

**Submission to the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
on development of rural tourism.**

17/10/2022

Compiled by Chair of National Cultural Institutions.

About the Council of National Cultural Institutions:

The Council of National Cultural Institutions includes representation of the directors and CEOs of Ireland's designated national cultural institutions, the Arts Council and Heritage Council.

The National Cultural Institutions (NCIs) advocate for the central role that art, culture, and heritage play in Ireland's vibrant, progressive society and are the permanent public state sites of collections and dynamic public programming. The objects in our collections tell the story of who we are as a nation. The continuity they offer keeps us connected to our past, immersed in our present, and focused on our future. Held in trust, they belong to us all.

As we preserve our past and engage in our present, it also falls to us to shape our future. In conserving, connecting, and amplifying creativity, the NCIs are a national resource with a key role to play in advocating for and promoting art, culture, and heritage nationally and internationally.

While distinct institutions in their own right, the NCIs recognise and nurture the benefits, insights and opportunities that arise from our closer collaboration. In recent years this has led to the production of annual activity reports that mark the collective output and activity of our cultural spaces (See Appendix 1). Through collaboration we continue to build on these successes into future years and expand our collections to reflect the nation's experience, support artists and their creative endeavours, and engage with our viewing audience both nationally and internationally.

Although our institutions are predominantly located in urban centres (Dublin, Cork and Kilkenny), with the exception of National Museum of Ireland – Country Life located in Turlough, Co Mayo, our activities and programmes occur in communities across Ireland.

Development of Rural Tourism:

Tourism is an important aspect in our visitor demographics and depending on the institutions can be a combination of domestic and international audiences. Museums and Galleries provide a key element of the tourism infrastructure that is free to access. A number of anchor annual arts, culture, heritage festivals and public programmes across Ireland are supported through the Arts Council and Heritage Council. Our National Concert Hall and Abbey Theatre provide a year round programme of performance and theatre that connects with a wide demographic of audiences. It is well documented that tourists are drawn to vibrant destinations rich in arts, culture and heritage. The outstanding collections and performances that feature in these institutions are a continual draw to tourists and demonstrate how opportunities to engage with these collections and programmes in rural communities would provide a compelling offer for many visitors and build on existing arts and cultural offerings in these communities.

Our response below focuses on the opportunities presented by mobility of collections and programmes to grow and develop rural tourism that can be supported by our institutions.

These recommendations build on already excellent initiatives within our institutions supported by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media, examples include;

- The National Archives brought the exhibition “Treaty 1921 – Records from the Archives” on tour in 2022 following its hugely successful presentation at Dublin Castle <https://www.nationalarchives.ie/2021commemorationprogramme/the-treaty-1921-records-from-the-archives/>
- The National Museum of Ireland (NMI) works with the Local Museums Network of Local Authority Museums to enable collection loans and currently have extensive loans of across all twelve local authority museums <https://www.icomireland.com/institutionalmembers/local-authority-museums-network-lamn>

- The National Museum of Ireland – Country Life based in Turlough Park House, Co Mayo is the only National Cultural Institution based within a rural community and works at a national level through its collections and programmes to ensure greater engagement with rural communities. One specific project of mention is the Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN) delivered in partnership with the Heritage Council and initiated through a Creative Ireland grant in 2017. <https://www.ouririshheritage.org/content/about/irish-community-archive-network-2> . NMI – Country Life is currently carrying out a pilot as part of the Night Time Economy Taskforce delivering late events and programmes in our rural communities supported by the DTCAGS&M.
- IMMA’s “Talking Art Online” offers regular talks on the collection with community groups. The programmes is supported through the Department of Rural and Community Affairs and IMMA has delivered sessions from Achill Island to Carlow. IMMA additionally have a network of at least 30 regional centres countrywide often with a significant number of collection loans across the country accompanied by education and learning programmes <https://imma.ie/whats-on/talking-art-online/>

Supporting mobility of collections and programmes:

As NCIs we support greater mobility of the national collection and programmes to communities across Ireland. In the case of our Museums, Galleries, Library and Archives this predominantly takes the form of touring exhibitions or collection loans to local museums and arts and culture centres and in the case of our National theatre and concert hall this can involve touring shows or co-produced programmes.

Infrastructure Supports:

Exhibitions, object loans, visual arts, books and historic papers require specific environmental and security standards. These often are not at the required level in available spaces in rural communities. There has been significant investment made in local museums, arts and cultural centres over the last number of years and this has been very welcome. It

has also demonstrated how investment can assist organisations meet required standards and thereby increase opportunities for rural communities to access collections or programmes from the NCIs. Continued targeted capital investment in these spaces would provide more suitable sites for exhibitions and touring programmes.

Staffing, Artist and Performer Supports:

From the point of an initial request to installation, the process of collection loans requires input from a number of specialists across our organisations including curators, conservators, loans officer and facilities. The capacity of our institutions to support multiple loan requests is limited by the resources we have to support these activities. Investment from the DTCAGS&M has enabled capacity within our institutions, however continued targeted investment will enable greater mobility of collections to rural communities and centres.

Insurance and Transport Costs:

Depending on the specific collection or object that is being requested, these costs can vary significantly. Often insurance costs associated with transport and installation can be the key prohibiting factor in enabling greater mobility of the collection. An annual fund or programme that enables institutions and organisations in rural centres to apply for additional budget support to facilitate loans from the national collection would assist. The current mobility of collections scheme that can be accessed by Local Museums for this purpose is €25,000. Added investment in this area supported through Local Government could enable mobility of collections and programmes further.

Promoting our cultural heritage:

Ireland's rich natural heritage particularly in rural settings continues to be a significant draw and important impact on tourists who visit our country. The success of recent campaigns such as the Wild Atlantic Way demonstrates how a strong brand and identity and a cohesive approach anchored in Ireland's natural heritage along the West Coast in turn provided gateways into a number of different elements of our cultural heritage.

There are opportunities within this framework to consider how we can better support and promote our cultural heritage across rural settings, finding ways to connect both tangible

and intangible heritage in a manner that draws visitors into a compelling story of Ireland's history told through its landscape, objects and language. For example National Museum of Ireland is a partner on an INTEREG research project CUPHAT which aims to explore opportunities for sustainable upland tourism and has a research strand that focuses on cultural heritage <https://www.ucd.ie/research/news/2022/ireland-walesinterregpartnershiponsustainabletourismforuplandsregions/body,616253,en.html>

Programmes that enable a collaborative approach with both staffing and infrastructure supports that can be accessed by participating partners would potentially lead to new innovative programmes and greater outcomes and impacts for rural tourism developments and community.