the brown bull has killed the white bull.

Queen Maebh: Where is my brown bull now?



Figure 87 Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

Culann: He has gone back to Cooley.

Queen Maebh: How could this be?

Mac Roth: ... *And, you're not the richest Queen in the land any more.*

King Aileel: ...We are back were we started...

Queen Maebh ponders on the events and feels remorse:

Queen Maebh: *After all the death greed and jealousy it has achieved us nothing.*

Culann: And we have also lost the greatest warrior in Ireland:

Narrator: And, that is the story of An Táin.



Figure 88 Photograph taken by Peter Brennan.

The End... Following the play the actors were presented with certificates:



8.9 Part Three: Public Space as a Form of Gathering.

The following is about the group of people who came together in 2012 to pilot the youth theatre project in the DRA and, though small, the residents thought it was an overwhelming ‘success’, measured by the meaningful encounters that inspired new possibilities for young actors as they discovered their talent and improved their confidence. Indeed, some individuals have experienced lasting benefits from their involvement, as a conversation between three young actors, Ammar, Joshua and Nathan, about the director of the group, Conal Kearney, in the kitchen of the ARD Family Resource Centre confirms:

Ammar Tahir: He helped us out a lot with our confidence.

Joshua Keane Quinlivan: Yeah!

Ammar Tahir: Like, how to act it out and... like, get into your positions. In real life you might not be there, but, you will have the skills and ability to do it. And people will look up to you as a role model and copy you and stuff...

(22nd October, 2012. Costume making session at Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, and filming for community documentary with Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Quinlivan, Niamh Heery, Noreen Fitzgerald and Randy Asante).

As the opening to this chapter revealed, the first day of rehearsals was inauspicious to say the least. However, as the day wore on it was insightful and, dare I say it, a success. The grey surroundings seemed to take on a different hue as laughter lit up the room. Conal’s game helped the group to introduce themselves to each other and, although we never discussed it, it seems clear now that these interactions revealed shades of the participant’s personalities, the things they liked or disliked, or what kind of things mattered most to them.



Figure 89 Photograph from Film Documentary: *Making History*.

All the adults, except Conal, took a back seat. We were not there to participate, but observe. I had never sat back and watched a group of people for such a long period of time before (most Saturdays for three hours, for over five months). I could see how the young people were changing, literally from moment to moment. I watched their smiles, their wide astonished eyes, their shrinking shyness or clumsy assertiveness. I felt their agitated comprehension and I admired their courageous interruptions.

In an odd kind of way these interactions appeared to transform the room and at times it seemed quite beautiful. The old curtain now appeared to have an interesting golden glow, framing the area where the group were working. The temperature of the room still left much to be desired, but this did not matter, as the old interior took on texture and character. The timbre of the room moved back and forth from staccato to dulcet tones and the atmosphere became vibrant with anticipation. These were significant shifts, because the room itself had not physically changed. It was as if something really important was taking place.



Figure 90 Photograph taken from film documentary: *Making History*.

Over the months I pondered on how a place establishes its identity. Is it more than just a combination of physical characteristics? I was drawn to a statement made to Werner Heisenberg by the physicist Niel Bohr during a visit to a castle in Denmark:

Isn't it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. The stones, the green roof with its patina, the wood carvings in the church, constitute the whole castle. None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely. Suddenly, the walls and the ramparts speak a quite different language. The courtyard becomes an entire world, a dark corner reminds us of the darkness in the human soul, we hear Hamlet's "To be or not to be." Yet all we really know about Hamlet is that his name appears in a thirteenth-century chronicle. No one can prove that he really lived, let alone that he lived here. But everyone knows the questions Shakespeare had him ask, the human depth he was made to reveal, and so he, too, had to be found a place on earth, here in Kronberg. And once we know that, Kronberg becomes quite different castle for us.

(Niels Bohr. Cited in Yi-Fu Tuan, 1977:4).⁸⁸

For me, what had happened on 9th June was similar. Shadows of potential took form as the theatre group came alive with enthusiasm. The room was suffused with new energy and light. It felt as if something was being created through this engagement, that these interactions were situated in a place at a particular time was profound. This awakened an interest in the complex relationship between space, place and creative encounters. How often do we bear witness to such multiple layers of social construction, of people becoming? We are normally so engrossed in the process we are oblivious to its force. I had the privilege, alongside a group of other adults, of observing such meaningful encounters over an extended period of time.

Before focusing our attention on how participation in theatre can shape spaces into meaningful places, it is important to outline the manner in which young people developed socially and personally. The pilot project ran from 9th June – 3rd November, 2012. Due to the play's success we worked again with a group from February 2nd – April 1st, 2013 for an Easter production of the Stations of the Cross. Those participating in the theatre included both Catholic and non-Catholics (including Muslim and Pentecostal) and, while our group was non-denominational, encouraging all traditions and none, we performed the Stations of the Cross for the local Parish Priest, Fr. Martin Glynn, who pursues as many positive avenues for integration as possible. It was an outdoor production performed in Doughiska Park.

The group met again from April 6th – 13th July, 2013 on the production *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. This play was about the everyday universal experience of life, the value of social relations and how we need to appreciate every moment. It is also a portrayal of how our identities are shaped, not just by the enduring aspects of life reproduced through daily practice, but through an ability to relate to things in a new and fresh way. In other words, how the old and new integrate, themes very pertinent to the

⁸⁸ Original source: Werner Heisenberg, 1972. *Physics and Beyond: Encounters and Conversations*. New York: Harper Torchbook.

DRA. The minimalist theatrical style of this play provided an opportunity for the Director, Conal Kearney, to explore the practical and symbolic potential for improvisation and mime with young actors, thus developing their skills in expression and composure for both drama and real life.

During these productions the young actors changed significantly. Not only did they begin to ‘find’ themselves, and others, in new and exciting ways, but they also embraced the ritual of theatre; a structured space for creative enquiry through the abstract world of interpretation and symbols. And, they worked incredibly hard, not only during weekly rehearsals, but at home on their lines and parts. They also had to struggle with the emotional aspects of being part of a group and the sense of trepidation associated with performing in a room full of 200 people on the night of the festival. We were all incredibly proud. Following Jean Cocteau’s contention that ‘the arts are essential, if only we knew what for’, the next section outlines how theatre can become a crucial piece of the community-building puzzle.

Theatre as a Process of Discovery

Watching how Conal Kearney managed the young people in the inquisitive process during rehearsals was instructive. Actors were encouraged to step ‘outside’ the taken-for-granted routines of society and adopt new roles. This was achieved through a combination of story-telling and group discussions about the play’s themes that weren’t necessarily related (for instance, what it was like to grow up in Nigeria) as well as improvisation. Although Conal Kearney followed a script, every possible opportunity was used to ask the young actors what *they* felt about different approaches: ‘Don’t worry too much about learning your lines for now, it’s all about the feeling’ (30th June, 2012). The emphasis was upon learning, what the play was ‘*saying*’: ‘It’s okay, we are only learning’... (30th June, 2012). ‘I will watch and listen to your ideas and that way I decide who plays what. Is that fair?’ (Conal Kearney, 28th July, 2012). It was an encouraging environment.



Figure 91 Photograph taken from film documentary: *Making History*.

The picture above depicts the group getting something ‘wrong’. The young actors would themselves often point out ‘mistakes’, if someone forgot their words, or there was a problem with their stance. There was no offense taken and it provided an opportunity for discussion about the role or storyline. They all ‘took it in their stride’ and, as Conal Kearney emphasized, the ‘play was just a tool’ and that

the process shouldn’t be pressurized to ‘produce’. That will happen.
At this stage we are getting the group relaxed, so we can be creative and encourage talk about their ideas. It is important to respect their ideas. That’s a huge feeling for them. They then realize the valuable power they have within the group. You can see I spend a lot of time on that. I could cut it and say ‘*This is the way it’s done*’, but that’s not the purpose of this exercise at all. It’s wonderful to see their confidence develop. All they need is a little encouragement. And they’re off.

(28th July, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Nuala Keady).

With a group of young actors there is always the possibility for disruption, that some do not appear to take the Play seriously. Removing the pressure to ‘produce’ also

allowed unconventional ways of dealing with disruption. It was not just discipline that was important for Conal Kearney, but for the young actors to appreciate that ‘their’ role was crucial if the Play (and themselves) were to be realized. He explained to the group that this was a different learning environment to school. Children have to go to school, there are laws and social pressures to abide by, but he explained that here, it is not like that. Theatre was a choice, and those participating were here because they wanted to be, not because they were being forced. It was important, therefore to

enjoy the story you are telling. If we don’t enjoy it we shouldn’t be here. Think about it yourself. Is it enjoyable, we can do great work, and we could be brilliant, but most importantly, you must enjoy it, cause if you don’t, it won’t work.

(Conal Kearney, 21st July, 2012. Castlegar Complex, Youth Theatre Project rehearsals)

Young people are rarely given space to express themselves out of choice and this was therefore an opportunity. However, a number of young people were being noisy during dress rehearsals. Rather than ask them to leave, he felt they were insufficiently occupied, that their roles were too small, so he decided to give them a bigger part to play. The success of Conal Kearney’s approach raises issues concerned with disruption (some might use the word deviance), what it means, how it is caused, and how best to channel the energy that it creates. Such an approach to discipline affected the larger group dynamics as Conal Kearney observed, they became more caring to one another:

There is a beautiful good will in the group too. There are some warm, happy, friendly people... the openness is great, we can all learn from that, I hope.

(31st September, Interview for community documentary with Conal Kearney and Anna King, Niamh Heery in Kearney residence.)

After two months the group had really gelled and were extremely committed to the play. As Conal Kearney said at the time:

We are at a healthy place. Normally, the challenge for me is that when you get a group together there is a certain way in which a group

develops. We have to be aware of the various stages of development and the dynamics of a group. It makes it a bit more challenging when we are young teenagers, as we might have certain ideas about things. And there's a lot of stuff that teenagers will bring into the room from whatever happened outside, or that day.

And then there is their relationship with their peer group. That is huge. So, the already established status has to be broken down. So we have to establish a new group, a new family. During this process there may be a little bit of what we call 'storming', before there is 'norming' and then 'performing'. We're into norming stage. These are interesting dynamics.

(28th July, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Nuala Keady).

The importance of participation, respect and providing a conducive atmosphere was central to the success of the play. Everyone was encouraged to contribute, and when people refrained, time was taken to 'work the energy' of the room so that everyone would eventually contribute.



Figure 92 Photograph taken from film documentary: *Making History*.

During rehearsals Conal Kearney would often stop to ask the young actors what they thought or felt about a story line. On numerous occasions the response would be: ‘I think that’s stupid’ or ‘That doesn’t work’. They would give their view and Conal Kearney would work with these ideas, either by asking why (and a conversation would ensue) or he would change the tack based upon the comments:

Conal Kearney: If we are telling a story to the audience, what do we need to do?

Rose Murry: You need narration.

Sammar Tahir: Can we not have a prologue, like in Romeo and Juliette. They tell the story and audience pick it up as they go along.

Conal Kearney: Very good. Give me an example.

Samara Tahir: You could say that there’s going to be a war, and that adds tension to the audience, cause they don’t know when the war is going to begin and whose gonna win.

Conal Kearney: All right, that sounds a great idea. So, we are doing a set-up.

(30th June, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals, Castlegar Complex. Roscam and community documentary filming with Caroline Keane Quinlivan, Niamh Heery, Randy Asanti, Sanober Jaffry, Nuala Keady, Anna King).

This process fleshed out the characters in the play, allowing the young actors to contribute to their roles, relate to other people in the group, forge dynamic relationships and build confidence. These were personal changes that evolved over time, played out amongst a group in which young people were part of a whole: creative elements in a theatrical jigsaw. A key element of the rehearsals conducted with Conal Kearney was how to project a voice confidently and command the group’s attention. An example would be Conal shouting, as he walks up and down, to Sharon Ware:

Would you say that, like that! Or would you say, *YOU would NEVER find a white bull AS BIG AS MINE...*

He turns...and says:

YOU ARE REALLY ANNOYED, BE ANNOYED.

Sharon smiled and looked a little embarrassed, but she was clearly impressed with this idea. The whole group enjoyed this aspect of the rehearsals and clapped. In another instance, where Conal Kearney wanted the young actors to appreciate body language, he suggests to Nathan McPhilbin to adopt a different physical stance:

Conal Kearney: That's really good Nathan. You have to understand that we are only practising. You have to make it bigger when on stage, so the audience can hear.

He asks the group:

What do we need more of when we are practicing, when we are doing that scene? What do you think we need?

Linda Oseyemi: Moving?

Nathan McPhilbin: Moving around stage more?

Sharon Ware: Project your voice and say words clearly?

Conal Kearney: Bravo...you see I teach words and speaking, I exaggerate these sounds for you, that's what we are doing here...

In order to explain this he acts out the body language of an introverted person: his head is bowed, eyes looking to the ground. A timid voice reflects a body that has shrunk, a weakened demeanor. He declares: what a beautiful morning it is. I'm happy, cause you're happy... He stands up straight and bellows? *WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS?*

Griffin Small: You are not projecting your voice, you don't look happy.

Conal Kearney marches around the stage, head held high and shouts:

What a beautiful morning. What's different about this?

The whole group bursts into laughter.

Griffin Small: Emotion and facial expression.

Ammar Tahir: You used the stage more.

Conal Kearney: Before talking about movement, let's talk about our own stuff first. So, what do we call this?

With his hand he outlines his body. ‘What is this?’

Sharon Ware: We need to look to the audience?

Conal Kearney: Yes, but there is something else, something more important. What do we call it? It's one word?

Nathan McPhilbin: Expression? Character?

Conal Kearney: Yes, character, YES!!! WELL DONE!

To Sharon Ware, he emphasizes the strength of the character of Queen Maebh.

Conal Kearney: You see... I stand a little bit bigger than other people. Also Queen Maebh is annoyed. How do we know she is annoyed?

Griffin Small: Walk up and down?

Griffin struts up and down the room.

Conal Kearney: Well ... well, yes that's pretty angry.

(30th June, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals, Castlegar Complex. Roscam and community documentary filming with Caroline Keane Quinlivan, Niamh Heery, Randy Asante, Sanober Jaffry, Nuala Keady, Anna King).

Later on that afternoon Conal Kearney worked with Majella who had, initially, spoken very quietly, to get her to project her voice and show anger. Conal began by asking Sharon Ware to say the line: ‘There must be a bigger bull stronger than King Aliel’s somewhere in my kingdom’. For Conal, her voice was too meek. He insisted she repeat

the line, each time asking for her to speak louder. At the beginning, she was nervous. But, by the end, she was roaring it out, and it was clear for all to see that she was proud of herself. Conal Kearney, demanded ‘a round of applause, for Sharon. She beamed with delight, as did everyone else. There was a real sense of group achievement.

Conal Kearney: What do we think about the next few scenes? We will read a few more times and then we will ‘move it’. Does anyone know what that means? It means ‘act it out’.

(30th June, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals, Castlegar Complex. Roscam and community documentary filming with Caroline Keane Quinlivan, Niamh Heery, Randy Asante, Sanober Jaffry, Nuala Keady, Anna King).

Conal Kearney suggested to Brice Daree that he needs to move his acting to the ‘next level’, to work on his body language and demeanour:

Conal Kearney: Moving our acting onto the next level is difficult because sometimes we get a little bit self-conscious. So, we need to try and move away from that. We can do this by such things as looking at people when we want an answer if you are asking a question.

(30th June, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals, Castlegar Complex. Roscam and community documentary filming with Caroline Keane Quinlivan, Niamh Heery, Randy Asante, Sanober Jaffry, Nuala Keady, Anna King).

It became evident throughout the rehearsals that these were acting skills that could transfer to everyday life. For instance, the voice projection work helped them understand how to communicate more forcefully and consistently. As Conal explains,

sometimes we get quicker at the end of the line, as we want to finish what we are saying. As an actor we have to bring the energy and the force through the whole sentence. Does this make sense? We need to finish, that’s how the actor does it.

(30th June, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals, Castlegar Complex. Roscam and community documentary filming with Caroline Keane

Quinlivan, Niamh Heery, Randy Asante, Sanober Jaffry, Nuala Keady, Anna King).

He asked Brice Daree to repeat his line until their confidence was raised and then they could ‘finish their lines’. When the young actors were successful at bringing energy and passion into the whole sentence, Conal Kearney was quick to complement: ‘That’s really good... Let’s hear it again – it was so good’.

On a number of occasions, members of the group expressed how valuable these skills were. They particularly identified with Conal Kearney’s lessons on body language, clear communication and voice projection. Indeed, it was clear that these experiences had been translated into their wider social life. Certainly, Ammara Tahir recognized this when he was in a discussion in the kitchen of the ARD Family Resource Centre:

The biggest thing I learnt was confidence and pronouncing words – *that comes in handy*.

(22nd October, 2012. Costume Making session at Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, and filming for community documentary with Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Quinlivan Niamh Heery, Noreen Fitzgerald, Randy Asante).

This raises another important aspect to the theatre process: its transformative role.

Theatre as Living⁸⁹

For me, one of the most moving examples of how someone flourished ‘inside’ her role was Linda Oseyesmi. I have known Linda for approximately four years. When I first met her she was quite a shy girl, with little confidence. She often chose to sit back and let her more extrovert friends express themselves. Within a month of acting in the play, Linda began to shine. Conal had worked with her confidence, resulting in a display of tremendous strength. She now had a distinctive presence and her status in the group altered accordingly.

⁸⁹ (Jones, 1996).

While some participants struggled with their social confidence at the beginning of the project, they went on to have completely new experiences, as they was propelled into the limelight. The personalities that came to the fore were very different to those which had started. This demonstrates how public theatre can provide an opportunity to work with young people and how they confront ‘life’s challenges’, which can be difficult during adolescence. For Conal Kearney, ‘Theatre is a way of unpacking and unfolding these issues in both a conscious and unconscious way’ (31st September, 2012). He adds that ‘we all bring something to the group, unconsciously. Maybe I had a row with my mother and father or I am excited’, and suggests that these kind of issues needed to be negotiated and worked with during rehearsals. For that, young people need a ‘safe’ place to express themselves through such dilemmas. In this sense, life and theatre are not separate. Indeed, for Nathan McPhilbin, he used his character to discuss his home life:

When I play the part of Cú Chulainn; there’s a lot I can relate to him...
I’m into hurling and I didn’t have much growing up either...

(Nathan McPhilbin, filming for *Making History* documentary. 4th October, 2012).

By observing the young actors, as well through conversations with Conal Kearney, I became convinced that theatre offers the ‘potential to create and negotiate roles that extend beyond the boundaries of performance into ‘real’ life (Jones, 1996:66). I was fascinated with how role playing could be a cathartic experience or, as Oscar Wilde put it, ‘Man is least himself when he talks in his own person; give him a mask and he will tell the truth’ (cited in Emunah, 1994:7). Linda explained to me that being involved in the group had ‘changed her life’ (6th September, 2012), that she had developed a love for acting and was inspired to further her ambitions and work in the creative industry.⁹⁰ Her involvement in the group clearly had an enormously positive effect on her life outside the

⁹⁰ Linda recently applied to National University of Ireland, Galway for a place on the degree programme in Drama.

theatre. She appeared happier, more engaged and certainly more expressive.⁹¹ As well as being able to identify how we use roles in everyday life, the play reveals how negotiating roles through public theatre can have a significant impact on an individual's confidence and life experience. Here, the line between theatre and life becomes blurred, in a positive way. This is, perhaps, what Jones (1996) would call, 'theatre as living'. It is dramaturgy. As once noted by Shakespeare. 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players' (Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act 2. Scene).

Dramaturgy is a way of understanding social life within the theatrical process, as well in everyday life. It is regarded by those such as Peter Berger, Hugh Duncan and Erving Goffman as one of the best ways of understanding the nature of the self:

Individuals are termed as actors in everyday life and the way people relate to each other is described dramatistically; that is, in dramatic terms. For example, people in life are said to play different roles, they use props to portray and arrive at their identity. The self is arrived at through interaction with other 'actors' (Jones, 1996:65).

Dramaturgical social psychology is linked to Burke's work in the 1930s that developed a model of human behaviour based on interaction. In this theory individuality was regarded as a social construction and therefore external contexts and circumstance were regarded as crucial to their condition (Jones, 1996:65). In sociology, the work of Goffman (1959) is has been hugely influential. Goffman was interested the study of social interaction in terms of theatrical performance. He analysed human interaction through the performances that take place in a specific time and with a particular audience. In other words, the self emerges from the social and cultural context in which one is located. This may, of course, change depending on where we are and with whom we are engaging. These enactments are therefore social constructs embedded in context. What is important here is that these performances are fundamentally constructed by shared beliefs and expectations. Scheff (2005) notes that Goffman was committed to bringing to

⁹¹ These are general observations made about these experiences with Linda in the context of the project.

light the ‘most common shared assumptions in modern societies (Scheff, 2005:368). What is interesting is the idea that the self ‘emerges’; that we craft this self and present it to others, implying that it is not fully formed and is possible to change. Jones (1996) highlights that this process can be used creatively to bring about powerful real life performances (changes in the self).

What is important is that observations during this research lead to the consideration of how we tend to relate to ‘incomplete’ social experiences, as if they are complete (‘whole’) experiences. It is possible to argue that we do the best we can to make sense of these ‘incomplete’ experiences, for instance the work of Goffman demonstrates how we construct a range of different narratives or ‘masks’ in order for us to adapt and cope in a confusing and often strange world. We adapt behaviour in order to retain a sense of control or dignity in social contexts that are peppered with experiences that more often than not challenge our sense of self, or our ability to succeed in expectation or desire. As Bruner argues: ‘The self is probably the most impressive work of art we ever produce, surely the most intricate. This ‘preparation’ is done through a process of co-constructing ourselves with what we want to be or could be within the constraints of ‘reality’ (Bruner, 2002:14). Often, these adaptations become more than processes of making sense. Sometimes they become social norms when adopted by more than one person; when groups accept such adaptations, they may become institutionalised.

It is precisely these features in life that public theatre negotiates. It provides a rewarding pursuit that takes place in a structured, safe environment that allows for creative exploration. These ideas may be more powerful when we consider them in the context of youth development. The nature of the self in adolescence is not fully constructed, it is a period in which young people are confronted with many obstacles, from trying to fit in to peer groups, the issue of loss or bereavement, illness, mental health, loneliness, sexuality, the pressures of balancing school and social life, body image, as well issues of poverty, crime, cultural or religious constraints and racism.

While some people may experience none of these issues, in some cases all of the above could apply. There is still a troubling lack of support structures in Ireland to provide conducive spaces for young people to understand these issues in more depth.⁹² As one Irish study reveals, at least one in four Irish teenagers have experienced serious personal, emotional, behavioural or mental health problems, and almost 1 in 10 deliberately harm themselves (*My World Survey Report*, 2012: www.headstrong.ie).⁹³

⁹² While this statement by no means is a criticism of the great work conducted by many local and national organisations (see below), there is still a need to invest heavily in more services for young people, particularly during this period of austerity when services are being cut. Poverty is also on the increase, a matter that recent cuts in social welfare payments to people under 25 years old will only exacerbate.

Useful websites for young people:

Aware (www.aware.ie) - Helping to defeat depression

Bodywhys (www.bodywhys.ie) - The Eating Disorders Association Of Ireland

GROW (www.grow.ie) - Helping people to help themselves

Mental Health Ireland (www.mentalhealthireland.ie) - Supporting positive mental health

Samaritans (<http://www.samaritans.org.uk/talk/branches/ireland.shtml>) - 24 hours a day, confidential emotional support

Schizophrenia Ireland (www.sirl.ie) - The Lucia Foundation

www.detect.ie.

Spun-Out (www.spunout.ie) – Irish youth health, media, information and activism

Foroige

Health Promotion Ireland

Health Service Executive

Irish Mental Health Coalition

Mental Health Commission

National Youth Council of Ireland

⁹³ The My World Survey (MWS) was designed as a structured way of listening to young people. The aim was to gather information from young people themselves about their lives and experiences and use this to assess issues concerned with mental health, in order to provide better, more sensitive services, based on their needs.

This project was a collaboration between Headstrong and University College Dublin (UCD). It took five years and was funded by The One Foundation.

My World Survey. 2012. National Study of Youth Mental Health. University College of Dublin, Ireland (Psychology Department & Headstrong, Ireland).

The *My World Survey Report* (2012:59) identified developing a good self-esteem, coping strategies and problem-solving skills (which requires critical thinking) as central to a young person's well-being. The report revealed that features of life that helped young people cope included: friends, talking, music, family and exercise (*My World Survey*, 2012:59). In their absence there is a need for concern. I would argue that many of the problems associated with adolescence may be complicated further by the difficulties encountered in culturally unfamiliar environments. Many of these issues can be negotiated through theatre. As the following comments show, the young actors appreciated the value of theatre:

Nathan McPhilbin: I was never that confident. I thought the drama would make me more confident. It has built up my confidence very well... I read the main line of the story and I was very happy with it. It's mind blowing the way there is history behind it all...

(28th July, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Nuala Keady).

Griffin Small: At the start I was very shy and I didn't really want to play parts, but I found now that it's very easy to get up and express yourself on the stage or in front of other people.

(14th July 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Karen Glynn, Louise O'Grady, Randy Asante, Nuala Keady, Sanober Jaffry and Caroline Keane Quinlivan).

Sharon Ware: I enjoyed the theatre group very much and meeting new people and learning new things. And I love acting, so it is really helping me. I think it is really good for people my age to get involved in theatre because acting can really help you and everything... if you are shy... acting can help you find out who you are and help you talk in front of people. It can help you make friends and meet new people... My favourite part is Queen Maebh, cause she is so strong and able to get what she wants.

(Sharon Ware, 5th October, 2012. Interview with Joan, her mother at home in Doughiska: 5th October, 2012).

Linda Oseyesmi: Queen Maebh is like confident and brave; she is a picture of a strong woman... I have gained more confidence and self-esteem from acting as her – I definitely want to be an actor when I am older.

(Linda Oseyesmi, Castlegar Hurling Pitch, Roscam, (6th September, 2012).

David Rozbicki: I love doing the play, I really like drama. I like acting. I like King Aliel, cause he's not as bossy as Queen Maeve. The story is pretty good, even though Queen Maebh is very bossy.

(14th July 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Karen Glynn, Louise O'Grady, Randy Asante, Nuala Keady, Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Keane Quinlivan).



Figure 93 Photograph taken from film documentary: *Making History*.

Other members of the group had equally profound experiences. When playing the part of Cú Chulain, Nathan McPhilbin lit up with joy and excitement. He ran to tell his mother the news.

Nathan McPhilbin: We have gotten scripts. I'm Cú Chulain!

(28th July, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Nuala Keady).

She was very proud of him, it was an important part of the process as Conal Kearney emphasizes:

It's important to observe the magic of theatre and what it can do. I think one of the biggest achievements for the young people in the group is to impress their parents: 'look at what we can do mum and dad, aren't we good...' It's important to be recognised, recognition for who they are and what they can do. As a young person we are functional, but not adult yet. So the way we work has to be done with care and sensitivity.

(31st September, Interview for community documentary with Conal Kearney and Anna King, Niamh Heery in Kearney residence.)

Many of the participants went on to shine as actors and are dedicated to the idea of becoming a professional actor in the future. As I watched these seemingly life-changing moments for members of the group, I was struck by the idea that theatre could have a liberating role, both personally and socially, something captured in the following exchanges:

Linda Oseyesmi: I always look forward to coming to drama, cause I like expressing how I feel and I like my character a lot...

(Linda Oseyesmi, Castlegar Hurling Pitch, Roscam, (6th September, 2012).

Griffin Small: It's a very nice way to express yourself and get rid of self-consciousness. I'd like to be Macroth because he is very sarcastic and not scared to show his true character to the Queen.

(Griffin Small. 14th July 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Karen Glynn, Louise O'Grady, Randy Asanti, Nuala Keady, Sanober Jaffry and Caroline Keane Quinlivan).

The young people were invited to pierce through social constraints and discover new, exciting personal possibilities. For example, in the kitchen of the ARD Family Resource Centre on the evening of costume making for the play, Ammar Tahir, Nathan McPhilbin and Joshua Keane Quinlivan were chatting about how the group had changed over the months:

Ammar Tahir: The first day I think all of us must have been shy, and now that we got into it, it's built our confidence.

Joshua Keane Qunilivan: I learnt to have the confidence to be able to talk and not be shy.

Nathan McPhilbin: And the biggest thing I learnt was not to be afraid to be yourself.

(22nd October, 2012. Costume Making session at Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, and filming for community documentary with Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Quinlivan Niamh Heery, Noreen Fitzgerald, Randy Asante).

8.10 The Liberating Role of the Mask

More often than not everyday life contains a range of expectations often defined in terms of educational achievement, and in particular the attainment of qualifications. Public theatre offers an alternative path, expanding consciousness to include other dimensions to the human endeavour that are often down played in an environment that seeks to reward the reproduction of facts or established knowledge. Exams simply confirm whether this information has been absorbed. In contrast, public theatre uses performance techniques, such as props and improvisation. It is understood not just as (individual) performance, but also as an opportunity to engage in myth and legend. Here the ‘theatrical role or character, like a mask, is both protective and liberating, enabling the expression of what lies buried beneath our real-life roles’... ‘Illusion in theatre does not lead to elusion of truth, but to confrontation with truth’ (Emunah, 1994:7).

Assuming anonymity, or performing a role completely different from our own persona, allows us to delve into the creative consciousness and discover new aspects to ourselves. Through rehearsal we can develop new strengths, experiment with ideas, such as bravery or self-sacrifice, and appreciate the consequences of experiences such as anger and hate. In theatre, contradiction, discord, conflict, and difference are qualities that expand a story. They seduce the imagination and provide a rich language of feeling through which we try to overcome conventions and create new possibilities. In this

setting, cultural and social differences can be explored and challenged, presented positively rather than negatively. Diversity offers significant benefits, for it enhances our breadth of knowledge and allows us to challenge accepted opinion. Role playing, or wearing the mask, allows us to confront an ‘accepted truth’ and create ‘new truths’ (Emunah, 1994).

In *The Táin*, Setanta goes through the ritual of ‘initiation’ during the first part of the Play when he argues with his mother that he should be able to visit his Uncle’s great school, Amhan Mhaca. During the rehearsals of this scene two themes emerged. First, the character of Setanta assumes the status of a mythological figure through a great act of strength when he slays a ferocious guard dog at the Palace of Culann. This is a story of transformation, one that can resonate in everyday real life encounters. Thus, the young actor, Nathan McPhilbin, felt there was enormous personal benefit when during one of the rehearsals he slays the dog and wins the mythical name, Cú Chulainn:

We have to get into character. I’ve learnt a lot from Cú Chulain, that it doesn’t take a lot to be courageous. It doesn’t take a lot to have strength. It’s basically a mindset. You need to focus on your abilities.

(Nathan McPhilbin, 28th July, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Nuala Keady).

Thus, for Conal Kearney, this is part of dynamic performance and is understood as more than just acting. The stage provides a symbolic space in which young actors contest the ethical and moral elements to storytelling and an invaluable learning exercise. In the Play, Setanta is from a poor background, but he refuses to submit to his mother’s word that he should not attend a school for noble men, Emahn Mhaca. He pleads with her to let him go:

Deirdre: No, you are far too young!!

Setanta: *Please...* I would love to go and besides I have never met my uncle King Conor.

Deirdre: All in good time, in another few years.

Setanta: But, I don't want to wait.

Deirdre: Well you will have to, your Father and I are far too busy!!

Setanta: Tell me how to get there and I will go there myself.

Deirdre: You are far too young to go there on your own.

Setanta: *Please, mother, no harm will become of me.*

Deirdre: Oh very well then, be careful and do what your uncle tells you.

(3rd November, 2012. Final performance of *The Táin* in Castlegar Complex).

During this visit Setanta is confronted with a fierce dog owned by the rich nobleman Chulain. As a vicious fight ensues Setanta draws upon his inner strength to kill the dog. Though initially angry, Chulain is impressed by Setanta's strength and will power:

Setanta: Don't be angry, I will find another hound for you.

Culann: But what will I do in the meantime?

Setanta: I will be your faithful watchdog.

King Conor: From now on you will be known as Cú Chulainn; the hound of Culann.

Druid: And that is how Cú Chulainn got his name.

Cú Chulainn thus becomes the mythological hero of the story:

Queen Maebh: This Cú Chulainn could prove to be a formidable enemy. Tell me more about this extraordinary man?

Druid: He is very capable of defending Ulster on his own. There is no one in your kingdom that can match him.

(3rd November, 2012. Final performance of *The Táin* in Castlegar Complex).

Public theatre helps us to imagine possibilities that we may feel are out of our reach or beyond our capabilities. It also offers a creative way to explore confusing or difficult

issues. For instance, Caterine Keane had an opportunity to reflect on her own life as being part of a single parent household:

One week I played Deirdre, Setanta's mother. She has to be strict. I wanted to be Deirdre, so I'm really happy. I wanted to be Deirdre because I wanted a small part, so that I could concentrate on it and get it right. She has to be strict and kinda has to do the jobs of two people. She has to do it on her own, which is tough. I'll do it as best as I can. I'll be strong. I'll try and be like my mum, as there is just us two. My dad doesn't live with us. I'll just copy her.

(Catherine Keane. 28th July, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Nuala Keady).

Bringing issues such as being a lone parent into the theatrical space allows them to be discussed in a public space. In many ways the very act of sharing stories can in itself be a 'healing' or rewarding exercise and there were many examples. For David Rozbicki, theatre allowed him to share his vulnerabilities as well as strengths:

I have been living here for 7-8 years. I'm from Poland, Warsaw. I love this country. There are more jobs...

(Paul. 14th July, 2012).

8.11 Theatre as Life through Fantasy.

In Conal Kearney's opinion theatre provides a space for young people to explore issues in life that are particularly important to them. Some of these may be classical stories of how to negotiate issues of power and control:

So, all the big symbols of good and evil are in the play. The boys playing the parts of the druid, the ritual and the magic and the power we wish we had; things we want to do...and the reality of the things we are going to do. At a young age we want to rule the world, in a nice way.

It is a very complex issue for a young person to relate to power. Because power offers us the ability to navigate a safe passage through development into adulthood.

(31st September, Interview for community documentary with Conal Kearney and Anna King, Niamh Heery in Kearney residence.)

Through the Play young actors perform roles in which they can appreciate how the enactment of power can be rewarding:

They have to be given the opportunity; to be given power. How we handle that power is very important.

(31st September, Interview for community documentary with Conal Kearney and Anna King, Niamh Heery in Kearney residence.)

The issue of power was teased out during discussions about war. What is important is not that everyone went away with a view that war was bad, rather that they experienced through art, narrative and dialogue, what is behind war through the scenes in the Play. This is a process of critical reflection that involved all the young actors. The following reveals how this process unfolds as the young actors comment on Queen Maebh and how, after raging war upon the Kingdom of Ulster, she eventually lost the brown bull of Cooley.

Conal Kearney: ‘So do you think declaring war on the Kingdom of Ulster was a good thing?’

(14th July 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Karen Glynn, Louise O’Grady, Randy Asante, Nuala Keady, Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Keane Quinlivan).

The response of the young actors shows how they draw upon their own life experiences as well as the storyline:

Griffin Small: No, not really. She should have tried to work it out.

Conal Kearney: How could she have worked it out?

Griffin Small: Go there personally, discuss it.

Conal Kearney: Do you think it was fair that she borrowed the brown bull?

Griffin Small: Not really, unless she is going to offer him something that is equal?

Conal Kearney: Why would she want the brown bull do you think?

Griffin Small: Just to say she is richer than her husband, which will cause more fighting.

Conal Kearney: Is that a big deal, being richer?

Griffin Small: Not very.

Conal Kearney: Why would she want to be more powerful than her husband?

Griffin Small: So she can gloat.

Conal Kearney: Where as, what should she have done...?

Griffin Small: Compromised. They should have shared their riches.

Conal Kearney: But she isn't that kind of woman is she?

Griffin Small: No.

Conal Kearney: Because she wasn't that kind of woman.. what kind of woman was she?

David Rozbicki: The Warrior Queen of Connaught!

Conal Kearney: Yes, she had a reputation to keep up. It's like someone in a situation where they are a champion, but they don't want someone else to be better, do they? Richie, who is your favourite champion?

Brice Daree: Javier Hernandez, Man U.

Conal Kearney: Isn't there a better one on Man U team?

Brice Daree: Yeah, Rooney, but I don't like him.

Conal Kearney: So, if Rooney heard Hernandez saying he was a better footballer than him, what would Rooney think? He wouldn't be happy, would he? So what would he do? He could prove it. Sooooo, Queen Maebh believes that she is more powerful than Alie. So, she goes about trying to prove it and by proving it she gets herself into all kinds of trouble, cause she has to follow it through. And it gets more and more complicated as the story unfolds, because she didn't know that she was contending with the greatest hero Ireland has ever seen...

Griffin Small: *Cú Chulainn!*

(14th July 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Karen Glynn, Louise O'Grady, Randy Asanti, Nuala Keady, Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Keane Quinlivan).

While war was discussed often in terms of the roles being played, its implications were also discussed:

Sammar Tahir: It was a really interesting story. The point that it got across was that wars are useless; like... there is no point of war at all. Like... people were killed, but no one wins ...

Ammar Tahir: No one wins...

Linda Oseyemi: Yeah, no one gains anything ...

Samara Tahir: You don't gain anything from war... Especially through greed and jealousy... you should be happy with what you have.

Amara Tahir: You got to admit his point is alright. Because if you start war for something really small, there is no point in doing it. Cause, like... after war you kill tons of people, you lose your home and you end up getting nothing; it's not very nice.

(Rehearsals, Castlegar Complex, 6th September, 2012).

It is important to acknowledge that topics such as war are complex. Phrases such as 'wars are useless', can easily be dismissed. But, war is not the issue here; it is the process of critical reflection. The technique of enactment is crucial, as it is an alternative

form of dialogue one that at all times, considers the whole group experience, as well as the individual.

It is often the case in general conversation that one person is trying to ‘outdo’ the other, or to be right. Public theatre suspends such linear forms of dialogue, because role playing (and its interpretation) demands conversations that include competing interpretations in a production that requires a high level of cohesion. By the end of the play many of the young actors were familiar with critical thinking, which often involved chatting and laughing about difference as well as similarities.

I would argue that this theatrical process created a safe place for young actors to explore unfamiliar aspects of the human condition. Through interaction in public theatre, they dealt with secrets, other worlds that offered a wealth of knowledge and imagination. Most people would shy away from difficulties such as those encountered by Queen Maebh in the Play. They would prefer to shelter behind a self-constructed image that suits the social mores to which one is attached. These are zones of comfort. When we are thrown into unfamiliar situations, rather than use the experience as an opportunity to learn something new, we tend to seek refuge in the status quo.

For the young actors theatre was a creative space that used props, masks, stories and improvisation to discover new realities. Through creative thinking we suspend our established ideas about what is good or bad, pretty or ugly, right or wrong. Through drama we play with contradictions and paradoxes, and sometimes may favour unconventional qualities, opening our minds to new possibilities. In this abstract realm of fantasy we can often begin to understand our social selves. It is as if we need to be ‘fooled’ into imagining something new, because we are often entrenched in a singular mind-set; the mind cannot free itself. The fool or trickster in Irish and Native American folklore and mythology would often depict this. It may be through humour or parody that a lesson is learnt.

Fantasy leads the mind down an abstract path. It temporarily scrambles boundaries and illuminates alternative universes, disturbing the cadence of normality.

While these are grand words, more often than not associated with world changing experiences, I argue that they are part of everyday life, such as when we struggle to make sense of something unfamiliar or attempt to solve a complex problem. Theatre structures these experiences and offers useful ways to develop these critical skills.

If we pause and switch off society's 'noise', a space is created for discovery. Public theatre uses a number of ways to free the mind, to bring inspiration to life for artistic expression as well as personal and social development. Sometimes this can be done through aligning ourselves with that which we find difficult, presenting an opportunity to expand our horizons. Theatre can personify and make large the mundane. The darker shades of human interaction (greed, anger, hate) are often explored, whereas in day to day life they are feelings often marginalised, arguably for good reason. However, public theatre is not generally about reason. It deconstructs emotions, plays with 'reality' and uses it as a point of learning. It is this journey of deconstruction that enables us to learn more about why certain values are perpetuated. For example, in the play Queen Maebh embarked on a war with the Kingdom of Ulster and was determined to prove her financial worth:

Queen Maebh: What do you mean? Are you telling me that your wealth is greater than mine? ***Me, Maebh, the great warrior queen of Connaught?***

(3rd November, 2012. Final performance of *The Táin* in Castlegar Complex).

This can be interpreted as an expression of greed. However, it may also symbolize institutional prejudice as Queen Maebh was compelled to prove her equal status. Any interpretation of a story is contentious, but in the process of deconstructing and acting out, it is possible to learn new insights. Although Queen Maebh made many mistakes, her role as a strong, powerful woman had a major impact on many of the young actors.

At the beginning of the play we visit Queen Maebh's greed and anger and witness the horrific consequences of her deeds, the loss of life and family. At the end of this

parable we are shown that war can be futile, if driven by the human ego. In this sequencing of events the manner in which the play unfolds provides a learning pathway. This was a learning experience that had a beginning, middle and end. In other words, it was structured. If we had simply isolated the characters out of the context of the story, or had focused on just hatred or jealousy, it could potentially be a damaging exercise for young people. It is for this reason that the process of critical reflection that takes place through rehearsals is so important, as they tease out a story where the young people can debate and challenge the positive elements to Queen Maebh's role, for even in the context of war the strengths and weaknesses of Queen Maebh and Cú Chulainn's become integral to the characters.

Through drama, and the rehearsals, the young actors are involved in a critical reflection of life's experiences, not just in the abstract, but also how everyday life informs their interpretation of the abstract. Importantly, the Play taught the young actors to question the apparent, and look deeper at life's experiences. Ferdia's decision to embark on a fight with Cú Chulainn shows how the play acts as a forum for competing interpretations:

Queen Maebh: What Cú Chulainn said must be true so...

Ferdia: What did he say?

Queen Maebh: He boasted that *he* could defeat you in battle.

Ferdia: He did? In that case I will be the first man to beat him!!!

(3rd November, 2012. Final performance of *The Táin* in Castlegar Complex).

It is plausible to suggest that Ferdia's actions are a result of his reputation being tarnished. However, this may not just be a personality trait (ego), but could relate to cultural norms that compel an individual to value his honour more than his life. This demonstrates the dangers of judging an individual by their actions alone. There are many

circumstances shaping the everyday moment and public theatre helps young people to engage consciously with these, particularly if they are unfamiliar.

Public theatre is both experienced as a source of entertainment, as well as a conduit to discuss morality and invites the group to improvise, experience and challenge norms through dialogue and experience. Through drama the Play offers a chance to explore universal themes that transcend human difference (love, forgiveness, compassion hatred, bitterness or greed). Crucially though, it is not just the performance, or the result that is important, but the on-going interaction that takes place as young actors critically reflect upon the story, the roles and the values they bring from the ‘street to the stage’.

8.12 Theatre as a Form of Bonding

During both the rehearsals and the Play it was evident that the theatrical process provided an opportunity for bonding and making new friends. As in any group situation where young people are involved, humour plays an important part in bonding. Joking can be a way of getting to know someone, testing boundaries as well as taking on new found confidence. For instance, they chatted about their roles and what they were going to wear for the Play. They made jokes about the difference between the types of clothing. No offence was taken, it seemed as if this was a space to explore each others differences, in a safe and non-threatening manner. Humour was a crucial element to the positive energy created within the group.

The rehearsals are not just about performance or acting, because it also allows the young people time to engage with one another, to confront, question and explain unfamiliar cultural practices. For instance, during a rehearsal Ammar Tahir and Sammar Tahir talk about Ramadam:

Ammar Tahir: Ramadam, it's like a mini fast. You start at sunrise and finish sun set.

Sammar Tahir: it's a religious thing, so you get closer to your family and to God. You don't really notice until the last minute and then you get hungry. It's really hard sometimes when you see your friend with a can of coke, or something.

Conal Kearney: What happens if you forget?

Sammar Tahir: You have to be honest with yourself, you wouldn't forget on purpose. It's not about being perfect. It's about getting closer to God.

Conal Kearney: What age do you start doing Ramadan?

Ammar Tahir: 10 years. You can start earlier if you want, but you don't have to do it.

Conal Kearney: So, it means you're kind of grown up, that you're ready for it. Well done!

(28th July, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Nuala Keady).

The rehearsals became a platform to explore the importance 'of ordinary people and what matters most to them' (Kleinman, 2006), a forum in which we can explore the dynamic, shared space between people. In this space private thoughts and feelings are expressed through our interaction with others. In this way it is impossible to separate the drama that surrounds a theatre project from its public setting. Crucially, it is multicultural, providing enormous potential for social encounters that matter. Public theatre is understood as the lived experience of everyday life (community). The theatre project offers another way of understanding the complex associations and experiences of community.

8.13 Theatre as a Form of Community

The young actors worked together as a collective group, appreciating the story as told through performance and recognising the importance of the other person's narrative. This is a difficult process, one that takes time to achieve, and contrasts starkly the traditional forms of education with which they are familiar. In public theatre the

emphasis is upon collective achievement (*ensemble*), rather than individual success.

Here, Conal Kearney observes that

it is important that the group becomes cohesive. Without a group being cohesive we are not going to get a good performance. As we call the word *ensemble*, as used in theatre quite a lot, which is the French word for together. We have to achieve that ensemble. To get that ensemble does not happen immediately, by just an introduction. It takes a long time, there are many weeks of chatting and listening and establishing our status within the group.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012), with Anna King and Niamh Heery. Kearney residence, Roscam).

This raises interesting dilemmas. For example, on one occasion a young actor said that he was not coming to rehearsals next week because he already knew all his lines. What he did not realise was that his lines were part of someone else's conversation. His lines prompt further development in the play and his absence would change the dynamics of the group. As Conal Kearney pointed out, performance is a social process in which

there are moments of strength when the group are working together at one moment. It can be very exciting; which would be in group dynamics what they call performing. But that performance moment does not necessarily come in the theatrical performance. It is explored through the year within rehearsals. That moment can come at any time and can be extremely powerful. And out of that then our creativity comes. For young people this is very important.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012, with Anna King and Niamh Heery. Kearney residence, Roscam).

It is a potentially rewarding process, one that offers the exciting prospect of enhancing a person's development:

Our first group is the family; that's where we first learn to work with each other; our primary carer or our mother or father or siblings, or both and then the next group would be school friends. All that provides a sense of status. So we are learning all the time. So, it's quite obvious that in this group is a learning process for the young people too. Because that's their future, how they deal with other people.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012), with Anna King and Niamh Heery. Kearney residence, Roscam).

It is in these rehearsals that crucial interactions take place, providing a public space in which people from diverse backgrounds come together to talk about ‘what matters’. During the rehearsals the difficulties associated with difference and diversity were examined through ‘common ground’ (literally through the structure of the Play and symbolically by critical exploration), that had significant implications. Here, Conal Kearney observes that

You can see from the young people, there is no issue of any racial distinction in their actualisation of being together. Maybe that is the ideal that they could develop into the community of the future. With those ideals, hopefully one or two seeds have been planted here through their creativity and theatre.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012), with Anna King and Niamh Heery. Kearney residence, Roscam).

As the Play unfolds public theatre becomes a community of (critical) dialogue, where shared understandings may often turn into conflict. However, conflict for Conal Kearney is part of the process:

Sometimes there are moments of crisis. Because the status within the group may not necessarily be the status that they hold within their first group, which is always their family. So we are renegotiating a new status sometimes, and that can bring some very curious and interesting issues of crisis.

All that energy is kind of thrown into the mix and it is bandied about unconsciously. Sometimes issues develop in the group, there will be moments of conflict obviously and there will be moments when the group becomes unified.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012), with Anna King and Niamh Heery. Kearney residence, Roscam).

Significantly, instead of inhibiting or denying conflict, Conal Kearney used these experiences as an opportunity for personal growth, as a way of developing a deeper understanding of the self in relation to others. Community experienced through public theatre is dynamic, a constantly changing force. It is a contested environment in which roles and status are constantly (re) negotiated and it includes encounters between culturally different people as they move through this social space. It is in this evolving space that the young actors (re) create potential friends:

Nathan McPhilbin: I like the fact that you can talk to everyone in here.
That it's a friendly environment.

(28th July, 2012. Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Nuala Keady).

(14th July, Youth Theatre Project rehearsals and community documentary filming with Niamh Heery, Randy Asanti, Nuala Keady).

On the night of making costumes with Sanober Jaffry, Nuala Keady, Noreen Fitzgerald, Caroline Keane Quinlivan and Niamh Heery it was evident that the group had bonded, sharing food, stories and jokes (see pictures below).



Figure 94 Photograph taken from documentary: *Making History*.



Figure 95 Photograph taken from film documentary: *Making History*.

During a break Nathan McPhilbin, Ammar Tahir and Joshua Keane were admiring The Táin poster and chatting:

Nathan McPhilbin: Everyone's getting on really well with each other, which is really good.

Joshua Keane Quinlivan: We are nearly at the end of it now.

Ammar Tahir: Yeah, you're so far into it now, you can't drop out.

The boys were very proud of how quickly the tickets were selling.

Nathan McPhilbin: all my family's gonna come.

Ammar Tahir: and mine.

They also talked about how they hoped that the group would continue next year, which shows how positive social encounters in the present can affect the future:

Nathan McPhilbin: the play brought everyone together. It would be nice if they put they put it together again and put in a different play and then we will get together again.

(22nd October, 2012. Costume Making session at Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, and filming for community documentary with Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Quinlivan Niamh Heery, Noreen Fitzgerald, Randy Asanti).

Clearly from these quotations the rehearsals had forged a friendly atmosphere, reaffirming the bond between the young actors and evident in a conversation between Nathan McPhilbin and Ammar Tahir in the kitchen of the ARD Family Resource Centre:

Nathan McPhilbin: We've been working at it for so long at this stage, I'd say the night will fly by.

Ammar Tahir: We are all hoping that none of us screw up.

(22nd October, 2012. Costume Making session at Family Resource Centre, Doughiska, and filming for community documentary with Sanober Jaffry, Caroline Quinlivan Niamh Heery, Noreen Fitzgerald, Randy Asanti).

‘None of *us*’ is a revealing phrase. Marcus refers not just to himself, for he seems very conscious of the group dynamic. Arguably, such encounters can have a lasting and positive effect, with the potential to shape community relations as well as the individual experience. Conal Kearney believes that such moments of bonding have a profound effect and that

One day, one moment, we remember as a child very, very clearly, when something changed, something happened profoundly for us. At least it is our responsibility is to present that moment, present the possibilities, present the ideas, the richness of a multicultural society.

(31st September, Interview for community documentary with Conal Kearney and Anna King, Niamh Heery in Kearney residence).

One of the important characteristics of theatre is that it is creative work undertaken *together* (group identity or unity) through the performance of a Play, while at the same time retaining a sense of *self* (identity), by bringing personal thoughts and feeling to the gathering. Here, creativity as an element of the community-building puzzle is elevated, as it offers the prospect of reconciling the self within the group (community or society). While these experiences may not always transfer to other life encounters, the theatrical process that the young actors went through may provide a counter-balance to other more individually driven social experiences. These are matters particularly relevant in a culturally diverse social setting, where different interpretations of the world collide, raising the potential for confusion and frustration.

The youth theatre project demonstrates a positive role for creativity in community-building. Through drama different roles and ideas interact (characters and narrative), they are broken down into plots and then enacted out through interpretation and story-telling. On one level this is about putting together a performance. On another level, one that is more important, these interactions engender positive everyday social encounters (or if you prefer, creating patterns of social sequences, that occur in a shared sense of place). People can ‘try out’ social creativity or innovative ways of reacting to each other in a protected environment.

There are a number of interesting projects in the field of gerontology and health that are using theatre and dance in a similar way: *The Penelope Project* and *Still/Here* a production and DVD by American dancer and choreographer Bill T. Jones, in collaboration with film maker, Bill Moyers. The Penelope Project is a year-long collaborative project between Luther Manor care home in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, U. S and Penelope's UWM Center on Age & Community and the Dept. of Theatre; Luther Manor Senior Living Community; and Sojourn Theatre. Their objective was to transform elder care through the use of creative engagement. Over a year the collaborators worked with residents, artists and playwright students to explore the story of Penelope from Homer's *Odyssey* through the resident's experience. Similar to the DRA Youth Theatre Project, group discussion, visual art, stories, music and drama were used throughout the project duration, resulting in a performance called *Finding Penelope*.

Anne Basting, director of the Centre on Age and Community at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and an Associate Professor of theatre, spearheaded the project after noticing that there may be similarities between the story line of the *Odyssey* and the experience of older people living in care homes. As Kinder (2011) notes, Basting recognized that the tale explores how

Penelope, who fends off 108 suitors during her husband's extended absence – has special resonance with residents of long-term care facilities, whose homes are constantly trafficked with strangers. She also suspected that these residents would have a profound understanding of what it means to wait, wait and wait. And because Penelope struggles to recognize Odysseus when he at last returns home, Basting saw potential for residents with memory loss to bring meaning to bar on this classic text (Kinder, 2011:20).

Residents used tools such as string of wool passed between people sharing stories of lost or enduring love until a whole tapestry of encounters are constructed into a poem or picture. Meyer-Arnold, the Director of Adult Day Care Services, highlighted its enormous potential when he explained how the residents 'loved' the students approach as they had a sense of discovery and made suggestions outside of the box (Kinder, 2011:21).

Basting and her team wanted to make recreation in the care-home more meaningful, and chose *The Odyssey* to challenge the residents with a ‘big’ classic. In an interview with Kinder, Basting stated: ‘I think there’s something about working with a myth of this size and scale that makes people feel part of history’ (Kinder, 2011:21).

One of the additional insights gained from the project was how residents enjoyed working together. Meyer-Arnold pointed out that there is an assumption that people do not want to work together, but through the *Penelope Project* it became evident that the opposite was the case. As Kinder explains, ‘The reward for this approach has been watching despondent residents come out of the woodwork and participate. A few have revealed creative skills and capacities nobody knew they were harboring’ (Kinder, 2011:21). The students crafted the final play out of the resident’s stories and experiences and the final script

blends the classic tale of Penelope with the present-day story of a young woman who has finally come to Luther Manor to see her mother, Penelope, whom she has never visited in the home because of fear: fear of being surrounded by the intense reality and needs of age, fear of being forgotten and the nearness of death. The result is the great, millennia-old epic story, grounded in a serious reality that we all deal with as we age, or as those we love and depend upon age, and lose what we think of as ‘identity’ here in the West (Mark Metcalf, March 16th, 2011, Thirdcoastdaily.com (art news website)).

The *Penelope Project* has been so successful that it has been transformed into a new way of working with people who are living in care homes (see www.thepenelopoproject.com).

The use of performance as a form of personal and social exploration is shockingly exposed in *Still/Here*. In 1994, choreographer Bill Jones created *Still/Here*, a performance that explored what it was like to live with a life-threatening illness. Having suffered the death of his partner, Arnie Zane, in 1988 he invited people with a terminal illness to participate in a project that included a series of fourteen workshops throughout eleven cities, two of them for children. *Still/Here* was first performed live by Jones’ company dancers in Lyon, France in 1994 and later made into a PBS documentary with Bill Moyers. It weaves music, dance and the spoken word into a powerful work of

interactive art about death and hope.⁹⁴ It is possible to imagine the pain, anguish and turmoil experienced by the creators of this project through this poignantly choreographed display of human emotion. Participants were encouraged to share stories and reflections, which were translated into movement, art and music: a dance called *Still/Here*. During the workshops, Jones (1997) would explain that he was not a therapist or practitioner, but instead

I am here because I feel that you have information that I, as a man, might benefit from and as an artist, will be inspired by. And, yes, I need my hand held in dealing with this thing as I take my place in the world (Jones, 1997, Marian Chace Annual Lecture. Cited in American Journal of Dance Therapy, 1988).

The ‘thing’ that he refers to is the issue of living with HIV and the shared human experience of dealing with the inevitability of death (Jones, 1997). Jones used mixed methods to communicate with participants about this difficult, heart wrenching topic:

I used various tactics to elicit verbal description of the gestures: *What does that mean? Could you perform the gesture and tell us something you've learned? Could you perform the gesture and tell us something you haven't told anyone before?* Later in the workshop, we handed out paper and markers. *Could you conceive your life as one smooth line? Where does it begin and where does it end?* With that, people made sometimes startlingly beautiful drawings, which were used as ‘road maps’ to guide where they stood and moved in the workshop space. I encouraged each of the group members to hold on to one individual as he or she ‘walked us’ through his or her life... (Jones, 1997, Marian Chace Annual Lecture. Cited in American Journal of Dance Therapy, 1988. Emphasis in original text).

Through these encounters individuals were given the opportunity to talk about how they felt about their experience. This was not an easy task. As Jone's noted (1997): ‘The present was a reward won by struggle, contemplation and courage’. These workshop uncovered the enormous range of experiences from people who felt that ‘This is the best time of my life’, to ‘I was not living till this happened to me,’ and ‘I have good days and

⁹⁴ See <http://vimeo.com/36236488>

bad days, but I take them as they come.' But, what appears really cathartic was when Jones took the brave step of asking people to face what their death may 'look like':

The inevitable next step came in my next request: *Take us to your death. What time is it? Where is it? How do you look? Who's there with you? What are they saying? What's going on?* Some people resisted every stage of 'walk me through your life.' And particularly this final questioning. I would say, *Be a fiction writer. It's your death, make it up as you go along. You won't have this chance again. What do you want to happen?* The results were almost always moving. Some were shocking. Asatto saw himself raging, screaming, needing to be held down. James first saw himself hurtling from a bridge, then, changing his mind, he said he'd be in some place calm, his work published, and I would be there with him. Beverley was going to go with her husband to a favourite spot along the Carolina coast line, sit on a special rock, and look out at the ocean. Catherine, age eleven, never reached the last day - she kept going until she was 674 years old and had to be stopped for lack of time. She was never going to die! (Jones, 1997, Marian Chace Annual Lecture. Cited in American Journal of Dance Therapy, 1988. Emphasis in original).

When pondering the value of such experiences, some might argue that Jones is exploiting people who are vulnerable. He, however, experienced it differently:

My purpose was to open a tap that would flow with poetic facts that could be crafted into art. Something else happened as well, people became more complicated and clear. They were breaking apart and rearranging themselves. They were sharing with each other, coining terms, making declarations, giving and receiving advice. At least two fell in love and are now married. I am convinced this richness was fueled by movement. Was it therapy? As a dance-maker I am interested in the prophetic in dance: The biblical prophet is defined by Abraham Heschel as 'one who is an iconoclast, challenging the apparently holy, revered and awesome. The prophet's language, poetry and action is charged with agitation, anguish and a spirit of non-acceptance. The prophet is a preacher whose purpose is not self-expression, nor the purgation of feeling, but communication.' It is the final sentence of this concise definition that is at once troubling and important in our discussion today. I don't intend to provide a therapeutically avenue for my audience although I acknowledge that good art changes us. I use feelings in my art. These feelings, I hope, meet the feelings of the

spectator allowing a more profound understanding of what we are sharing here in this world, what we belong to (Jones, 1997, Marian Chace Annual Lecture. Cited in American Journal of Dance Therapy, 1988).

What initially may appear as an artistic endeavour and a journey towards self-exploration, the *Penelope Project* and *Still/Here* productions were also an opportunity to understand in more depth our collective selves, and how we share space, time and history. The *Penelope Project* has resulted in new, kinder and more enjoyable experiences for older people in residential care. *Still/Here* offered an opportunity to experience agency and change. Although the participants were unable to change their present circumstances, the use of the imagination enabled them to experience it differently. New opportunities were discovered (love, marriage, acceptance) and some experienced what may be described as 'healing'. While, in my view, it was not physical, it was none-the-less profound.

While the Youth Theatre Project was not intended to engage with the hard reality of death and illness, Jones' work points to the enormous potential in creativity and the arts for uncovering and exploring the social dimension inherent in living with others. His work recognizes that we are not only all forced to face our mortality, but also highlights how life and death are intricately woven into a culturally and socially situated fabric of meaning. While we may be alone in our passing, the journey there is undertaken with many others. Even when we find ourselves alone or abandoned, it is possible through engagement with others to follow the weave of time and discover that we still 'belong'.

More radical forms of activism can be found in theatre projects such as *Theatre of the Oppressed*, created by Augusto Boal in Brazil. The concept has become an international form of activism. Boal's written work (1979) has been translated into 25 different languages and his theatrical techniques are used in over 70 countries. Boal was influenced by writers such as Paulo Freire, who was interested in exposing the power structures and relationships that marginalise or exclude (Shaw, 2008:27).

Paulo Freire's work, and in particular *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and

the *Theatre of the Oppressed*, has proven influential in radical interpretations of community development, both in terms of theory and practice. Freire's and Boal's approach insists that traditional education, with its emphasis on reproducing authority, perpetuates domination. In contrast, a critical educator (which includes community development workers) values humility and compassion. Here, for Boal, theatre acts as a lever in local communities to bring to the fore key issues that cause oppression. Community workers and artists work together as 'critical educators' in a dynamic process of co-learning and co-teaching.

Other authors drawing upon Friere's commitment to the oppressed, such as Ledwith (2005, 2001), argue that community development should be a critical process committed to social and environmental justice that begins in personal empowerment. For Ledwith, 'power and empowerment, poverty and privilege, nature and humanity' are linked. The 'stumbling block' in collective action, she suggests, lies in the difficulty in moving from personal and group projects to full collective force. The objective of the *Theatre of the Oppressed* is to provide centres in local areas whereby such challenges can be overcome.

While the motivation of the Youth Theatre Project was not to transform oppressive state structures, there was, I believe, a liberating role to the work. Certainly, it drew on the underlying theory as laid out by Boal and Friere that places an emphasis upon the role of critical education and change in a realistic, non-threatening environment for these crucial experiences to be discussed. Such an approach would be sympathetic to Ledwith's view (also influenced by Friere) that emancipation has to start by giving 'voice to silenced voices', so that 'the deeply personal is profoundly political' (Ledwith, 2005:63). For Ledwith, 'life is a fiction', and therefore we need to hear 'stories of the people', before we can change communities. The interpretation of the past can be made only when 'people know of a social world and their place within it. We tell and retell the stories of our lives differently according to our audience, our recollection and our insight; stories become shaped by time and space and understanding, and the telling of stories

can, in turn, be the vehicle of our understanding'. These narratives emerge only when community workers make contact with people in their everyday context. This is an interaction that identifies issues *relevant* to people's lives and empowerment exists when it encourages people to question their reality. A more just society recognises sustainability and is rooted in the personal everyday experience of 'grassroots community activism'.

During the theatre project one of the more powerful narratives people engaged with were stories about their personal and shared identities. The tension between individual and shared community identity is not easy to understand, and even harder to make assertions about. Forging unity within a context of difference is not an easy task. Public theatre offers a potentially creative way of understanding these dilemmas, because unity is understood not as something homogenous, but as part of something shared through the endeavour of creating art. In the youth theatre production the individuals are not isolated or independent. The Play is collectively organised and structured with a vision that is contained in a time-frame. For public theatre to work it needs to be embedded in the social and physical landscape of the community, because this reinforces participation a sense of belonging. It is impossible to separate the drama that surrounds a theatre project from its public setting, both symbolically and literally, because it represents a call for community action. It is a community because it cannot exist without the participation of all concerned (for even people behind the scenes are involved, as well as the parents who bring their children every Saturday to rehearsals). 'Making' theatre cannot be understood as anything other than a social exercise.

8.14 Placed-Based Identity Formation

Conal Kearney, whose family have lived in Roscam for generations, raised the issue of how young people's identities are shaped both by past and present, and whether it is important for them to have an opportunity to express the range of feelings associated with their developing identity. As the young actors discuss the roles of Cú Chulainn and Queen Maebh, 'they also confront their own sense of identity as it shifts through

adolescence' (Conal Kearney, Director of the Youth Theatre group and resident of Roscam. Roscam. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012). He also adds that

It's challenging for them, really challenging; to get up there; sometimes to not know somebody; and all those issues; girl standing in front of a boy and all those things it brings across; but then the benefits you get from that is hopefully huge, from the self-confidence building to belief in yourself.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012), with Anna King and Niamh Heery. Kearney residence, Roscam).



Figure 96 Photograph taken from film documentary: *Making History*. Ancient Roscam Site.

For Conal Kearney, theatre provides a form of ritual to help young people deal with the challenges of evolving identities often experienced when re-locating to a new country. While others might not have used the term ritual, Randy Asante's observation provides evidence of the potentially powerful role theatre can play in building a community and overcoming diversity when he states,

I think the theatre group, especially the way it has been organized, has really brought people from different backgrounds all together. It's given them a chance, especially for the kids, to have a firsthand meeting with other kids from different backgrounds, which is really good. I've seen Nigerians, Ghanaians, Irish people all together, trying to put a play together which is really really interesting.

As a volunteer I have been really watching the way the kids are interacting. When we first started you would see the Ghanaians together, the Nigerians together, the Irish together. They were separate groups. Now it's really different. On the breaks you can see them mixing together, which I think is really special. These kids and their children will be the future generation. And when there is that sort of togetherness amongst them it will be good for community as well.

(Interview with Randy Asante, 6th October, 2012. Castlegar Hurling Club with Niamh Heery and Anna King for the Community Documentary).

This suggests that encounters with 'strangers', if conducted within conducive spaces, can provide rewarding experiences. As Conal Kearney observes, 'It's important to observe the magic of theatre and what it can do' (Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012. Kearney residence, Roscam). Although such sentiments and observations are impressive, how to nurture such valuable life encounters into the wider community requires a long-term sustainable project.

8.15 Understanding How Identities Evolve through Metaphor

From the young actors involvement in *The Táin* it was clear that critical reflection was key element in the Play's success. During rehearsals I became aware of the way in which metaphor 'opened up' young people's minds and how taking on roles and 'masks' had brought theatre into 'real' life through the ability to build confidence, forge bonds between individuals. It seemed to me that the structure of a metaphor required further exploration. A metaphor 'involves the bringing together of two different objects or subjects that have a particular contact in common' (Jones 1996:222-223). In other words, a metaphor acts as a link. This is called a 'metaphoric connection' – 'a common quality'

(Jones, 1996:223). The quality of things, animals, flowers, for example, have their own essence or characteristic. When related to something else, this may shed new light on the subject. A butterfly, may represent an ‘unsettled’ person, the imagery of a tower demonstrates how someone feels ‘locked in’. Metaphors can be used, therefore, to explore feelings or predicaments in more depth, to unlock hidden dimensions or to describe complex situations (Jones, 1996:222-231). Within dramaturgy there is a tradition that uses metaphor as a tool to stimulate conversations about things that are not ordinarily easy.

Characteristic associations may vary, depending on the particular culture which informs the interpretation so that, for example, the colour black in pre-Christian Western pagan religions had positive associations. It was related to stories about (re)birth, and how the darkness of the earth held the potential for new life, as did a woman’s womb and the dark side of the moon. It was viewed positively, for it represented life. In contrast, Christian beliefs point to the colour black as something evil and is associated with death, while white represents purity, virginity and godliness.

The manner in which metaphor holds the potential to reveal hidden characteristics, as well as providing an opportunity to examine the meaning assigned to objects and symbols is valuable, particularly when we try to understand evolving identities in contested landscapes. The use of metaphors in theatre also allows discussions about social displacement. The difficulties associated with attempting to make new homes in unfamiliar landscapes are not just practical (finding the local shop or bus stop), but are also symbolic (how we interpret or read social and cultural norms). These local symbolic systems are what Geertz believes to be crucial elements to the day to day ‘functioning’ of social life. Such concerns raise questions about the role of signs and symbols (‘how signs signify’) within our social and physical landscape and how they ‘play a role in the life of a society, or some part of a society’ (Geertz, 1993:118). For Geertz, it is extremely difficult to understand local systems without being culturally equipped to do so. Our knowledge of a particular locality is passed on to us through

practice and social conditioning. We continually (re)enact culture through our engagements, conversations and the daily business with those who recognise the same (or similar) pathways of knowing. To find ourselves in places where completely different understandings of the world are the norm can therefore seem bewildering. Public theatre clearly has a potentially positive role in the construction of pathways of knowing.

Much of the ethnographic research in this thesis has documented how older indigenous people from the DRA attempted to reconcile their experiences with the changing cultural patterns and practices. Conversely, there is also a need to highlight the responses of newly settled people in this unfamiliar social landscape. During the rehearsals I became increasingly drawn to the positive element of the storytelling process, rich as it is with metaphor and allegory. While story-telling traditions vary worldwide those in Western Europe contain similarities that include evolving narratives passed down through generations.⁹⁵ As the tellers improvise or change the structure of the story to introduce new plots and themes, they often adapt to the audience or purpose for the tale. Indigenous story-telling was a method of transferring knowledge, values and ethics. The tales were very much connected to group (community) identity, describing evolutionary myths (where the ‘original’ people came from) or imparting knowledge about the importance of nurturing a strong relationship with the land that symbolises community well-being (See Basso, 1996).

Myths draw on the symbolism of nature’s cycles to bring about learning and reflection. Often certain creatures assume roles that are symbolic of a particular moral, at other times they represent existential issues, such as mortality and death. The raven, for example, is associated with death in old myths and legends.

⁹⁵ <http://www.timsheppard.co.uk> is a useful website full of information about worldwide storytelling traditions. While traditional storytelling generally refers to fairy tales, folktales, mythology, legends, and fables, modern storytelling also includes historical narratives, political commentary and digital versions.

Narrator: Just then a raven flew down and landed on the shoulder of Cú Chulainn. Queen Maebh and her warriiors knew then he was dead, as the raven would only eat dead meat.

(3rd November, 2012. Final production of *The Táin* in Castlegar Complex).

Many myths and legends use the stories of magic and spells to broaden the imagination, to facilitate the idea that it is possible to use the imaginative powers for changing the future. Thus, Queen Maebh calls upon the druid to put the army of Ulster to sleep:

Druid: I will put the armies in a deep sleep your majesty...(drum rolling sound) the armies of Ulster are in a deep sleep, your majesty... (drum rolling sound)... Wait!! There is someone who is not asleep; he is immune to my power, your majesty.

(3rd November, 2012. Final production of *The Táin* in Castlegar Complex).

Equally, there are discourses concerned with how human beings can overcome the power of magic or how individuals can overcome dominance, hardship or tragedy. In *An Táin*, the story unfolded to show how the hero(in) can find the inner strength to overcome the supernatural:

Queen Maebh: Who is this person?

Druid: He is a youth and his name is Cú Chulain.

Queen Maebh: A Youth? How is he immune to your power? Tell me about him?

Druid: Cú Chulain is a nephew of King Conor. He is a warrior of immense strength and speed, despite his size. There is no one to match him.

(3rd November, 2012. Final production of *The Táin* in Castlegar Complex).

Engaging in the symbolism of tales creates opportunities for actors to consider events in more depth, encouraging, for a short period at least, to suspend their own sense of ego, I, or individual view of the world and enter into a realm of the fantastical. Conal Kearney believes that in this place, between fantasy and the ‘real’ world, it is possible to re-negotiate our futures. When myths are associated with a particular place, the moral of the story, or the symbolism underpinning it, becomes more powerful. This is because places give life to stories. They situate characters (both human and otherwise) in a context outside of the allegorical significance, giving the imagination the necessary anchor points for freedom to explore. Places provide a framework in which the story *belongs*, giving structure to dialogue, critical reflection and, more importantly, an opportunity for new ways in which the story can develop. In other words, *places act as a bridge between the world of the imagination and the everyday life*. Myths and legends travel across cultures and time, allowing an emphasis to be placed upon land that is not concerned exclusively with that belonging to one group or culture.

Modern approaches to storytelling tend to elevate the individual and the written word, whereas traditional stories in Ireland were passed down orally (although sometimes imagery was used) and regarded as a collective affair. Here, storytelling created a space for a group that was often involved in its (re)construction. It was a shared encounter, rich in cultural tones. The participation of the ‘audience’ in oral story-telling traditions was vital, confirmed in its convivial setting. The storyteller does not stand up and deliver a fully formed creation. Rather, it comes into ‘being’, and remains ‘alive’, through social engagement. They use symbols, riddles and rich imagery to seduce people into participating. The story is co-constructed reflecting the personality and needs of the group. As Dáithí Ó hÓgáin argues, the aesthetic quality of folklore can ‘inspire us to give a better vision of the world’,⁹⁶ because it is exploratory in nature, embracing a shared understanding, rather than an individualist ‘take’ upon the world.

⁹⁶ Story-telling Ireland website.

Traditional story-telling in Ireland draws upon old Irish proverbs, place names, sites of important social encounters and folklore and, in my opinion, offers enormous potential in modern Ireland to create positive encounters between people experiencing differences. In so doing, story-telling techniques may help people overcome some of the challenges associated with locating themselves in cultural systems that are different. While we can accept that story-telling traditions draw upon local knowledge there is a further interesting element to traditional Irish story-telling techniques: improvisation. This can lend itself to the form of theatre. Moreover, because storytelling allows contributions from the group, it seems possible that this can also be used to build ‘shared futures’ based on multiple interpretations, each contributing to the community-building puzzle.

Once formed, these emerging narratives shape new symbolic systems of knowledge that reflect diverse cultural traditions. If we acknowledge the importance of working with local knowledge in this way, traditional story-telling might help overcome the challenges associated with dislocation, and make living in a diverse cultural setting meaningful, enjoyable and preferable. The themes used in stories are almost always universal, offering opportunities for building bridges between cultures and overcoming difference. In the Play, Conal Kearney decided to work with the old Irish legend of *The Táin*, the ancient story of Cú Chulain and the great warrior Queen Maebh of Connaught, because

we love the big stories... is because they have been worked on for generations, for years and years. They are the classic stories of power, good, evil and magic.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012).

Conal Kearney believes that classic stories, with their rich use of imagery and metaphor, can help to (re) shape aspects of life that appear challenging because when

we are in creativity - in make believe; what we are doing is attempting to renegotiate reality.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012).

He adds that these roles are interesting because they personify modern life dramas in an exaggerated way. For example, Queen Maeve,

the great warrior queen of Connaught is very interesting in modern society – one, she is a woman, a warrior queen. She is the boss and has power issues, which is always interesting to explore with young people. And then we have our super hero Cú Chulain, who is a modern day superman. He is everything – he is all powerful, he's got a heart, he's kind, he's also human. This is the ideal. We also have his half-brother, who is different; there is conflict there. This is interesting from a psychological point of view, because here we have the divided self.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012), with Anna King and Niamh Heery. Kearney residence, Roscam).

The classic stories are also non-ageist (to the extent that they are capable of being adapted for any age group) and they tend to exalt older members of the community as, more often than not, they are the bearers of history, tradition and local knowledge. In this way, the dilemma of the isolation of many elders in our society could be improved through the use of public theatre and storytelling. Story-telling in Ireland has a rich tradition as well as a contemporary presence through the work of those such as Liz Weir, Nuala Hayes and Jack Lynch, who grew up immersed in the work of the great story-teller, Eamon Kelly.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Eamon Kelly (1913 – 2011), was born in the Slieve Luachra area of Co. Kerry. He was initially a woodwork teacher before becoming an actor. He appeared on radio as well as the stage, in The Gate and The Abbey Theatre. He was nominated for a Tony Award in 1966 and won the New York critic's award on Broadway for his role in Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Aside from his acting excellence it was as a story-teller that many remember him. (An Extract from Jack Lynch website: Eamon Kelly, an appreciation).

There are two aspects to storytelling in Ireland: the traditional-bearers and storytellers. The term *seanchaí* describes the ‘communal bearer of multi-faceted traditional lore’, whereas a *scéalaí* is the teller, which was one of the functions of the *seanchaí*. As Jack Lynch writes:

Given the nature of late 20th century Irish society it is questionable if the term *seanchaí* can now be applied to more than a few (some individuals like Paddy Lowry and Paddy Heaney in the Slieve Bloom area may well approach that status). It would certainly be inaccurate to give the term to most modern professional story-tellers, given the fact that the traditional *seanchaí* was defined by the *local* audience to whom he (and it was usually a ‘he’) imparted his lore.

(See Jack Lynch website: Eamon Kelly: An Appreciation).

The challenge for the modern day *scéalaí* and *seanchaí* is how to communicate stories in a culturally diverse social setting. It is possible that the structure behind the fluid and transient nature of storytelling may provide insight into this dilemma. The structure (space) that ‘holds’ old Irish stories are particular localities; where the stories are located in the relationship that humans have with their landscape and the ancestors that resided. Such a canvas provides a fruitful framework in which the creative aspect of the storytelling process can unfold. Thus, storytelling techniques use the structured landscape to explore the fluid affairs of the heart, as well to locate the wisdom that textures the story. That such lores are passed down through generations, and retold many times, often with a slightly different emphasis or moral tone, depends on the audience. Each time an old story becomes a new adventure, with a different hue or allegory, it becomes ‘alive’ in its own right. This may illuminate for us how we may be able to work with experiences of difference and use the contestation of meaning as part of a constructive process of inquiry.

Such approaches to story-telling have been considered in depth by Edmondson, who uses ethnographic reconstruction to ‘make sense’ out of interactions that would otherwise appear ‘opaque’ (Edmondson, 2012:77). The importance of how forms of knowledge are communicated is central to her examination of ‘wise interactions’ in a

West of Ireland Connemara village and, like the traditional storyteller, she argues for the ‘active roles of both speaker and hearer play in transmitting insights about attitudes and behaviour’ (Edmondson, 2012:77). She draws on the use of proverbs in the West of Ireland as a form of knowledge sharing, and argues that using them aptly requires three coordinated capacities:

The first is the ability to perceive precisely and humanely *what is at issue in a given state of affairs*, the second, to see how it could be changed, the third, to know how to *activate* this knowledge *for the person addressed* (Edmondson, 2012:83).

Edmondson highlights the important point that, for an individual to know how to use proverbs in this way, we need to not just learn a large amount of sayings, but also know ‘*how they could be used*’. She states that this requires a form of tacit knowledge, learnt over a period of time, with experience of interpreting the proverbs in many different situations and that being adept at this task requires ‘a profound capacity to understand human behaviour, which not everyone acquires in equal measure’ (Edmondson, 2012:83). Importantly, she argues that this kind of knowledge sharing is participatory in nature because it draws on social environments: ‘change is enabled rather than prescribed’ (Edmondson, 2012:84).

These kind of ideas are useful in diverse social contexts that may be tense due to lack of familiarity. If such interactions are taken in conducive spaces for shared dialogue it is possible for proverbs and storytelling techniques to be of use in overcoming problems of inequality. For instance, as Edmondson argues: ‘The user of a proverb can avoid assuming a position of superiority, instead pointing to resources from which speaker and hearer both draw’ (Edmondson, 2012:84). Arguably, this was achieved during theatre group encounters. Moreover, because of the creative, improvised nature of the such interactions, it may well be that people can be ‘surprised’ out of their preconceived ideas and therefore learn new and potentially rewarding experiences rather than ‘playing safe’ within familiar codes of language that lead to reproduction of social norms.

In this way, theatre, through the use of storytelling, can build new creative futures that are co-constructed, alive and non-threatening through the teaching of young people the art and craft of more three dimensional forms of dialogue that are critically reflective and participative in nature. Here, Edmondson addresses whether shared cultural resources such as wisdom, can provide intergenerational support for young people to help them negotiate the challenges associated with difficult life situations. In particular, the skills of social competence and resilience are addressed and she emphasizes the collective nature of how these skills are acquired, arguing that interaction in both family and wider social contexts is key to how such experiences can be successfully integrated into everyday life encounters. While she acknowledges that resilience and social competence take time to develop, and are by no means ‘fixed’ (see also Rutter, 2000; Cutrona, 2006; Sameroff 2005) she states that ‘ethnographic reconstructions of wisdom extend this debate by pointing to *sociocultural* resources used by people of different generations for dealing with problems in their common environments’ (Edmondson: 2012:33).

Metaphors can be used to also to

startle or amuse listeners in a way that transforms their involvement with the predicament... The surprise and the humour of proverbs are part of what brings the listener to want to see the situation differently or behave differently in it (Edmondson, 2012:83).

This is a view that would resonate with Elmes (1979) who notes that ‘The mind of man seems everywhere to analyse, and reassemble, something of the fabric of a cultural order, often in the mode of mockery’ (Elmes, 1979:xiii). Elmes regards the process of storytelling as a form of ‘reflective response’ perhaps to historical disaster, destruction of culture and family security, and can be a ‘motive for recalling and shaping particular myths in particular ways’ (Elmes, 1979:xiii).

The use of storytelling as a way of negotiating life’s trials and errors is also central to the work of Basso (1996). Basso studied how wisdom in the day to day interactions of the Apache people can help people predict and therefore avoid harmful events or travesties, through a form of *prescient* thinking that are produced and sustained

by three mental conditions: smoothness, resilience and steadiness of mind (Basso, 1996). This type of thinking is used by the community to help people through difficult times, as well as providing structure to social life. What is critical though is that value is attributed to the ‘learning’ of the lesson inherent in the difficulties individuals encounter, rather than just the act of avoiding harm.

What is interesting about Basso’s work is that he describes how the Apache people believe that these mental qualities need consciously nurturing through a sophisticated process of learning stories about one’s ancestors. These stories are contained in a matrix of ancestral knowledge about the land that they inhabited and the culture of which they were (are) a part. When these ancient stories are enacted through storytelling and combined with everyday life experiences, a lesson about the present would come forth. Knowledge of places and their cultural significance is crucial to this process. The Apache people caution against losing the stories of their ancestors, as the land embodies wisdom and therefore provides a structured space from which the story is teased out (Basso, 1996:71-104). Here the use of the imagination is critical, for it is important to be able to imagine the past as well as conjure the future.

These ideas resonate in Conal Kearney’s work with the youth theatre. The play draws upon the need to identify with place and the role of culture in belonging. In a manner similar to the story-telling process, the structure of the public theatre landscape (its social and physical characteristics) provides the platform for creative processes of inquiry and social construction. More specifically, public theatre and the storytelling process may offer people who have become dislocated from their own sources of inspiration (familiarity, home and place) to weave a new story, one that retains their past, or ‘what matters to them’, and can be combined with experiences in the present. What is important to tease out briefly here is how belonging is understood; what are we belonging to, and how does this process occur?

We need to consider why stories are important. Here, Bruner (2002) states that stories are intrinsic to our everyday lives and social interaction. We live a life within

stories, and yet, when we try and explain the stories, or understand them in more depth, we tend to stumble. Moreover, we often use them without thinking, or fully understanding the extent to which these stories perpetuate or construct the contexts within which we engage. As Bruner establishes:

Stories are surely not innocent; they always have a message, most often so well concealed that even the teller knows not what axe he may be grinding. For example, stories typically begin by taking for granted (and asking the hearer or reader to take for granted) the ordinariness or normality of a given state of things in the world - what *ought* to prevail when Red Riding Hood visits her grandmother, or what a black kid *ought* to expect on arriving at a school door in Little Rock, Arkansas, after *Brown v. Board of Education* struck down racial segregation. And the peripeteia upsets the expected sequence – it's a wolf in Grandma's clothes, or Governor Faubus's Arkansas militia is blocking your entrance – and the story is on its way, with the initial normative message lurking in the background (Bruner, 2002:6).

How then do stories shape our experience of the world? How do they become compelling enough that they ‘shape our experience not only of the worlds the fiction portrays, but of the real world?’ (Bruner, 2002:9). Public Theatre offers a way of deepening our understanding of these issues.

This thesis provides an exploration of how to create conducive spaces for ‘making sense’ through the role of theatre, the imagination and creativity. It is also important to understand how the unfamiliar becomes the familiar (making sense) and, importantly, how is it possible for culturally diverse individuals and groups to shape new experiences and futures. The issue of meaning is central to this exploration. We often regard normality as something ‘outside’ of ourselves; the world within which we have inherited. It is actually important to understand how this world has been created by a range of influences, including a consensus of what is meaningful. Here, belonging is understood to offer an opportunity for social life to be given meaning through the co-construction of cultural landscapes, avoiding the conflicts associated with ‘insider and outsider’ constructs, and the division associated with boundaries and borders.

Public theatre has revealed how experiences of the familiar and unfamiliar (both old and new) are interchangeable dynamics, became important to this endeavour. They are not separate experiences, but part of a lived process of *becoming*. We can enjoy and be well-versed in a poem without consciously understanding its allegorical content. Or, we can know our loved ones well, but have no awareness of their secrets or dreams (and ironically, these secrets may even find their expression among strangers). It is not clear at which point the unfamiliar becomes familiar, or vice versa. In other words, the boundary between familiar and unfamiliar is blurred and difficult to define.

This raises the issue of how we define the ‘whole’. Is it more than the sum of the parts together? It is not just the accumulation of the parts involved. What gives the experience of something being ‘whole’ (in this context, the making sense of a chaotic world), structure, is meaning. Although the social unfolding of meaningful experiences may actually relate to moving from separateness to togetherness (in the sense that meaningful experiences appear to be more prolific when we engage socially rather than remain in isolation), ethnographic interactions over a sustained period (in particular during the theatre process) have shown that it is how we construct (the context of our gathering) the experience is also important.

Here, Maines (2000: 577) argues that the difficulty of meaning is ‘encased in the problem of consensus’, largely because people need to understand, either literally through cognitive processes, or symbolically through cultural norms and codes, something in order for them to act. Similarly, Geertz (2000) writes that common sense represents the world as a familiar world, one everyone can, and should, recognise, and within which everyone stands, or should, on his own feet... Common sense is an everyday realm of thought that helps “solid citizens” make decisions effectively in the face of everyday problems. In the absence of common sense, one is a “defective person” (2000: 91).

This process of social construction is driven by a range of influences, some of which are unconscious (socialisation). Life is, therefore, not a rational process. Here, the theatre provided a process where this (un) conscious realm was made *more* conscious. It

revealed *some* hidden or subjective dimensions through the use of myth and legend. Public theatre offers an opportunity to explore these ideas by ‘making the familiar and the ordinary strange again’, offering ‘alternative worlds that put the actual one in a new light’ (Bruner, 2002:9). This research demonstrates how public theatre, through narrative, myth and legend can , ‘... carry our meaning-making beyond banality into the realm of the possible. It explores human plights through the prism of imagination’ (Bruner, 2002:10). Following Geertz (2000), we can suggest that public theatre shows ‘how common sense is forged’ and from this it is possible to ‘see how culture is put together’ and thus we can better understand ‘the kinds of lives societies support’ (2000:93).

8.16 Using the Imagination and Creativity to (re) engage with Place

To fully appreciate the importance of the imaginative process it is useful to regard theatre as a place ‘in-between worlds’, a space to draw upon experiences of the past and use the imagination to find expression and create new things in the present. These experiences can also be described as the ‘spheres of the between’, which describes a place where people struggle to make sense of each other (See Buber 1947 and 1958, cited in Hodes, 1972: 73). The phrase ‘in-between worlds’ can also describe structured spaces for critical inquiry and participation. Here, public theatre offers an additional quality, a space Brook refers to as ‘empty, a void between fantasy and reality, where we can renegotiate reality’ (Conal Kearney, 31st September, 2012). During the theatre project it became evident that while such encounters may endure in the individual, through personal development, a question persists as to how we can give structure to the experience and bring about long-term development that reaches further than a few individuals? The next section considers how this may be achieved by using the imagination and creativity to (re)engage with place.

This following section, explores how the young actors used their imaginations to engage with the ancient heritage of Roscam. Conal Kearney took the group to a place in the community which could help them appreciate more fully the role of place in the Play.

McAuley points out that theatre, like other live arts has in the past emphasized the spatial dimension to performance (McAuley, 2006). There has been a tradition in theatre practice to regard the stage as a non-place, disassociated from locality, enabling the stage to travel and be in *any* place (Godall, 2006). An example of this would be street performers who move from place to place, but create temporary spaces to perform. It is for Brook the process of removing performance from place that allows creativity; an ‘empty space’ is therefore always full with potential. Within these spaces public theatre can use artistic methods to encourage people to (re)think their sense of place. ‘When street performers set up to perform in a park, street or city square (a ‘pitch’), they are looking to encourage a crowd away from the business of everyday life, and to re-position this audience in the performance space of their own design. In so doing, performers effectively fade the socially endowed and inhabited ‘place’ into the background (Cohen, 2007:187-188). This act allows a temporary pause of normality, while other dimensions to life can be explored. We can switch between reality and illusion: ‘the magician’s knowing wink, the singer’s seductive harmonies... Our preconceptions...are challenged and thus our understandings of place are ripe to be reassessed and re-jigged’ (Cohen, 2007:186).

Place-based performance, however, asks us to reconsider place in the performance. Rather than the idea that performers create a space of ‘their own design’, these ideas emphasize the *relational* aspects of place-based performance. In Casey’s view, places ‘are not empty but full, and they are good to live in precisely because of their distinctive features’ (Lewis, 2006:283).

However, site-based performance still engages with the creative use of space, they locate these acts in a specific site. Here, Lewis’s insights are valuable because:

Theatre is a place of many spaces. That is, it is a tangible, contoured environment, with all its features, foibles, and qualities, within which acts of spatial and placial imagination are meant to take place. In this case, the idea of ‘space’ might be acknowledged as an imaginary construct, an attempt to imagine an aspect (or several) of place in a simplified, restricted, or alternative form (Lewis, 2006:285-286).

Place-based performance is more than just the idea that performers and an audience must be present together, that a performance ‘take place’ that is to be located somewhere’ (McAuley, 2006:15-16). Site-based performance is also about how performers, an audience and community engage with the historical, social and storied landscape in which the performance takes place. Here, McAuley (2006) has argued that this emphasis on place and people’s experience can aptly be called a ‘placial turn’ in which performers choose to abandon the ‘non-place of the stage’ and ‘locate their performances in place because they realize that all social action is contextual. (McAuley, 2006:16). It is in this vein that Pearson and Shanks observe usefully that

Site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused... They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible (Pearson and Shanks, 2001:243; cited in McAuley, 2006:17).

For McAuley, Pearson and Shanks, engagement with place is at its most intense in site-based performance. Site-based performance helps us to understand the social and political context in which people live. As McAuley highlights, this is because

Moving outside traditional performance venues and making performances in sites marked by their own histories of occupation and use means that artists and spectators experience these places in new ways, and are obliged to engage in new ways with the political issues that seem to be an inevitable consequence of being in place... Places raise questions about memory and about group and individual identity: who we are intimately bound up with, where we are, and where we come from... (McAuley, 2006:17).

Thus, for McAuley, placed-based public theatre offers a way to (re)negotiate the self within the social setting that it is taking place. This is extremely significant insight because one of the primary objectives of this research was to deepen awareness of how people cope and respond to changing social and cultural landscapes, as well as overcome some of the challenges associated with social dislocation.

The power of the imagination should not be underestimated as a tool in social development and a further piece to the imaginative puzzle evolved when Conal Kearney suggested that we took the young people out to an ancient site in Roscam. Public theatre, therefore, became a conduit for understanding the relationship between space and place. For Conal Kearney this could help to encourage ‘integration’, as individuals relate to, and become part of, the cultural tradition that existed in a locality (6th September, 2012). This is not a guise for supporting a process of assimilation, the view that young people should adopt traditional Irish culture or values. Rather, as Basso observes, these physical places hold the symbols and ‘signposts’ that create a sense of belonging, because these places (and the stories they tell) provide significance and meaning:

In other words, one must acknowledge that local understandings of external realities are fashioned from local cultural materials, and that, knowing little or nothing of the latter, one’s ability to make appropriate sense of “what is” and “what occurs” in another’s environment is bound to be deficient. (Basso, 1996:72).

Here, it is worth considering Basso’s view that such processes require us to have an interactional relationship with the land. We must realize that places ‘are as much as part of us as we are part of them, and senses of place – yours, mine, and everyone else’s – partake complexly of both’ (Basso, 1996: xiv). Getting to know the DRA landscape, therefore, offers opportunity for belonging to both a place and its peoples: ‘places are lived most often in the company of other people, and it is on these occasions-when places are sensed *together...*’ (Basso 1996:109).

Basso argued that people’s expressions, whether political, emotional or social ‘are informed by their experience in a culturally constituted world of objects and events with which most of us are unfamiliar’ (Basso, 1996:39). In this sense these visits, and the critical reflections during rehearsals, are part of a process in which the young actors might find themselves developing a better understanding of the less obvious influences that shape social life. These visits to explore ancient heritage were, therefore, not just about the appreciation of artefacts, or obtaining historical knowledge (although no doubt

the young actors enjoyed this element of the visit), they allow public theatre to bring culture to life; to work consciously with that which is considered to be unfamiliar and to discover new ideas and meaning. In other words, a ‘sense of place... is not just something that people know and feel, it is something people *do*’ (Camus, 1955:88).

It is almost impossible to measure the extent to which someone belongs or assigns value to a particular experience because there are so many ways in which an experience can be interpreted and lived out. It is imperative therefore that other considerations of an individual’s lived experience are taken into account. However, that said, if we define belonging as having the right to participate in the co-creation of culture, through creative practices that enable individuals in the present to shape the future and change the past, then it is possible to see how place-based public theatre can encourage a sense of belonging.

The idea that people can develop a sense of belonging by renegotiating the future through imaginative work involves not just individuals shaping their social and cultural lives, but that in so doing they also have profound personal experiences. Here, Cohen (2007) suggests that one of the powerful ways in which performance can have an effect on the future is through the work remaining ‘in’ the spectators, actors and the places of enactment. Poetically, it is described as,

characterised by thin strands of being: wisp-like vanishings feeling hollow and ghost-like presences making full (Cohen, 2007:185).



Figure 97 Ancient Roscam. Photograah by Anna King.

8.17 Roscam Field Trip

Knowledge of places and their cultural significance is crucial to building community and to developing shared identities. Places are more than just a physical ‘landscape’. They provide a ‘reference point’, allowing the use of ancient myth and legend to be contemporarised. Conal Kearney, Nuala Keady, Niamh Heery and I, took the young people out on a field trip to Roscam on 8th September, 2pm-5pm, 2012. The objective was to introduce the young people to some of the area’s rich tapestry of ancient history. For Conal Kearney, this would bring the characters of *An Táin* to life, and make them work for the benefit of the actors. He took them on a adventure around the land showing them the tower, relics and gravestones.

Roscam was a very old settlement dating back to the ninth century and had a significant monastery in A.D. 1177. In medieval times there was a parish of Roscam and

in the *The Book of Leinster* it records ‘The Church of Roscannin (Roscam) and the castle of the port of Galway were burnt down by the English’ (Sheerin, 2000:76-77). The castle, situated near the Monastic site was demolished, in 1813 and is now known as ‘Pollacushlaun’ – Hole of the Castle. Stones from the Castle were used to build the pier at the site and in the 12th Century Roscam was a thriving community with both monastic and military importance. The area where the castle and monastery stood formed part of the territory of Clanfergail, of which the O’Hallorans were dynasts. Clanfergail consisted of 24 villages stretching across Clare, Galway and Roscam. Today, the site is occupied by the ruins of a late medieval 14th century church and a round tower. Round towers in monastic times were used for both religious and military purposes, and according to the ‘*Book of Ballymote*’, the half-brother of Niall of the Nine Hostages, who became King Brian of Connacht, is buried under a large ceremonial stone referred to as Clogh a Liagain or Liagaun Stone, which allegedly dated back to the Bronze Age. The 1813 census records there were 22 houses in Roscam and Glebe, all occupied by farmers. Many of these original families to the area are buried in the local graveyard. The Davenport family of Rosshill House are also interred there (Sheerin, 2000: 76-86). When Christianity replaced Paganism in Ireland, the monks would often adopt some of the former religious practices in order to placate the pagans, which occurred in Roscam and is evident in artefacts and symbols of the ‘old ways’ that still existed, such as two bullaun stones with round shaped cavities. Sheerin believes that these stones may have been used for Pagan ceremonial oils and later as a Christian holy water font (Sheerin, 2000:82). These stones are used in myths about the location and they may have healing powers. Another stone called the ‘holed stone’, is a fertility stone. Locals refer to the graveyard as “Moor” graveyard; the word Moor being a derivation of Muir, meaning sea, or boggy place.

As a native of Roscam, Conal Kearney was able to share with the young people the area’s local history, providing a platform for discussion about issues such as immigration, culture, life, death and themes raised in the play such as greed, love, hate

and war. To the group, he explained that when he was young the area was completely rural. His mother's family, the Melvins, went back 400 years to a place called Corrigeen, which is a neighbouring small village town land that was once made up of small farms adjacent to Roscam, which was the main parish. This site now sits on the edge of the city, beside the Atlantic Ocean. Roscam clearly had an identity before urbanisation made its mark.

Conal Kearney showed the young actors the ancient graveyard and monuments in the area. As you look back from the monuments your eyes fall on a completely new landscape: the rich countryside of the past is now a small area of land that acts as a threshold between the past and present. People in cities often forget that the structures they inhabit are situated on land that has a history and story, one that arguably remains intact, albeit in the small areas of wilderness that have managed to survive urbanisation, or in the place names that trace the lives of previous generations. Conal Kearney's objective was to 'bring the characters alive' in the Roscam landscape, as well as giving life to new ways in which the young people may understand the area in which they live.

A few minutes' walk from the city to the ancient site is like stepping back in time, another world. As Conal Kearney explained, all the

local people would have been buried, or interred there up until the early 1970s. In fact, my grandmother was last person to be interred there in 1972.

I am interested in the pre-Christian part of it, because there is some standing stones and some references to a fella called Niall of the Nine Hostages and his brother who was King Brian of Connaught, who is reputably buried here. We can see some of the elements of pre-Christian rituals: the bull on stones, which someone has used as a headstone for a recent grave, in the last 100 years. And that would have been a pagan ritual of initiation of some sort, and there are other fertility stones. Personally, I would suspect that the Christian connection is to the Coptic monks from South Africa. Because they set off and went and found the most remote places of Western Europe to settle in prayer.

(Conal Kearney, 8th September, 2012. Visit to Roscam historical site).

During this trip to Roscam parts of the play were enacted, helping everyone get a feel for the sense of the tale in a setting that lent itself to the storytelling of myth and legend. The trip also afforded an opportunity for bonding between the cast as they ‘played’ the roles and confirmed, at a later date, by one of the actors, Nathan McPhilbin, who said that

the drama has really brought a lot of people together. We are getting along now... Everyone’s talking to each other now. I would love to see more people getting into it... I would love to see it get into the town hall.

(Nathan McPhilbin, Rehearsals at the Castlegar Complex, Roscam. 6th October, 2012).



Figure 98 Roscam Ancient Site. Photograph taken by Anna King.

Essentially, the idea was that newcomers would develop a sense of ‘belonging’ to the area, as they re-shaped the narrative of the story through their own experiences and creative input. While it is difficult to establish empirically what ‘community belonging’

means, or how it can be achieved in the long-term, it has been identified as important in a number of the narratives garnered in this research. Conal explains that we

talk a lot about belonging in community. What better way of belonging than through a cultural experience. Culture is a social construct on one level. So... it is up to us to also be part of that construction of culture. And it is about embracing and celebrating that. That's how we develop and that's how we learn and that's how we live in a positive way.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012), with Anna King and Niamh Heery. Kearney residence, Roscam).

For Fernandez (2003:187), this can be done by turning spaces 'we go out to inhabit into places with those feeling tones we are familiar'. However, feeling familiar in unfamiliar places takes time. From the experience that I have had in the DRA it also takes a concerted community effort. For Conal Kearney, engaging in the process of cultural (re)production can help young people adapt to either changing or challenging situations because it is

part of our human nature to adapt because what we need is a sense of belonging... It is important to reinforce this sense of belonging. We can do this by exploring who we are and where we are.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012, with Anna King and Niamh Heery. Kearney residence, Roscam).

On many occasions he discussed how storytelling was an important part of different cultural traditions and the young people reflected on the ideas raised during the field trip. For example, in a conversation with Linda Oseyemi, Sammar and Ammara Tahir and Nathan McPhilbin discussed the role of storytelling in family life:

Sammar Tahir: Yeah, I definitely will share it [with his children]. It would be a story that you would like to explain, especially the twists that it has in it. Like, how it ends up that she [Queen Maebh] doesn't get the bull..

Linda Oseyemi: Yeah!

Nathan McPhilbin: It would be good as well, like if you're telling your kids the story and they're like, how do you know this? And then you can tell them that you were part of the story; that you acted in the story...

(Conversation at the Castlegar Complex, Roscam. Rehearsals, 6th October, 2012).

For Conal Kearney, this is a process of co-construction where the story evolves and changes during its dissemination so that stories

like the Irish legends and myths like Cu Chulainn and Queen Maebh are vernacular stories. They often change as they are passed down. For instance, within the Roscam settlement there are some pre-Christian artefacts. This is quite common on early Christian sites, as the monks would attempt to incorporate pagan practices into Christianity in order to ease their initiation into the new religion. In more modern times this is still a useful exercise. For every generation it is a gift to take the story and add more to it. We have the gift of the story that has been handed down from thousands of years of people to us in here in this community. It is our job to hand it on to someone else. I would like to think that maybe some of the young people will tell this story to their children and place it then in Roscam and then that child would tell that story to their children when their older, and add something else of the community...

Given a group access to Irish history and giving them joint ownership of the story and legend and a site and place. It's about belonging – maybe finally they feel like they own the history too.

(Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012. Kearney residence, Roscam).

We can also find this in Sammar Tahir's comment:

Sammar Tahir: And you can give your own point of view of the story, as the character that you played. It sort of brought like life into the story, with our characteristics and stuff – we all brought some of our personality into it to make it more realistic and entertaining too.

(Conversation at the Castlegar Complex, Roscam. Rehearsals, 6th October, 2012).

The DRA has a large number of young people and, as Conal Kearney explains, it is important (and maybe even more important than ever) that these young people are given the honour of being part of history, of being able to define and shape their future by drawing upon the past that involves a feeling they belong to their community, that they identify with its traditions and stories. Through sharing *his* history they, in turn, may share their stories and culture. He suggests that it is now fitting

to return there [Roscam] with our new young community. The symbolism of that would be huge. It's an opportunity to look now at our modern society, where we are going and what we are doing and to look at these places, where it all began and to some extent where it all ended for some of these people.

(Conal Kearney. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012, with Anna King and Niamh Heery. Kearney residence, Roscam).

This was confirmed later by Ammar Tahir, who talked about how doing the play had helped him think about his own culture, as well as others:

I'm King Aileel...I'm only in it for three scenes really. It gave me a lot of confidence when I was acting out... when I grow up I think acting may be a hobby. I like doing Irish legends. It's not like any other culture, it has its own thing about it; it makes you want to learn more about your own culture...

(Conversation at the Castlegar Complex, Roscam. Rehearsals, 6th October, 2012).

The use of the imagination enabled the young actors to interpret history differently from the conventions chosen in schools. It offers an opportunity for them to engage directly with events that had happened hundreds of years ago. Nathan's McPhilbin's Great Aunt, Mary Henry Waller, expressed a similar view, that history

is extremely important to a young person... it's our heritage. Through theatre you can use your imagination so much better. You can re-enact the part you can feel inside; what that person was feeling. Well... at least you think you can.

(Mary Henry Waller, 15th September, interview with Nathan McPhilbin 2012 for film documentary, *Making History*, at Sean Bhaile, Doughiska).

These issues raise questions about our identity, the role of history in shaping the present and the future, and how it is possible for the imagination to change the narrative of the past to influence the future. It is not about eliminating the past, more a sense that it is possible to learn from the past. On this matter, Conal Kearney explained to the young actors how people that live overseas still engage with their families and ancestors, demonstrating that history

is so much part of our identity. There's burials there of the tenant farmers and poor people from the area. You can see a headstone erected by a loving son, who is now in Massachusetts across the United States...

(Conal Kearney, 8th September, 2012. Visit to Roscam historical site). The young actors were particularly interested. Thus, for example, Nathan McPhilbin pointed this out during a subsequent conversation:

The Play is very historical and last week we went to see a few graves and the engravings that were on them from Boston, New York, Manhattan, and all that... *it was very, very cool!*

(Nathan McPhilbin, 4th October, 2012, conversation, Castlegar Complex, Roscam).



Figure 99 Roscam Ancient Graveyard. Photograph taken from film documentary: *Making History*.

Basso suggests that these encounters are examples of how places matter and that when an individual no longer lives in these places, it is possible that some identities remain attached through the imagination. For Basso, communication about places (landscapes) can ‘provide light on how people draw upon the cultural meaning of a place to communicate something important about themselves or their relationships’ (Basso, 1996: 75). He identifies an important link between how people ‘engage, relate and create or reproduce themselves and their culture’. Thus, for Basso place-based thoughts about the self can inspire thoughts of other things and places. Indeed, importantly, he observes that place-based experiences lead to whole networks of associations that can expand awareness and knowledge (Basso, 1996: 107). In this vein, Conal Kearney argues that ‘theatre is a way of unpacking and unfolding these issues in both a conscious and unconscious way (Conal Kearney 31st August, 2012).

The idea that our heritage is connected to both the land and our ancestors was a continuous feature of discussions in rehearsals. As one of the actors, Nathan McPhilbin, said,

I was always interested in history and stuff, like from anywhere. But, I wasn't too interested in Irish history, but just finding out that there's a big battle around this area. It was like, that's kind of cool! So I was kind of in to it then...

(Nathan McPhilbin, Castlegar Complex, Roscam. 6th October).

For the young actors, taking time to walk around the ancient site and chat about its origins was rewarding. As the young actors practised their parts surrounded by ancient historical architecture I was deeply impressed and I gathered from their responses during the day that they too found it a meaningful experience. The importance of being able to see the story in a physical form should not be downplayed, a point that Basso emphasises when he remarks that:

places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process – inward toward facets of the self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternately both together, cannot be known in advance. When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscapes of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where that may lead is anybody's guess (Basso, 1996:107).

The young actors displayed great enthusiasm for Conal Kearney's stories, particularly for those characters in the play that may have once visited the area. Tuning into

this place is very, very relevant to what we are doing, because we are doing the story of Cú Chulainn and the The Táin, which is related to Queen Maebh of Connacht. I have no doubt that Queen Maebh and her entourage would certainly have come around this area of Galway Bay on some of her exploits across to Clare and wherever else. So, I think it is good to perform the play here in the spot where these characters originated... perhaps...

(Conal Kearney, 8th September, 2012. Visit to Roscam historical site).

For the young actors the visit to the ancient site (re) introduced a local tradition that had always been passed down through generations. It was an opportunity for people from other landscapes to connect in a new way with the experience of immigration and cultural difference. History was being (re) enacted in a contemporary context through the use of the imagination and role-playing. The Play performs the role of a bridge between isolated cultural worlds, allowing the creative potential for different cultural practices to mix with different time frames.

There was also a practical dimension, for while many young people are born in Ireland their parents are from other countries. This can, at times, be a confusing journey as young people are confronted with competing social norms and expectations. In the family home their own cultural traditions may be upheld, whereas at school they encounter different experiences. Conal Kearney alludes to this when he suggests that some

of these people are first generation young people living in this community. This is a huge challenge for a young person in their initial rites of passage, in their development and journey through into adulthood. Be that as it may, children and young people are also very adaptable.

(Conal Kearney, Director of the Youth Theatre group and resident of Roscam. Roscam. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012.)

In other words, people adapt their behaviour depending on the context and the level of expectation. Here, Conal Kearney explains that the process of adaptation is complex and for many may require abandoning elements of their past. In other words,

they are not yearning for their origins, because it is part of their mind set to live and be accepted here. So, the most important aspect is the present – where they are today.

(Conal Kearney, Director of the Youth Theatre group and resident of Roscam. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012.)

Conal refers to a time in the rehearsals when the young people refer to their past experiences in other countries:

You can see here, as they talk about some aspects of the schooling in other countries is awful. To me this might be an unconscious way of saying ‘the present is the best’.

(Conal Kearney, Director of the Youth Theatre group and resident of Roscam. Community documentary interview: 31st August, 2012.)

And yet, as Conal Kearney observed, ‘none of the young people mentioned anything positive about their parents country of origin, unless prompted’. This he suggests is one of the ways in which young people begin to ‘feel like they belong’.

Observing social life through the lens of theatre production is a novel form of research. However, of more import are the practical implications that this ethnographic work has unveiled. Theatre that is alive in a community is a powerful way to bring people from different cultures, backgrounds, age groups and nationalities together. Thus, ‘making theatre’ builds new relationships, and provides meaningful ways to envision and create a shared future. One of the primary reasons for the theatre project was to focus on providing a uniquely conducive space for personal development in young people. This is especially important when we consider evidence from research reports such as the *My World Survey* (2012), which highlight the need for services directed at young people to reflect their needs. Given that many young people experience difficulties within their own social spaces, the theatre project offered a valuable, safe space in which to learn as well as create an opportunity to engage in social encounters that matter in a culturally diverse context.

The youth theatre project was not a service, shaped by a provider’s agenda or expertise, but a space for engaging in life. It was a way of life that gave space for all members to construct a community (ensemble) narrative that supports young people. Crucially though, it is not just the performance, or the result that is important, but the on-going interaction that takes place as young actors critically reflect upon the story, the roles and the values they bring from the ‘*street to the stage*’. We need to recognize that if

public theatre is to be successful it needs to be embedded in the social and physical landscape of the community, because participation reinforces a sense of belonging. It is therefore impossible to separate the drama that surrounds a theatre project from its public setting, both symbolically and literally, because it represents a call for community action.

For some, most notably the young actors, the theatre was a liberating exercise of discovery, confirming that these spaces sustain social encounters that matter. While spaces for sport, religion and school are valuable, public theatre offers a space in which all age groups creatively reflect upon their engagement with the stage. Thus, theatre can be seen as a social world with sets of patterned experiences that require a shift of focus from the individual to the whole. It also demonstrated the positive power of group methodology to create psychological and emotional spaces for dialogue, and echoes Block's (Block 2008:75) argument, that every gathering needs to be an example of the future we want to create. The youth theatre project demonstrated the importance of method (creating space and structure with intention) in shaping the future.

One of this chapter's recurring themes is how these encounters help young people develop a strong sense of 'belonging' to the area, or what Rowles would refer to as 'being in place' (2000, 2008, 2003). Being in place, he argues is the

self-affirming (frequently subconscious) experience of immersion in a complex supportive system of inextricably blended action, orientation and environmental affinity. This system is grounded in location and is in a state of dynamic homeostasis as part of a constantly evolving process of a person's integration in place (Cutchin, 2004; Dickie, Cutchin and Humphry, 2006. Cited in Rowles, 2008:130).

To understand the value of place-based public theatre, it is useful to understand how we adapt to situations, how we engage and sustain shared constructions. In the case of shifting social and cultural landscape of the DRA this is crucial, because a range of negotiations are taking place depending on culture, identity, role, group or individual interaction. Place-based public theatre helps to capture these experiences, it breaks them down for reflection, and then builds up new, more positive experiences. It enables us to

use our imaginations to deepen understanding of ourselves in relation to others through immersion in culturally significant encounters.

The theatre project demonstrates how it is possible to broaden the frame in which such encounters take place, because it can create a situated experience whereby contestation and multiply interpretations can become shared and meaningful. It uses the imagination to play with ‘reality’ and shift our perceptions. It does this in a ‘manageable’ space, that ‘holds’ the experiences, so that it is not overwhelming or fragmented. The performance makes sense by weaving together the abstract and unfamiliar with ‘form’ and the known. Furthermore, I believe that place-based performances, where individuals are encouraged to *unearth* their relationship with *place* can help us negotiate our way through the complex array of structured and unstructured meanings that shape our day to day lives. Most importantly, place-based public theatre, quite simply, helps us imagine how to live more meaningful lives with others. It creates cultural encounters that matter. As Arendt has argued, there is a role for the imagination because it enables us to consider others and ourselves in a new way:

The more people’s standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusion, my opinion (Arendt, 1993:241).

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Doughiska was, along with neighbouring Roscam and the Arduan, a semi-rural community, with a population of 200 people (the DRA). Within less than a decade the DRA had become a city suburb of over 7,000 residents with over 33 different nationalities. Initially, there was an element of ‘cultural shock’, caused by policies that prioritised speculative property development, at the expense of public amenities to service new demographically diverse settlements. This research follows how older community members coped and responded to change, as well as how newcomers struggled to make homes in unfamiliar cultural landscapes. In so doing, it draws attention to *place* being a complex setting, where history, culture, politics, environment, social and personal life interact.

This research uses creative methods to enable people to explore how a range of social patterns (often articulated through common narratives) either shape or constrain their experience. During this research the author developed a form of ethnography that uses the craft of performance, is place-based (utilising local historical narratives) and uses various creative methods for cultural exchange and dialogue (group methodologies). This approach challenged social constructions that constrain expression and provided space for the renegotiation of values, attitudes and conventions through critical education and creative dialogue. Key to the success of such an approach is the use of the imagination (not least visioning, role playing, story-telling and performance) to both understand our sense of place and develop new cultural landscapes that reflect present day circumstances and needs. This process involves being engaged with the sequencing of community life over an extended period, while at the same time working creatively to discover new ways for change and potential to be realized.

This four year ethnographic and action research provides empirical evidence that strongly indicates the power of *place* within social development, as groups such as the

DRA Development Company Ltd. and the Good Shepherd Parish secure political and financial support for the procurement of schools and a community centre. It also highlights how making dislocated *spaces* into meaningful *places* within the DRA was realized through a range of cultural and artistic gatherings (Church events, Ghanaian celebrations, the Polish, Come2gether Association, the GAA, World Café experience and the DRA Youth Theatre Project), as well as activities that elevated the role of nature in creating landscapes conducive to social and community dialogue. It was during these encounters that individuals participated in (re)negotiating their social and cultural landscapes, thus creating a sense of belonging.

One of the more significant findings has been the positive role for diversity in creating meaningful change. Tentative though these findings are, they identify a desire and willingness on the part of diverse groups to develop relationships and to engage in the community-building puzzle, rather than ‘hunker down’. This is not to suggest that this is a process without challenges between individuals and groups, but the projects examined here provide valuable insight into how these may be overcome. In particular, they indicate that the primary feature for social dislocation, or lack of social development, is more to do with *context* rather than the issues of *diversity*. Rather, diversity, at least for the residents in this study, is experienced as a creative prerequisite to building meaningful long-term relationships.

Building on these experiences, this thesis reveals the power of public places in building community, in particular, two kinds of public spaces are important to social life: artistic ‘alive’ spaces, which inspire dialogue and shared experience, as well as physical spaces that are wild, open and natural (“unfinished”) that are vital within a community. This relates to the idea that unfinished spaces invite *possibility*, and are not *constrained*, such as those that are ‘finished’, ‘manicured’, closed or ‘tamed’. Both symbolically and literally, these spaces offer all members of a community the opportunity to feel part of the environment within which they dwell. Within these spaces, individuals meet as equals; they can communicate and share moments.

These ideas came to the fore in a number of projects, including new forms of gathering constructed by the Catholic Church, the GAA and the Ghanian Union. Not only do people use these new forms of gathering to help build sustainable relationships, but they have become important sites for participation in future development. The Church as it is represented in this particular area, for example, now conveys a modern ‘inclusive’ approach to faith, as it embraces new people, cultures and religions. Here, it is plausible to suggest that the launch of the Good Shepherd Parish symbolized the beginning of a passionate interest in the role of celebration, music and cultural exchange. These are events that provide examples of how many of the local Irish people, and newcomers to the area, felt a strong desire to ‘integrate’, while retaining a sense of identity and tradition.

In addition, three other projects revealed the relationship between people and place. The World Café experience demonstrates the use of abstract ‘space’ for developing a shared understanding of long-term development. *Friends of Merlin Woods* highlights the importance of transforming ‘spaces’ into meaningful ‘public places’ as part of the community-building puzzle. Finally, the Youth Theatre Project explores the role public theatre, and combines both the creative element of ‘space’ and the enduring aspect of ‘place’. Together, these elements of social life offer a pathway through some of the challenges associated with a socially dislocated setting.

Lessons from the World Café experience reveal the importance of ‘how we gather’ and the quality of that experience. Within a group context World Café was more than just a meeting place. World Café explored an empty space (a temporary creative workshop that brought together different members of the community) and how it can became a creative opportunity for shared interaction and dialogue, enabling new friendships to develop and a deepen our knowledge of what it means to be, or relate to, a ‘stranger’. This was a space *in-between*, in the sense that it was a suspended moment, whereby people were encouraged to leave pre-conceived ideas about ‘reality’ and enter a creative space for inquiry into the lives of others, as well as how to use the imagination to

envision shared futures (sustainable development), while at the same time fully participating.

That the World Café was a creative space for exploration is important, but it led us to reflect upon how such encounters can be reproduced outside the project's short life-span. In order to do this it became important to consider what had taken 'place' within this space, not just what was contained in the conversations or the information gained. In order to do this we needed to consider what 'space' means in everyday life and how it is experienced? What became evident throughout the session, however, was that people wanted the experience to endure. They articulated a desire to bring these experiences into everyday life, and how we could make this representative, so that as many voices as possible are heard. This led me to consider how creative 'spaces' could become something tangible and lasting. The next part of the journey would be to transform the creative space in World Café experience into a long-term project that would involve transforming *spaces* into meaningful *places* and led directly to the development of the Youth Theatre Project.

The urban development that took hold in a dramatically short period of time in the DRA has led to a form of 'landscaped identity crisis', where the meaning people attach to their local environment is challenged and uprooted with an influx of newcomers and mass urbanisation. The *Friends of Merlin Woods* campaign is part of an on-going attempt and to (re) negotiate the DRA's physical and symbolic landscapes for both new communities and more established residents. The ethnographic research into the *Friends of Merlin Woods*, addresses the relationship people have with place and, in particular, one type of public place: a natural space, known locally as Merlin Woods. This is an exploration into how physical landscapes and environments shape experience, as well as how individuals can, in turn, shape their environment to affect experience. The research suggests that we need to present a stronger case for 'a-live' public spaces, which are conducive to community gathering and where new future possibilities for community building can be explored. Physical public spaces alone do not build social relationships;

what are required are processes to inspire engagement within such spaces. The way in which public places shape individual and social change, stimulate agency and create ‘meaningful encounters that matter’ can inspire more positive possibilities and a better quality of life. Moreover we need to appreciate that public spaces provide opportunities for new forms of identify formation, potentially reconciling tensions that may exist between individuals and groups.

As an alternative form of gathering the *Friends of Merlin Woods*, have been successful in a number of ways. They have galvanised support to call an end to unsustainable development practices and have sought to bring isolated groups and individuals together, generating a real sense of community spirit. It may be the case that people do not interact in public spaces unless there is an obvious reason to do so. But, the case of the Friends campaign suggest that these codes of conduct can be renegotiated and challenged and that interactions do take place and civil inattention can be broken. The presence of an event or amenity such as the mandala, art or organised nature walks draw ‘strangers together’, but this can only ever be successful if these public places are open and accessible, places to which people attach meaning.

These are encounters situated in *place*, either through online communication (Facebook), or through physical engagement in Merlin Woods. Moreover, while there are strong arguments that defend woodland conservation, the Merlin Woods project highlights another critical issue; the symbolic potential inherent in a natural habitat. However, before this could take hold, the dominant interpretation of space and place had to be challenged and renegotiated. It represents physically and symbolically the idea that public spaces offer opportunities for shared belonging in the landscape. This is where people can dwell and, through the practice of turning such spaces into meaningful places, engage through shared interaction to build a future together. If Merlin Woods is to be a successful public place, where people can communicate and share moments, then people need to meet as equals in on a neutral ground, and only at that point can it become a place

for the community to share meaningful moments and (re) negotiate a changing narrative, one that puts place-based social development centre stage.

This ethnographic research on public theatre reveals that such a social ‘space’ is more than just a creative form of expression or performance; it offers individuals and communities, including people with different values, an invaluable opportunity to encounter one another and, in so doing, sheds light on other interesting insights: the importance of creativity in the community-building puzzle and the role of the imagination in stimulating agency and change.

Observing social life through the lens of theatre production may be a novel form of research. However, of more value are its practical applications. Theatre that is alive in a community is a powerful way to bring people from different cultures, backgrounds, age groups and nationalities together, and as the ethnographic research has shown, ‘making theatre’ builds new relationships, providing possibilities to envision and create a shared future. This project is what Brown and Crittenden would describe as an example of how the arts ‘provide space for integrated and democratised knowledge making (Brown and Crittenden, 2007:100).

In particular, Public theatre allowed young people that may experience difficulties in their own social space a valuable, safe space in which to engage in social encounters that matter in a culturally diverse context. For young people, everyday life, more often than not, contains a range of expectations that are often defined in terms of educational achievement, and in particular the attainment of qualifications. Public theatre offers an alternative path, expanding consciousness to include other dimensions to the human endeavour that are often down played in an environment that seeks to reward the reproduction of facts or established knowledge.

Crucially, it was not just about the performance, or the result that was important, but also the on-going interaction that takes place as young actors critically reflect upon the story, the roles and the values they bring from the ‘*street to the stage*’ and back again to the street. It is also impossible to separate the drama that surrounds a theatre project

from its public setting. This research, therefore, reveals that if public theatre is to be successful it needs to be embedded in the social and physical landscape of the community, because participation reinforces a sense of belonging and when the stories that are embedded in the landscape are performed they become a liberating exercise of discovery.

Crucially, the performance ethnography that developed throughout this research is fundamentally about social change. In this sense, ‘arts based inquiry became a mode of inquiry and a methodology for performing social activism (Finley, 2011:436). It offered an avenue of inquiry that enabled a (re) negotiation of the social landscape through dialogue and meaningful exchanges. In this sense it is what Finley describes as ‘arts-based inquiry at the heart of a people’s pedagogy’ (Finley, 2011:443). With an eye to the future, I would like this thesis to contribute to furthering the work of arts based social development and research. To this end, I quote the words of Cohen:

I aspire to live in a city where there is a rich life of cultural events large and small that challenge and provoke how the residents of that city understand their everyday world. To my mind, this would bring artistic and cultural enquiry right to the forefront of how, why and where communities function. The everyday places of such a city could become a shifting platform for revelation, obfuscation and embellishment of its history and of its self-image: the collective social memory of the city could be revealed for the deeply contested layering of fiction, function and fact that it is. The lovers’ lane would be chiselled with poetry and animated with harsh fevered dancing; the abattoir loading bay would once a week make way for a flower market and bank forecourts would host a glazed parquetry installation of slashed credit cards. In such a city, I feel that these events would shed light on where I live, and I imagine my experience of the events that would be all the richer for the impact that the places themselves had on the respective art-forms involved.
(Cohen, 2007:195).

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ⁱ Traditional community development approaches to place

Within the American literature on community development historically there has been an emphasis upon identifying efficient state-led directives that resolve problems in marginalised communities. For DeFilippis and Saegert (2012), the principal focus has been upon how communities socially and economically develop. For these authors, communities are physical spaces where people live and work; ‘though not necessarily doing both in the same place,’ and they are the ‘people, places and institutions encountered in everyday life that provide opportunities and support for activities, as well as barriers and constraints’ (DeFilippis and Saegert, 2012:1). In this tradition, there are two questions that emerge: first, what role do communities play; both in the larger political economy and in the daily lives of people? Second, how can community development improve the social life of communities that lack power and resources?

Community development in the USA started in the Progressive Era and extended over a period of 40 years, shifting from a limited number of small organisations concerned with improving the conditions of poor urban neighbourhoods, to a ‘mainstream set of practices and institutions’ that assumed many of the functions previously undertaken by local governments (DeFilippis and Saegert, 2012: 1). These early forms of social intervention contained a list of problems facing poor people that included the clearance of slums or the reconstruction of neighbourhoods. This was, in O’Connor’s opinion, (2012) community development convinced that poverty was not an individual’s failing, but a social condition. Improving the geographic space would break the cycle of poverty and contribute to social peace (O’Connor, 2012: 14).

From the 1940s through to the early 1960s, much of American community development practice was place-based intervention, concerned primarily with changes to physical infrastructure, such as the condition of inner cities or rural de-population as American capitalism was expanding. This was a period interested in how resources were distributed and how well-organised intervention could reduce any disparity. Influenced by urban planners and social scientists this was not so much about the distribution of power, but whether resources were used efficiently.

The massive forms of intervention undertaken in the New Deal had a significant influence for several decades, creating political allegiances between local politicians, community groups and developers. However, as O’Connor observes, small-scale projects, designed to improve poor communities, were undermined by larger public policies. On the one hand, central cities were the subject of vast amounts of Federal investments and yet, on the other hand, policies on home mortgages, highway building and commercial development were incentivising industry and middle class groups to move to suburbia (O’Connor, 2012:17).

By the 1960s the place-based approach was subject increasingly to criticism as public debate focused on the persistent ‘pockets of poverty’ in American’s older cities. By the mid-1960s community development had entered a new phase, replacing the place-based approach as community development assumed a ‘human face’ (O’Connor, 2012:20). A Federal political agenda saw an increase in liberal activism, most clearly

visible in Johnson's 'War on Poverty' (1964) where there was a significant programme of job creation and public works, investment in infrastructure and a range of schemes designed to respond to the problems associated with displaced rural communities (O'Connor, 2012:16). Here, two programmes stand out. The first, Urban Renewal and the second, the Area Development Act.

To professionals and academics there was a crisis of metropolitanisation where a combination of outward migration of the middle classes and inward migration of minority groups, had been compounded by industrial decentralisation and the deterioration of inner city buildings (Stone, 2012: 76-78). Once again, public housing legislation was important, as critics of this extended period of urban renewal argued that these programmes were little more than public subsidies for private real estate interests (O'Connor, 2012: 19). The Area Redevelopment Act (1961) attempted to address unemployment among communities affected by economic modernisation. However, there were few resources, and little in the way of co-ordinated planning, as redevelopment agencies competed 'with one another to lure existing businesses with the promise of tax breaks and cheap labour' (O'Connor, 2012:19). The Liberal intervention of the New Deal and the War on Poverty, lasted only briefly. From the 1970s onward, community development practice drew upon ideas about individual rational self-interest, less government and free markets. It was not about bringing new infrastructure or jobs to deprived communities, but about moving people that were 'motivated' to find jobs elsewhere.

For many, the internal problems to the War on Poverty were linked directly to the role of government or, more specifically, to interference in the free market. The argument runs that important public funds were being mis-directed toward economic and social processes that could not be prevented. While rural modernisation or outward migration to the suburbs meant that central cities and rural towns were losing people, attempts to invest in declining communities as part of social policy were misplaced, since they fail to realise that people are motivated by rational self-interest (King, 1987). Ideas such as 'building local capacity' or 'mending the social fabric' were simply unrealistic. It was the beginning of social programmes dominated by an individualised model of human behaviour. Federal government policy would seek to construct 'flexible, deregulated labour markets that had very little interest in either the rapid movement of businesses or decreasing wages', where social policy should develop around the idea of moving 'people to jobs', 'not jobs to people' (O'Connor, 2012:12).

Critics of both place-based and progressive schemes under the War on Poverty argue that they failed to address seriously issues such as participation and equality. Poor communities were either an experiment in liberal intervention or passive recipients of government hand-outs. And yet, as Ledwith (2005) observes, there was also a legacy to programmes in the War on Poverty that would influence community development theory in Europe from the 1990s onwards, where the issues of poverty and equality gathered momentum (See Ledwith, 2005). This was particularly evident in the UK, where

community work contained a strong educational component following the Younghusband report (1959), which advocated a North American model of community organisation as a means of empowering people to identify their own needs and how they may be met. This was followed by the Gulbenkian report (1968), which identified a crucial role for professionals such as educators, social workers and the clergy in attempts to improve participation in the decision-making process. There was, however, controversy, between those that argued for a more ‘educationalist’ agenda, and those that prioritised service delivery and planning. In Scotland, for example, the chosen route was to emphasize community development as ‘learning’ (Popple, 1995). However, the influential Seebohm Committee report (1968) in the UK recommended an expansion in community work services and public participation in urban planning that had a major influence on community development.

The post-industrial landscape, one in which American business was facing increasing international competition, demanded that national economic competitiveness was a priority. In the U.S.A, the Commission on a National Agenda pointed out that the transition to post-industrialism was inevitable, and any national policy for revitalising local communities was ‘ill-advised’, because it would encounter a racial backlash, working-class resentment or increased opposition to big government (O’Connor, 2012:24). The Reagan and the Bush administrations of the 1980s reduced welfare and federal assistance to poor communities, and eliminated most of the community development programmes. The debate between place-based and people-based policies was now dominated by the latter. Enterprise zones, with an emphasis upon supply-side economics, would dominate. Generous tax breaks for business and deregulation would stimulate investment that would ‘trickle down’ to poor communities.

State-led community development in Ireland – UK.

The most substantial analytical literature on community development in Ireland is that associated with state-led initiatives, where either the state is a developer, or community development is related to the state. From the 1970s, the economic and political landscape in Ireland and the UK changed rapidly. It was a period marked by rising unemployment and inflation, deteriorating economic growth and stagnation in productivity and wages. In Ireland and the UK, a role for state-led policies persisted, and the market driven agenda would gain ascendancy only in the late 1990s, where there was a belief that they could reduce the problems associated with persistent long-term unemployment and uneven economic development.

For O’Cinneide and Walsh (1990), an important shift in community development practice in Europe occurred during the 1970s, as local groups and organisations replaced more traditional welfare mechanisms. Community-led initiatives, funded partly or fully by government, expanded to address issues of unemployment, job creation, training and welfare rights (O’Cinneide and Walsh, 1990). These policies were framed by a commitment to anti-poverty strategies, where community development principles such as

participation and empowerment became important (O'Cinneide and Walsh, 1990; Motherway, 2006; Lee, 2003).

Both community literature and practise explored an understanding of community development as a 'process whereby the people who are marginalised and excluded are enabled to gain in self-confidence, to participate in action to tackle the problems that face their community' (Motherway, 2006: preface). Here, Lee (2003) has argued that this was a definition rooted in a broad understanding of citizenship that sees people as having a right to influence decisions that affect them and to 'have their experiences and views listened to and acted upon (Lee, 2003:1). Motherway (2006) concurs, arguing that community development refers to 'participation in decision-making and collective action, leading to an agenda of social change regarding equality, social inclusion and amelioration of poverty' (Motherway, 2006:2).

An important question remains: how much of this rhetoric was lived-out? There are no easy answers to this question, reflected in much of the contemporary community development literature, as well as the ethnographic findings in the DRA. One of the reasons why such questions are not easy to resolve is because, arguably, much of the community development literature reflects paradigms that are framed within existing relations of power and are aimed at adaptive approaches to 'social inclusion' and 'social problems'. On this, Mayo (1994) argues that

It is not just that the term has been used ambiguously; it has been contested, fought over and appropriated for different uses and interests to justify different politics, policies and practices (Mayo, 1994:48).

ⁱⁱ Press Release: 6am Monday 12th November 2012.

Minister Quinn & EIB President welcome start to construction of eight schools unlocking Public Private Partnership Model.

EIB provides €50 million loan to assist investment

The Minister for Education and Skills warmly welcomed the start of construction today (Monday 12th November) of eight schools which are being delivered under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. These are the first public sector projects to be funded under the PPP model since June 2010.

These schools in counties Westmeath, Leitrim, Limerick, Galway, Donegal, Wexford and Waterford are the third bundle of schools to be built under the Department of Education and Skills school PPP programme. They are part of the five year school building programme already announced by Minister Ruairí Quinn T.D. earlier this year.

A loan of €50 million has been secured through the European Investment Bank (EIB) which has meant these new schools can now proceed to construction. The total value of the construction costs is estimated to be approximately €100 million.

The eight schools will provide accommodation for approximately 5,700 students. Six of the eight schools are second level schools; while the two remaining schools to be built in Doughiska, Co. Galway, are a primary and a secondary school which will share a single campus.

Minister Quinn said, “This is very good news for the communities in counties stretching from Donegal to Waterford who have been waiting for their school building projects to be given the green light.”

“I am particularly pleased that the EIB has again decided to support the Department’s schools capital investment programme with a loan of €50 million which will assist in funding this investment. It is a further signal of the bank’s renewed confidence in the Irish State and our recovery programme.”

President of the EIB, Werner Hoyer, said, “The landmark agreement to support construction of eight new schools marks the reopening of the PPP sector in Ireland. The European Investment Bank is committed to enabling education investment in Ireland. This project complements EIB support provided in July to build 550 new classrooms and backing to redevelop University College Dublin a year ago.”

The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) is responsible for advising State Authorities on the best financing of priority public investment projects. These eight schools in PPP Bundle 3 were referred to the NDFA in July 2010 to assist in securing funding.

BAM PPP was appointed preferred tenderer in September 2011 and all planning issues were granted by May of this year. Now that funding has been secured, construction is expected to begin immediately. The project financing includes EIB, Bank of Ireland and the National Pensions Reserve Fund.

Theo Cullinane, BAM Chief Executive said, “We are pleased to be investing in the Irish market and to have been able to partner with the Department of Education and Skills, the NDFA and our senior lenders Bank of Ireland, the European Investment Bank and the National Pensions Reserve Fund to develop a financing solution for the project. The successful financing of this project augurs well for future PPP projects.”

Tom Hayes, Chief Executive of Bank of Ireland Corporate Banking, said, "This transaction highlights Bank of Ireland's commitment to supporting local communities throughout the country. It will create more than 1,000 much needed jobs during construction and on completion will provide first class educational facilities for over 5,700 pupils and serve generations to come."

Earlier this year, Minister Quinn unveiled a five year Schools Capital Programme worth €1.5 billion. This will see a total of 275 major school buildings projects commenced between now and 2016. The €50 million loan being provided by the EIB will assist in funding this investment. Since 2008 the European Investment Bank has provided nearly €350m for investment in schools and universities in Ireland.

All schools are expected to be completed by 2014. Their completion will bring the total number of schools delivered under the PPP model in the State to 23.

ENDS

Press contacts:

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Or Richard Willis (for EIB) +352 621555758 willis@eib.org

ⁱⁱⁱ Hi Anna,

Please find attached the minutes from the last meeting we had with the residents.

The new owners for Fionn Uisce Phase 2 is : Doughiska Development Ltd, 31, Currachgrange, Newbridge, Co. Kildare. They have submitted a new planning permission as far as I know.

Happy Christmas

Catch up in the new year

Kindest regards

Maura

Agenda for meeting between FFC Residents Association Committee & Residents, 26th November 2013

1. Minutes, Apologies
2. Lighting in all three estates.

After a couple years of us continually meeting with the council we can finally say that all three estates have had their street lights fixed and

Taken In Charge by GCC. Any lights not working from now on can be reported to GCC for repair.

3.Fearann Rí Phase 1

There is a bond worth €131k in the process of being cashed in and GCC has estimated that it will take €133k to bring it up to their standard .Tom Connell confirmed at the last meeting that he is confident that FR Ph1 will be Taken In Charge in the next year or two.

4.Fearann Rí 2

A bond of €108,000 was in place with Anglo Irish Bank for Fearann Rí Phase 2. Anglo, together with Irish Nationwide then became the IRBC. When the IRBC was liquidated in February any liabilities arising under the bond agreements became unsecured claims thus having no hope of ever being called in. This leaves Fearann Rí phase 2 with no funds to complete essential works estimated at costing €177,275. Hopefully the councillors can secure €59K every year for the next 3 years in order to complete this part of the estate.

5.Fionnusce Phase 1

Fionnusce Phase 1 has a shortfall of almost €300,000 to bring it up to planning standards even after the €127,000 bond is allocated. As Constructed drawings need to be prepared to depict accurately the precise locations of all roads, footpaths, open spaces, sewers, watermains, manholes, gullies, valves meters, etc.

6.Phase 2 Fionnusce – New Owner:

FFC have been advised by GCC that Fionn Uisce Phase 2 had been bought by a development company and new planning permission has been lodged. The developer had paid a cash bond of €130K and we are confident it will be redeveloped and finished in the next couple of years.

7.Drainage/Sewage survey

This is a priority for all concerned estates. The recent CCTV survey showed cross connections of sewage and storm water drainage systems. Without the survey of all households, the extent of the problem is not known. This already has implications for residents such as sewage overflows on the road, sewage smells travelling up bathroom pipes, blocked drains etc. Galway City Council engineers also stated that this

problem has wider implications for the city and raised environmental concerns as well as wider water supply issues.

GCC stated that there needs to be a survey carried out on all the private areas, ie everyone's back yards, to have a full view of any problems that might arrive. This will cost €30k so we have asked the city councillors to ask for this money in the upcoming budget

All other remedial works, such as roads, landscaping etc cannot proceed until this issue is rectified for fear of having to dig up roads again to make repairs.

8.Local Property Tax- Fionnusce Phase 1:

We have asked Galway City Council to clarify the status of Fionnusce Phase 1 in relation to the Local Property Tax with the department? We ask that FFC receive a copy of the letter.

We are also awaiting contact details from GCC in order for us to also write to the department to put our case across ourselves.

9.Unfinished Housing Resolution Fund & Up coming budget

With the €10 million unfinished housing estates resolution fund, as announced in the recent budget, we have asked GCC to seek funding to enable them to help us finish the estates.

We have met with the city councillors to agree an amount to be requested in the the forthcoming budget

- Allocate €30,000 for the drainage/sewage survey.
- Ring-fence €59,000 for Fearann Ri Phase 2 (each year for next 3 yrs= €177K)
- Allocate €2,500 for drawings for Fionnusce Phase 1

10.Landscaping

After asking the council for mulch at the last meeting, the Parks Department has supplied us with the first load of mulch and has specified that we can ask for more when we need it. It would be great to get a few more helping hands when next load is delivered.

We have received from GCC daffodils and bluebells which we have already planted and we hope to get more plants in the spring.

11.AOB

The committee would like to appeal to residents to come out and give us an hour of you time to help with litter pick ups and landscaping. Great way to meet your neighbors and help maintain the area. It's your community, help us make it great! Big thanks to the regulars who help every time, its appreciated.

We've had a recent spate of vandalism with 2 houses having graffiti on them. We have managed to contact the owner of one house and had it removed. We are trying to trace the owner of no 64 in order to have this graffiti removed for the side of the house.

There will be a meeting tomorrow night (27th) in Castlegar Sports Center at 7.30 (check time with Michael) in regard to setting up a neighbourhood text alert system. All welcome

^{iv} **Progress under the 3 aims, to date, is as follows:**

(1) enabling the people:

➤ Commissioned a *Community Profile and Needs Analysis with Action Plan* in 2008, under auspices of NUIG, and same was launched in November 2009. This Profile was intended to focus on the entire area of Doughiska, Roscam and Ardaun as one area, rather than on Doughiska area, for example, as had been done in the earlier research, referred to above. The DRA Planning and Strategy Committee secured funding for this research, from NUIG, Galway City Council, Galway Diocese/ Good Shepherd Parish and McInerney Homes Ltd.

Some of the key points of this research include:

- Population is exceptionally young – average age in 2009 was 25.1 years,
- The DRA area is home to an estimated 7,279 people, having mushroomed from 200 in 2000,
- 26.6% aged under 15 years, with an estimated 1933 children living in area,
- One third of population comprises of non-Irish nationals, with at least 33 different nationalities living in the area,

-
- More than 1 in 8 (12.5%) of households are headed by a lone parent. This rises to 16.8% of households in Doughiska, and 38.5% in An Sean Bhaile estate. One in 5 of lone parent households are headed by an African mother,
 - There is more than 3 times the national average number of professional workers in the DRA area (39.2% as opposed to 12.4%)
 - DRA population is highly educated, as the proportion of people with degrees is more than four times higher than the national average.
- Secured funding from Galway City VEC for providing English classes to non nationals, in the sum of €2,000.00 in 2008, and classes were successfully delivered at that time.
 - Arranged CE Scheme, in conjunction with Galway City VEC, and now have 7 participants operating in the area, in administrative, maintenance and caretaking roles, and more are planned.
 - Estates Residents Committees established as a result of Profile, to assist contact in coordinating input and views from the population.
 - Secured €30,000.00 from City of Galway VEC towards projects indentified as assisting integration in the area. One of these projects was the *DRA Summer Camp*, which was run in conjunction with ARD Family Resource Center in the area, and which was a great success, with up to 100 children from many nationalities participating in a highly organized curriculum of events, which was run from the 11th to 15th of July, 2011, in glorious weather. Some photographs may be seen on our community online website, namely www.oscaill.org. It is planned to repeat such projects.
 - Have arranged with DCU (Dublin City University) to run the *NFTE Programme* in our area, which involves teaching the principles of entrepreneurship to teenagers. Training has taken place at DCU for the course organisers, and the course will be run under the auspices of DCU, with appropriate accreditation on completion of the course.

Teenagers will be given the opportunity of learning how to set up a business with seed capital, prepare cash flows etc., through interactive and fun learning. This will be done by committing 1.5 hours per week, total 40 hours in the year, outside of school hours. Participants will have the opportunity of competing at Regional and National finals.

- *Project 2022* is a 10 year project for this area. Project 2022 will be assisted and facilitated by this company on behalf of the people, as the projects which will be identified arising out of the various research initiatives conducted under the guidance and tutelage of Ms Anna King, are ultimately planned to be managed by this company. Already, Project 2022 has secured funding from the Galway Film Centre to provide facilities, equipment and mentoring, such as will be required to prepare a documentary for showing in the Autumn at The Town Hall Theatre. This was secured despite stiff competition from many other competing organizations. The planned documentary will focus on Project 2022, on this area and its peoples, and on the Theatrical project planned for the area, over the summer months. The resultant documentary will be capable of competing for European funding initiatives to assist development of the projects identified.

(2) developing infrastructure in the area:

- *DRA Planning and Strategy Committee* was instrumental in progressing upgrade of the main Doughiska road, after many years in limbo, through liaison with all partners involved, and was also instrumental in facilitating the procurement of the amenity facilities in Doughiska Park, which is one of the finest in the city, comprising football pitches, tennis courts, skate park and magnificent children's playground, all of which is situate on approximately 22 acres.
- Secured input from Residents committees of estates in the area, to agree a landscaping plan for the main Doughiska road. The councillors were lobbied, and appropriate motion was arranged at a meeting of Galway City Council. The agreed area proposal, was approved and implemented and has been a great success.
- Made application to POBAL and was approved for inclusion in the Family Resource Centre Programme in 2008. *ARD Family Resource*

Centre is now up and running in new accommodation on the main Doughiska road, and has appointed a Projects Co-ordinator, an Administrator and Development worker to date. Many programmes are currently under way with *ARC FRC*, and which is the only Family Resource Centre approved for the city, to date.

- Made application to the Department of Education and Skills and secured approval in 2010 for *Merlin Woods temporary Primary school*. This company was approved funding of almost €500k under a devolved scheme to procure temporary accommodation for the new Primary school. That project was delivered successfully and on time. More recently, a further €200k has been approved by the Department of Education and Skills for the provision of 2 additional temporary classrooms on the same site, which is currently being arranged. This action was identified as a priority in our Community Profile and Needs Analysis with Action Plan, referred to earlier.
- Approval has also been given by the Department of Education and Skills, for *permanent Primary and Secondary schools* for the area, and which are planned to be sited on one educational complex in Doughiska, with capacity for 450 students at Primary level and 650 students as Post Primary level. Construction work is about to start thereon, in the next few weeks. In this context, this company facilitated the withdrawal of a planning appeal, relative to the proposed schools, specifically relating to access, and which involved mediating between the Appellants, Galway City Council Councillors and Management, and the NTMA, as a result of which a new proposed schools entrance was agreed, involving a revised Part VIII process.
- *Orienteering and mapping of Merlin Park Woods* carried out on behalf of the DRA Planning and Strategy Committee. Merlin Park Woods is a magnificent amenity of over 90 acres, and provides amenity to the entire DRA area.
- Further application by this company to Pobal for the *DRA Preschool and Afterschool services* was approved in September 2011. The DRA Community Preschool opened in temporary accommodation in September 2011, at 183 An Sean Bhaile, Doughiska, Galway, and this fulfilled a need which was identified as a priority need for the

Doughiska area, in the earlier referred to Doughiska Profile of 2005, and also in the 2009 report referred to above. The ECCE, CCS and CET schemes are currently being provided in the Preschool programme and subvention is also approved by Pobal, much to the delight of the people of the area. It is planned to move accommodation to further temporary accommodation at 45 An Sean Bhaile, Doughiska, in order to try and accommodate increased demand, scheduled to commence in September 2012. Much gratitude is due to Galway City Council and Foroige who facilitated the Preschool at 183 An Sean Bhaile, and to Galway City Council who will be facilitating the Preschool and Afterschool services at 45 An Sean Bhaile from September 2012.

(3) Influencing future planning:

- Submission has been made under the new City Draft Development Plan to Galway City Council, in relation to the proposed development of the Ardaun Corridor, more particularly to highlight the necessity to obtain a *Health Impact Assessment* on any proposed development, which would acknowledge the impact of any development on the *health* of the community, as being a determining factor in decision making, in addition to any environmental or other impact on the people.
- Submission has also been made under the City Draft Development Plan also, in relation to the proposed bus corridor through Merlin Woods, and a Health Impact Assessment has been requested in respect of this development also.

Projects currently proposed include :

- Acquiring a Centre to be used as an Educational hub/ Neighbourhood Centre/Church, for the area, and is an action identified as a priority in our own Research document. Currently this company has placed a bid on a building which is on the market for sale. Funding has been committed to purchase same, with the aim of having the project to be self-financing thereafter.
- Educational programmes to be secured and managed, i.e., courses including VEC courses, Access and Diploma courses of NUIG,

Liturgical training courses for the Good Shepherd Parish and surrounding parishes. Indeed provisional approval has been obtained to run courses, and accommodation to deliver same is what is required.

- Management of the NFTE Programme, as aforesaid, and funding will be required for coordinator/trainer of programme.
- Management of the DRA Preschool and Afterschool Programmes.
- Facilitating management of Project 2022,
- Programmes to be facilitated as required by the different nationalities, as will facilitate and encourage greater integration of people of the area.
- Sports facilities are urgently required.
- Park maintenance and upkeep, and refurbishment of landscaping is a priority.
- Maintenance and upkeep of estates, especially those in need of landscaping refurbishment.
- Drama club to be facilitated also. Drama workshops are planned, with emphasis on integration and intergenerational activity. Funding will be required to pay the Drama Workshops Facilitator, who is a trained professional.
- Enterprise centre and Post Office required and potential sites within the area, are identified.
- On going co-ordination of services in the area, in conjunction with and supporting ARD Family Resource Centre.
- To act as umbrella organization for all organizations operating in the area, in order to coordinate services being and to be provided; and to continue to act as a voice for the people of the area in developing the goals set by the company, and ultimately, to strategise and plan to effect same.

The above was sent via email from Dan Hurley, Company Secretary to Anna King on 28th May 2012.