

The Arts Council /An Chomhairle Ealaíon submission to the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sports and Media on the theme of Developing Rural Tourism

1. Introduction

The Arts Council /An Chomhairle Ealaíon is the Irish government agency for developing the arts. We work in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policymakers and others to build a central place for the arts in Irish life. The Arts Council is guided by its ten-year strategy [Making Great Art Work](#), which sets forth a vision for Ireland in which the Arts are valued as; central to civic life; as a hallmark of local and national identity; and as a sign and signature of our creativity as a nation.

We set policy to ensure that all of our funding is spent strategically, that all of our actions reflect the long-term interests of the public and that all of our decisions are transparent and fair. We aim to have policies which are current and relevant and which reflect our role as an expert agency in the arts.

In 2022¹ the Arts Council is investing **€108m** in arts infrastructure, development and activity throughout Ireland. This includes **€10m** in dedicated Arts Centres in every county and **c.€14.5m** in a year-round programme of arts festivals throughout the country. Our key partners in local government invest approximately €37m (net) in current expenditure on the arts with additional monies invested through capital funds

This is underpinned by core values expressed in our Memorandum of Understanding with the County and City Management Association [A Framework for Collaboration](#) in which we state:

We believe the arts, because they encompass a diversity of human experience in a variety of forms, contribute directly to building cohesive and sustainable communities and to enhancing quality of life. We also believe the arts can actively contribute to local economic

¹ As of October 6th 2022

development, whether in terms of attracting inward investment, improving opportunities for cultural tourism, or supporting indigenous creative industry

2. Policy

In March 2022 the Arts Council launched its new spatial policy [Place, Space & People](#), which marked an emphatic shift in Arts Council policy to the notion of *a people and place-centred approach* and towards achieving better socio-spatial equity. Our vision is for a country where everyone has the opportunity to create, engage with, participate in and enjoy the arts and culture, regardless of who they are or where they live.

We believe there is absolute compatibility between our spatial objectives for the arts and core Government policies as espoused in *Project Ireland 2040* and *Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021 -2025*, which articulate the need for a holistic approach to development and the inherent value of integrating policies across a range of areas for a common good and optimum development. We have seen this brought to bear in particular in recent cross-agency initiatives such as the [Town Centres First](#) programme and the [Night-time Economy Taskforce](#) in which the Arts Council is an active partner.

Whilst Tourism is not our primary area of focus we believe the arts have a significant contribution to make to rural tourism development on a range of levels. These include place-making, place identity and pride of place; building resilient and creative communities; diversity of arts and cultural offering, and opportunities for sustainable cultural and creative tourism.

Our annual [Arts Insights](#) survey conducted on our behalf by Behaviours & Attitudes provides evidence of these sentiments and affirmation of the importance of the arts in our society, particularly coming out of the Covid crisis.

In its most recent iteration (2021):

- 88% of the Irish population believe that *Ireland's reputation for the arts helps bring visitors and tourists to Ireland*
- And 78% of the population agree with the sentiment that *the arts locally help give my county or region a distinctive identity*

Some further points on each of these areas are outlined here:

2.1 Place-making, place identity and pride of place

At a fundamental level we believe that a thriving arts and cultural environment, on any scale from village to city, can contribute significantly to place vitality, vibrancy and identity which in turn impacts on place attractiveness and authenticity.

The Places Matter conference in March 2022, hosted by the Arts Council and Local Government had an online session called the **Arts and Our Changing Rural Future** which can be watched back [here](#), moderated by Dr Bernadette Quinn (TU Dublin).

2.2 Building resilient and creative communities

Through our local government partnership since 1985 we have ensured that there is arts activity in every town and townland across Ireland. Investing over this length of time has resulted in festivals, organisations and events being sustained to animate our rural places year round, and in particular over the summer months making these attractive places to live in, work in and visit. Our Creative Places Programme (estd. 2020) invests in places that have not had the benefit of long term sustained investment in the arts and we currently invest in **12 places** around Ireland, some rural examples are Tuam, Shannon, Baltinglass, Bagenalstown, Athy, Edenderry, West Cork Islands, Iveragh Peninsula and Tipperary Town, which in time will become more animated with the potential to attract visitors.

2.3 The diversity of arts and cultural festivals and events

The Arts Council supports a year-round calendar of arts festivals and events, many of a high reputation, that bring visitors from abroad but also promote domestic tourism. This is evidenced by the wealth of data collected by these festivals on their audiences and participants.

On one night of the year, our arts and cultural organisations and infrastructure is most particularly animated and exemplified by place during Culture Night, and we know that in

2021, 121 towns, 67 villages and 45 rural locations in Ireland got involved, which highlights the community and cultural vibrancy that exists in our rural locations.

2.4 Arts centres

Whilst Arts Council-funded arts centres around the country do not in general promote dedicated programme for tourists, there are exceptions such as Siamsa Tíre in Tralee, which promotes a specific tourist programme.

The summer months are often viewed as ‘slow’ months for audiences. There have however been programming initiatives which have created artistically-led programmes in the past which have been popular with tourists. Commercial programmes attracting tourists can be of artistic merit and provide employment to artists, especially in the Traditional Arts. This is an area of huge potential that could be further incentivised, through cross-sectoral initiatives. This could also have significant impact in developing the cultural offer in the Gaeltacht region where there are examples of high profile programmes such as the *Other Voices* series in Dingle, Co Kerry attracting in a significant audience in the winter and enriching place identity at a wider level.

Ibec’s *Experience Economy* campaign highlights the significant value of this sector, which includes arts and culture, to the economy and in particular to regional and rural development. The identified need for skills development, life-long learning and future proofing careers for change in this sector has particular resonance for the arts and cultural sector, who have already demonstrated extraordinary resilience, adaptability and creativity in facing huge change challenges such as the Covid crisis.

2.5 Sustainable cultural tourism

There has been a burgeoning growth in sustainable cultural tourism practices at a wider European level with the European Commission actively promoting Culture as both a driver and an enabler of sustainable development

The Arts Council is currently developing a proactive Climate action policy which will include the phased introduction of climate action requirements for regularly funded organisations. This policy will also include collaboration with government bodies such as Fáilte Ireland to support the Greening of Festivals and Events.

Sustainable cultural tourism is defined by the European commission as *the integrated management of cultural heritage and tourism activities in conjunction with the local community, creating social, environmental and economic benefits for all stakeholders in order to achieve tangible and intangible cultural heritage conservation and sustainable tourism development*

As such the Arts Council subscribes to the notion that cross-agency co-operation and collaboration is the essential approach to take to ensure meaningful rural development and that the arts provide a particularly potent means of exploring, communicating and driving meaningful growth and change in this respect.

3. Assessing Impact

Having already developed a Social Impact [toolkit](#) that assists arts organisations and local authorities to look at the impact (social, cultural, economic and environmental) of the arts at local level in Ireland, we are about to embark on a significant multi-year impact measurement initiative with arts festivals in Ireland to investigate and evidence the significant developmental impact they have over a prolonged period of time.

The Arts Council would welcome the opportunity to further discuss the points made in this submission.