

Give Us The Night - Developing Rural Tourism Ideas (26/10/22)

- Appoint entertainment officers in each local authority to work alongside local venues, promoters and tourism representatives, to develop and promote an extra range of local events (particularly music) that would not typically be covered by local arts offices.
- Consider repurposing part of the post office network to anchor tenants of rural multi-use community hubs. This could be carried out in conjunction with roll-out of fibre broadband in rural Ireland.
- Develop a targeted grant scheme for existing licensed venues, including pubs, to make their premises more amenable to a range of cultural events. This could include the funding of new stages, dedicated DJ booths, sound-systems, retractable seating, accessibility improvements, outdoor event infrastructure (including tents/marquees) etc.
- Develop a mediation service within local authorities to resolve noise disputes.
- Employ a design and aesthetic consultant in each county, to advise on shop signage, streetscape, town/village identity and messaging. This would involve, for instance, improving abrasive or gaudy shopfronts, most typically used by chain stores.
- Encourage the awarding of catering contracts for tourist attractions to local independent operators.
- Encourage urban based hospitality business owners who closed during or since the Covid-19 pandemic, to consider rural Ireland as a viable option. Endeavour to make community cafes a stronger central feature of rural towns and villages, and to increase licensed multi-use arts, cultural and entertainment venues. The emergence of creative, sustainable building solutions in response to current housing supply challenges (e.g. modular / Tiny Homes) could play a part in this process.
- Enhance the offering of nature-based activities (including the use of seasonal event spaces) to attract domestic tourists from urban areas to rural Ireland. The addition of nearby eco-camping should also be further developed, making these areas attractive to a range of demographics, with art and music performance being central to the experience. Unused land such as old golf courses could be repurposed as campsites and mini-festival locations, with clubhouses providing hospitality and further entertainment options.
- Expand the experience of brewery/distillery tours by encouraging the development of event spaces onsite.
- Festivals to be required to book a sufficient proportion of local acts. In the case of large-scale festivals, this can be a key profile building exercise for these acts, who could raise their stock locally and cultivate a more vibrant local scene. Festival organisers could also be encouraged to put on pre-events and after parties, at venues in local or neighbouring areas.

- Further develop domestic stag/hen party market to spread across Ireland, tying together non-alcoholic experience based daytime activities (e.g. heritage craft workshops, artisan food tours) with a diverse range of night-time options.
- For the OPW to significantly increase their engagement with local communities, to provide buildings and land for studios, events and cultural market places. Additionally, the OPW could help to facilitate a more ambitious event tourism strategy by putting more heritage sites into regular event use.
- Identify a wider range of locations for food and beverage vendors (food trucks, coffee bikes, container cafes etc).
- Just like the falloff in ballrooms and dancehalls, the role of the 'big house' in rural Irish society has altered. Many of these stately homes are still in operation, providing multi-use land and event spaces, to host festivals and weddings. These houses and land impact very positively on the economic and societal aspects of a rural area. Local authorities could work more closely with the owners of these properties and land, to provide a greater range of cultural amenities and activities for people in the area.
- Modify the "living above the shop" concept, to include recording studios and arts spaces, to increase artist-in-residence opportunities and album recording locations around the country.
- "Roots" initiative that encourages students to return to their town or village during the summer to become more actively involved in local cultural events. Too many areas are suffering from a mass exodus of their young creative populations, contributing to a ghost town effect, making these destinations less attractive to tourists who seek to sample a vibrant Irish atmosphere. This initiative could be strengthened through local cultural space audits, providing more visible event options and general access to space for organisers.
- Support the growth of the small pub/hotel model.
- Take inspiration from the showband era, by using remaining towns halls, church halls and other community spaces for evening and night-time entertainment. This could include non-alcoholic events, as recently exemplified by The Virtue Club in Kerry.