



Donegal County Development Board
Bord Forbartha Chontae Dhún na nGall

Conference Report

Donegal: A Creative County Making Connections Creating Opportunities

Donegal County Development Board
Cultural Resources Forum

4th October 2011
Villa Rose Hotel Ballybofey

Final Report



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INTRODUCTION

Donegal County Development Board Cultural Resources Forum organised a one day conference on Tuesday 4th October 2011 in Ballybofey. This major conference entitled “Donegal: A Creative County - Making Connections, Creating Opportunities” focused on the future development of the cultural sector in Donegal.

The conference gave participants an opportunity to explore and discuss with national figures the role that culture can play in assisting Donegal and the north-west region make connections and create opportunities within the areas of cultural tourism and creative industries.

The conference was attended by people working in the sector and participating in cultural activities, including the Arts, heritage and language, as well as those working in tourism. In total 142 people attended.

This report summarises key points from the speakers’ presentations, question and answer sessions and feedback from a number of workshops. The conference programme outline is attached for reference at Appendix 1.

SESSION 1: CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Session one was chaired by **Méabh Conaghan from Enterprise Ireland**. Chuir Méabh fáilte roimh achan duine. She spoke of the need to make connections and of the economic imperative for doing so. Our strong and unique connection across the border was one example of a connection and Méabh urged participants to build on that. She also spoke of the grá people in Donegal have for culture.

The first speaker was **Dermot McLaughlin Chief Executive of the Temple Bar Cultural Trust**. His talk was entitled “What are the Creative Industries?”. Dermot firstly outlined the European context for creative and cultural industries, including the EU Green Paper on unlocking the potential of creative industries. He provided definitions of key terms, which he sees as important as they provide a lingua franca that can be used worldwide. However, he qualified this by saying that how we classify things can often complicate rather than enlighten.

Providing both the UNESCO and EU sets of definitions creative and cultural industries, Dermot expressed a preference for the EU definitions:



"Cultural industries" are those industries producing and distributing goods or services which at the time they are developed are considered to have a specific attribute, use or purpose which embodies or conveys cultural expressions, irrespective of the commercial value they may have. Besides the traditional arts sectors (performing arts, visual arts, cultural heritage – including the public sector), they include film, DVD and video, television and radio, video games, new media, music, books and press.

"Creative industries" are those industries which use culture as an input and have a cultural dimension, although their outputs are mainly functional. They include architecture and design, which integrate creative elements into wider processes, as well as subsectors such as graphic design, fashion design or advertising.

Dermot also provided statistics from research carried out at both European and national level. Key messages from this research included the fact that the sector provides employment across Europe and Ireland, and that cultural industries have economic value. It is described at an EU level as a growth industry and all the indicators are that it is sustainable.

Dermot described Temple Bar as an example of a creative industry, or cultural industry, or both. When the economic impact of the Temple Bar area was evaluated, it was found to have an annual turnover of €680 million. If it was to be seen as a company, this would place it approximately number 67 on the top 1,000 companies list.

In conclusion, Dermot said "You have to apply a business head; it's not enough to say it's cultural."

Next to speak was **Ian Brannigan, Regional Development Manager with the Western Development Commission (WDC)**. His talk was entitled "Future Growth Areas – Creating Opportunities". Ian outlined the potential growth of creative and cultural industries and demonstrated that at an EU level, Ireland is recognised as an area of high potential growth. He stressed that it is regions that are seen as creative, rather than countries. The definition used by the WDC is "occupations and industries centred on creativity, for the production and distribution of original goods and services".

Ian told participants that 3.1% of people in Donegal work in creative industries. The average productivity is €25,000 per employee per annum. Although this is less than the minimum industrial wage, it is often a partial income for people.

Looking to the future, Ian stressed the need to focus on export. Research by NUI Galway entitled “Economic Impact Assessment: Future Growth Trajectories”, estimated that an additional 17,000 jobs could be created in the Western region if export capabilities were improved. WDC have set up a “Creative Edge” initiative to promote exports and are focused on matching products to markets. He said their vision was “to see this region as a hotbed of creativity”.

The final speaker in session one was **Michael Starrett, Chief Executive of The Heritage Council of Ireland**. Michael started off by commending Donegal for taking a lead by organising the conference and said The Heritage Council would be encouraging others to follow Donegal’s lead. He spoke of the importance of the cultural and natural heritage to employment opportunities, to a quality tourism product and to the quality of our own lives.

Michael described how traditional structures for managing heritage resources are silo-ed and fragmented and need to change in order to be fit for purpose. He posed the question “Can they be encouraged to operate as a sector rather than or as well as an interest?” and saw a need for the Government to address this. He highlighted the potential for heritage to be conserved, managed and planned in an integrated and multidisciplinary manner. However, he was clear that heritage belongs primarily to the people and that structures to date have served to disenfranchise people. Michael believes that people need to be driving heritage and that the experts should not purport to speak for the sector.

Michael explained that The Heritage Council provides €150,000 funding per year for ‘Heritage Week’ and that approximately 750,000 people get involved in Heritage Week around the country. He sees this as an example of how you can do more for less and do not need expensive marketing campaigns. He highlighted the futility in investing tens of millions of euro in marketing our heritage as a tourism product whilst at the same time failing to provide adequate resources for people to manage and conserve the quality of that heritage.

The heritage sector was recently targeted for disproportionate cutbacks; however Michael hopes that responses to those proposals as well as research to be published soon (and to be headlined at The Heritage Council’s ‘Place as Resource: heritage inspiring innovation for economic growth’ conference on October 27) will ensure that heritage is recognised and appreciated. Research to be launched later this month will demonstrate that for every €1 million in grant support from The Heritage Council, 449 jobs are supported and that every €1 spent by The Heritage Council results in €4.40 being spent in tourism. He noted that The Heritage Council had provided funding of over €1 million to heritage initiatives in County Donegal between 2005 and 2011.

Michael concluded with the hope of increased cooperation and integration between the heritage sector and the cultural sector, and he believes that a positive heritage sector will be recognised as a major contributor to the economic, social and environmental well-being of all the people.

This first session concluded with Questions and Answers. Discussions focused on the role of the Heritage Council and its funding strands (Heritage Research, Heritage Management, and Heritage Education, Community and Outreach); and to frustrations at the lack of interagency co-operation.

SESSION 2: CULTURAL TOURISM

Session two was chaired by **Dessie Larkin** in his role with **Culture Ireland** and as a representative of **Donegal County Development Board (CDB)**. Dessie introduced the session speaking about the importance of culture in these times of economic stress.

The first speaker in this session was **Philip King of Hummingbird Productions**. As tosach le cupla focal as Gaeilge, Philip proceeded with a quote from Seamus Heaney:

*Strange how things in the offing, once they're sensed,
Convert to things foreknown*

He felt that there was a sense of something in the offing at the conference and that this would guide us to the things we know already, intuitively. He also saw similarities between our concerns today and those of James Joyce who wrote in 1904:

...we are living in a sceptical and, if I may use the phrase, a thought-tormented age: and sometimes I fear that this new generation, educated or hypereducated as it is, will lack those qualities of humanity, of hospitality, of kindly humour ...

He took the participants on an imaginative journey - if we had been in this room in 1911 asking "what sort of Ireland might come to pass?", who would be in the room? In 1911 it was probably dreamers, poets, they probably didn't have statistics but they had visions, dreams, and a sense of what an Ireland could become. This is what led to the 1916 revolution and the establishment of the first Republic. He pointed out that we have had almost had 100 years of a free country but questioned whether the aspirations in the first programme for Government had come to pass.

He described how a set of conditions have been given to us here in Ireland - emigration, unemployment, downturn, fear and anxiety but running in parallel to this is the portrait of a possibility and opportunity. “There is a tide in the affairs of men, Which taken at the flood...” We could have an Ireland that we all dream of, an Ireland that is reimagined, that is better and that is perhaps more in tune with those dreamers of 1911.

Philip spoke then about cultural tourism. He drew inspiration from Seán Ó Ríordáin’s poem “Fill Arís” and the sense of going back to the things that are important. He spoke of the beauty of the language that is uniquely ours, that says everything because it is ours and makes us ourselves, individually and as a nation. It’s a gift, it’s a given. He stated that if we do not have culture, then we do not have cultural tourism; but culture is not created in a lab or stress tested. It is all of what we are. It is a vital resource, not just in an industry sense but because it gives us a sense of ourselves and if we do not have a sense of ourselves, we cannot share that sense with anybody else.

Philip spoke about using technology to “speak to the world”. He described taking tradition, translating that tradition, and the transmission of the content that you’ve created. Rather than importing formats for television shows from other countries, he suggested that we could create this property ourselves and sell it to someone else.

He concluded by posing the question: Can we grasp what’s possible? Can we become what we dream of? He feels that only we can decide this for ourselves and that if we can do this then people from all over the world will come and be with us and marvel at our maturity, our beauty, our wisdom and our fineness.

The next speaker in this session was **Kevin Kidney from Fáilte Ireland** speaking about “The Tourist as your Customer”. Kevin introduced Fáilte Ireland and its responsibilities in supporting the tourism industry, developing the tourism experience in Ireland and domestic marketing. He stated that people come to Ireland for the people, the place and the pace.

Although there was a decline in numbers of overseas tourists in 2009 and 2010, Kevin feels that they may have bottomed out this year and that there may be slight growth. In terms of where Ireland’s tourists come from, the highest numbers come from Britain, followed by mainland Europe and then North America and the rest of the world. Specifically in relation to cultural tourism, Kevin outlined that 2.9 million overseas visitors partook in cultural activities whilst in Ireland in 2010, with mainland Europe accounting for 43% of this figure. Most of these visitors visit historic houses / castles, monuments, museums / art galleries, heritage / interpretive centres and gardens.



Kevin explained that the average length of stay of the cultural tourist is about 7-8% longer than that of other tourists. Cultural tourism accounts for 35-40% of all tourism worldwide and is growing at a rate of 15% per annum. This is about three times the rate of general tourism. He reported that cultural tourists tend to stay longer and spend more and therefore are considered more 'recession proof' than other tourists. They also tend to be highly educated and are interested in learning while on holiday.

Kevin stated that visitors want innovative ways of accessing culture and heritage and that they are looking for broad, themed and authentic experiences so there is a move from observation based to more embracing and participatory experiences. He explained: "the days of sitting on a bus and looking out the window are gone." Surveys with overseas visitors indicate that things they associate with Ireland are castles, museums, churches, pubs and Guinness. Surveys also indicate that key issues include a lack of awareness among customers, ease of accessibility, the customer experience, and coherent product offering.

In conclusion, Kevin sees the priorities for the sector as ensuring high quality experience, supporting the communication of the 'Brand Ireland' message, developing industry skills set, interpretation, insights and innovation. He also feels it is important to address key considerations in the same way as any business, including a focus on value for money and keeping in contact with costumers.¹

¹ Subsequent to the conference, Kevin submitted the following suggestions as issues for Donegal to address internally before trying to promote externally:

- What does Donegal have that will attract visitors?
- Where in the county do clusters of those attractors exist?
- Is there anything in either Sligo or Leitrim that could further enhance these clusters (the holidaymaker does not know or care about county boundaries)?
- Is the network between those clusters strong? Do they sell one another to the visitor?
- How can the Tourism Forum and the Culture Forum in Donegal work together more productively for the benefit of all?
- Once Donegal has addressed those issues, it can then address the question of how do we put the information in front of the potential visitor?

Shona McCarthy from the City of Culture was the final speaker in this session speaking about the City of Culture - An Opportunity for Donegal. She described how Derry won the title of City of Culture for 2013 just over a year ago. Referring again to Seamus Heaney, she explained that the lines:

*So hope for a great seachange.
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that a farther shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.*

were used on the front of the winning bid for the City of Culture. She sees this becoming reality through initiatives such as the Peacebridge.

Shona is currently working with partners to tell the Derry / Londonderry story and to establish Derry / Londonderry internationally. She feels that there will be benefits for Donegal from the City of Culture as the two places are inextricably linked.

A key target market for the City of Culture is the diaspora. There is an opening event plan - “Sons and Daughters” – calling all sons and daughters to come back and celebrate. It will target Irish and Ulster Scots communities worldwide. She also described the extensive media campaign associated with the City of Culture, including e-media. The BBC coverage alone is estimated to be worth £100 million.

Shona felt that there was a lot to learn from Liverpool where the City of Culture was estimated to be worth £750 million in the local economy, resulting in rises in employment and retail as a result. The City of Culture is a major showcasing opportunity. She feels the key is to get the city to believe in itself. It’s about changing the perceptions of the outside world and also the perceptions of how we see and present ourselves. Shona concluded by looking forward to seeing the confidence, ideas and ambition of Derry and its citizens really come to the fore and have a viral effect across the island of Ireland and tell a new story and a confident story about all of us.

The session concluded with Questions and Answers on topics such as the role of Udaras na Gaeltachta and the importance of inter-agency working, and on what opportunities might exist for tourism students when they graduate. It was recognised that opportunities are limited for graduates but that they have to become involved in local businesses in whatever capacity they can initially.

SESSION 3: NETWORKING, BRANDING & PARTNERSHIPS

This session was chaired by **Traolach O’Fionnáin, Arts Officer with Donegal County Council**. Traolach introduced the first speaker **Hannah McGuinness from Donegal Designer Makers**, speaking on the topic of “Why a Network?”. Traolach felt the Donegal Designer Makers represented a solid blueprint for how a network can operate.

Donegal Designer Makers are a group of Irish craft makers and designers from Donegal who have formed a collective to showcase their work; they have a website and facebook page. Hannah provided an overview of the craft makers and designers involved, showing photographs of the artists at work and with their work, and also photographs of the end products. Those involved are Sharon McGinley, Brian McGee, Shane Houston, Marina Hamilton, Fiona Higgins, Isobel Sangha, Michael Parkinson, Emer O’Sullivan, Noel Cronin, Martin Gallagher, PJ Patton, Liam Logue, Koko Designs, Alice and Eve, Joanne Gamble, Eddie Doherty, Chic Hens, Emer Kelly and herself, Hannah McGuinness.

Initiatives taken by the network include a successful six-week “Snapshots” exhibition in a ‘pop-up’ gallery space on Main Street Ardara in July and August 2011. Hannah spoke of the benefits of working together in a collaborative way and of the power of the network.

The next speakers in this session were **Paul Brown from the Earagail Arts Festival** and **Mark Wheeler from Rathmullan House**, in a joint presentation entitled “In Bed With”! Paul and Mark continued on the theme of collaboration, outlining the benefits of bringing the cultural and tourism sectors together in partnership as evidenced by the Earagail Arts Festival and Rathmullan House partnership.

They described how this allowed them to benefit from each other’s expertise and to share resources at a practical level, for example a vintage marquee purchased by Rathmullan House. Mark also described the innovative approach taken by Rathmullan House, for example participating in a number of events around the country as a way of sourcing customers, including providing a pop-up restaurant at Electric Picnic. He said “if we can’t get people to Rathmullan, we’ll take Rathmullan to the people”.

Paul described a number of other partnerships that the Earagail Arts Festival has established, including working with the Regional Cultural Centre, for example. He concluded by urging us to have pride in our artists and in what they have achieved.

SESSION 4: FACILITATED WORKSHOPS AND PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Participants attended their choice of facilitated workshops. There were rich and varied discussions in the workshops, for the purposes of reporting back to the conference, a few key points from each workshop were provided to the rapporteur, **Fiona McGaughey** of **Equal Measures**, who provided a summary of the content of the conference.

The key points from the workshops are captured below. Also provided are some comments participants were keen to have included in the report.

What Constitutes Cultural Tourism in Donegal and What is the Role of the Diaspora?

1. Irish culture is rich and unique; it is associated with an craic and the Irish language. There is also an important land and marine environment and activities that could be explored further.
2. There is a need for marketing and information about Donegal and to get attractions recognised. Also, Irish culture should be taken to the European stage, for example dance and music festivals.
3. There is a need to improve the customer experience, for example:
 - a. having a range of activities throughout the day and evening at times that suit tourists and having tourist offices open at weekends and in the evenings;
 - b. using venues other than pubs to showcase music and dance;
 - c. building on the success of Oireachtas na Gaeilge;
 - d. giving value for money for services, food and drink;
 - e. having one information point which is easily accessed and understood;
 - f. suppliers and artists should work together, link websites, promote themselves and each other; for example we could create an artisan and gallery trail.
4. The Diaspora have a key role to play and we should have a large event to invite people back. We should have local champions. E-zine should be used and further developed, for example a more interactive tool is required to allow customers to leave comments, upload photographs and so forth.

How can heritage contribute to economic growth in County Donegal?

1. The importance of raising awareness and appreciation of heritage and the importance of education were highlighted by participants.



2. Heritage is important to our and our county's sense of place and sense of identity. It is not a commodity. Heritage is not just for the tourist but for all of us as well. People intuitively know what heritage is but don't necessarily articulate it or understand the links between the different strands of it.
3. Notwithstanding the above, practical examples which were suggested included:
 - a. Embracing tourism technologies (such as apps).
 - b. Investing in traditional building skills' education and training.
 - c. Capturing storytelling.
 - d. Initiating a Visitor Passport Scheme.
 - e. Developing music and crafts as packages.

How to Promote Your Work / Product through Partnership

There were three broad areas that the discussion focused on in terms of the value of coming together regarding work/product development and a partnership approach:

1. Support:
 - a. Learning and mentoring / peer support
 - b. Helps to generate new work / ideas
 - c. Builds ambition
 - d. Reduces isolation
2. Collective engagement / Shared Platform:
 - a. "Not reinventing the wheel"
 - b. Shared profiling / branding
 - c. Pooling skills / organising smartly
 - d. Cost sharing
3. Partnership Agreements
 - a. Get talking / doing
 - b. Formalise: legal and professional
 - c. Clarifies roles, responsibilities and expectations

What are the Opportunities for Growth in Creative Industries in Donegal?

1. Individuals feel isolated – there are advantages and disadvantages creatively to isolation but networks are so important.
2. There is no cultural web-based presence in Donegal for culture, this should be established.
3. We should harness the energy from today by feeding back to participants and having "small wins" that are communicated.

What Constitutes a Creative Industry in Donegal?

1. The number of people working within this sector is surprising. It employs more than the IT and software industries but does not have the same lobbying power as it is much more fragmented. Therefore there is a need to work together to demonstrate ways and value of getting involved.
2. People are unsure of what is and is not included in “creative industries”; it is hard to define and grasp. There is huge potential for job creation, yet there is no clear pathway into it. It also needs to be included on the curriculum in schools and we should establish whether there are sufficient suitably skilled graduates in the region to support creative industries.
3. Barriers to setting up a creative industry include public transport limitations and infrastructural issues. Another major problem is marketing, which is very fragmented and there is no one site or area where people can access information. This is a problem for the region at national and international level.
4. The tourist and cultural sectors do not engage with each other, there is a lack of joined up thinking. One proposal is to choose a day / night over the summer to see where the tourism and cultural sectors could enter into small partnerships to see how it works and gather statistics.

How can Donegal Benefit from the City of Culture 2013?

The key point emerging from this workshop was that a specific Donegal / City of Culture Committee should be established to link with the City of Culture, identify opportunities and facilitate involvement.

A number of people suggested that the Donegal side should proactively attempt to maximise the training opportunities that City of Culture could potentially create.

Participant Feedback

The following additional feedback and comments were received following the conference:

- A number of people wished to express their congratulations and gratitude to the conference organisers and were eager to see outcomes and ongoing work in this area.
- Future conferences should specifically target practitioners’ attendance. The importance of their presence and activity in the sector should also be reflected in the amount of speakers that are artists/practitioners based in the local region. Workshop time could be expanded in future, training could be incorporated, and opportunities for dialogue between the arts administrators and the art makers in the county could be provided.



- Annual awards / platforms could be established for emerging county-based musicians / visual artists / theatre makers etc., perhaps run during the Earagail festival.
- Community groups are crying out for arts leadership and artists are crying out for work in their local area that would help them grow professionally and survive financially. Arts funding available in the county is often rewarded, on merit, to national and international artists, but a more self-sustaining model would strategically invest some of these funds in local artists and local communities – building regional arts audiences, and growing indigenous talent, preparing it in turn for ‘export’ to other regions.
- There is some good practice in relation to parts of Donegal that could be used for the county as a whole, for example “Visit Inishowen”. There are also a number of people in Donegal with specialised skills, including skills in emerging technologies, who could contribute to realising some of the recommendations in relation to using technology which emerged at the conference.



APPENDIX 1: CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

8.30 Registration ~ Tea/ coffee / scones

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

9.10 Chair Méabh Conaghan Enterprise Ireland ~ Welcome / Introductions

9.30 Dermot McLaughlin Temple Bar~ What are the Creative Industries?

9.50 Ian Brannigan WDC ~Future Growth Areas ~ Creating Opportunities

10.10 Michael Starrett Heritage Council~ Heritage~ Inspiring Innovation for Economic Growth

10.30 Questions & Answers

10.40 Break ~ Tea/ coffee

CULTURAL TOURISM

11.00 Chair Dessie Larkin Culture Ireland/ Donegal CDB ~ Introductions

11.15 Philip King Hummingbird Productions ~ What is Cultural Tourism?

11.35 Kevin Kidney Failte Ireland ~ The Tourist as your Customer

11.55 Shona McCarthy City of Culture ~ An Opportunity for Donegal

12.15 Questions & Answers

12.30 Buffet Lunch

NETWORKING BRANDING & PARTNERSHIPS

1.20 Chair Traolach O’Fionnáin – Donegal County Council ~ Introductions

1.30 Hannah McGuinness Donegal Designer Makers ~ Why a Network?

2.00 Paul Brown Earagail Arts Festival /Mark Wheeler Rathmullan House ~ ‘In Bed With’

WORKSHOPS

2.30 Facilitated Workshops for Conference Participants, discussing Conference theme and issues and ideas raised in presentations thus far.

3.30 Feedback ~ Fiona McGaughey Rapporteur

4.00 Close