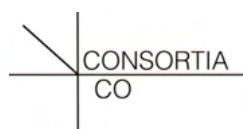




## Inishowen Art Festival Feasibility Study

Funded through the Arts Council's Capacity Building Support Scheme



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# Introduction

## 1.1. Background and context

In 2022, Artlink were awarded funding through the Arts Council's Capacity Building Support Scheme to investigate the potential of an arts festival across the peninsula of Inishowen Co. Donegal. Artlink formed in 1992 and is the longest established professional art company in the region. Its remit covers the North-West, including Northern Ireland, with a studio and workshop based at the Fort Dunree Military Museum, Buncrana.

To carry out the feasibility study Artlink were joined by:

- Keith Whittle, London-Tokyo based curator, lecturer, and writer.
- Maria Coleman, Samhlaigh Arts Collective, multidisciplinary, socially engaged arts practitioner.
- Patrick Mulvihill, co-founder of community development organisation Amicitia.
- Sam Marchetti, co-founder of ConsortiaCo, a commercial innovation agency and accelerator for business to government development and consortium bidding.
- Adriana Valderrama Lopez, researcher on Artlink archive

## 1.2. Purpose of the feasibility study

The purpose of this study is to thoughtfully evaluate the potential of an arts festival in the Inishowen region. This evaluation encompasses multiple perspectives, taking into account the feedback, opinions, and ideas of a diverse array of stakeholders. The aim of the study is to ensure that any proposed concept is a natural fit for the local area, rooted in an understanding of the community's values and cultural landscape.

Rather than solely pursuing innovation and novelty, this study acknowledges the importance of learning from past experiences and recognising the value of existing artistic and cultural endeavours. The study coincides with a project which is archiving the past work of Artlink.

The overarching aim of the feasibility study is to strike a balance between embracing new ideas and honouring the region's rich heritage, taking care not to disregard the work of previous artists and community stakeholders.

To achieve this, the study will examine the current situation in Inishowen, explore the aspirations of the past and present, and analyse case studies from similar projects around the world. By investigating what has worked and what has not, we aim to gather insights that can guide the development of a culturally sensitive arts festival if there is, in fact, good reason to do so.

Artlink's recent work, especially with the Irish Hospice Foundation, has involved the cultivation of compassion in our community, and in this study, we intend to continue with this ethos of kindness and openness. We believe that by fostering a deeper understanding of the community's needs and desires, we can co-create a set of recommendations that enriches the cultural tapestry of Inishowen and supports Artlink's ambition to build capacity in the region.

## Community and Regional Context

### 2.1. Demographics and socio-economic profile

According to the EnVision Inishowen Series<sup>1</sup> commissioned by the Inishowen Development Partnership “Inishowen is unique because of its location and circumstances. But is no different than any other border region in Europe, where people’s resilience has evolved to tolerate the burdens of economic, social and health inequality and where the same resilience leads to creativity, locally derived solutions, an appreciation of plurality and diversity, and a capacity to celebrate and appreciate this uniqueness and duality.”



This uniqueness and duality are captured in a peninsula that measures 884.33 square kilometres and is bordered to the north by the Atlantic Ocean, to the east by Lough Foyle, and to the west by Lough Swilly. It is the largest peninsula in Ireland and is known for its picturesque scenery and rich history.

Most of Inishowen's population inhabit the peripheral coastal areas, with several harbours, some of which are used for commercial fishing purposes, including Greencastle, Bunagee, and Leenan. A seasonal ferry service crosses the Foyle, connecting Greencastle with Magilligan in County Derry, while another crosses the Swilly, connecting Buncrana with Rathmullan.

The inner region, defined by low mountains and expanses of bogland, is a critical component of the peninsula's ecology. The blanket bogs, stretching across the low mountains, not only define the region's character but also carry significant environmental importance. They stand as natural warriors against climate change and biodiversity loss, through their carbon sequestration capabilities and rich biodiversity, making them essential for a sustainable future.

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<sup>1</sup> Envision Inishowen (Connecting Communities) <https://inishowen.ie/envision-inishowen-connecting-communities/>

## 2.2. Local arts and culture landscape

County Donegal has extensive involvement in contemporary visual arts and crafts and is the home of several leading public galleries, arts and crafts studios, and a significant number of individual artists and makers. The main Arts Council funded gallery is the Donegal County Council run Regional Cultural Centre Letterkenny. Other publicly funded galleries include the OPW operated Glebe House and Gallery, An Gailearaí, and Artlink, Fort Dunree.

There is also an extensive number of craft initiatives throughout the County including Donegal Craft Village, Local Hands, Ballyshannon and the Donegal Designer Makers network. Creative Sector & Film The Creative Coast Donegal Initiative was developed and is implemented through the Local Enterprise Office of Donegal County Council. The aim is to develop a shared vision and identity for the creative sectors in Donegal. The initiative offers creative enterprises access to innovative ideas and workshops from professionals working in many different creative sectors.

Donegal County Council's Film Office acts as the main resource for filmmakers in Donegal and those who wish to film in Donegal from all over the world. Festivals Donegal is home to a rich variety of annual festivals. These include Earagail Arts Festival, Patrick MacGill Summer School, Sea Sessions, Rory Gallagher International Tribute Festival, Scoil Gheimhridh Ghaoth Dobhair, Féile Roise Rua, Féile na hInse, Ballyshannon Folk and Traditional Music Festival, Inishowen International Folksong and Ballad Seminar, Buncrana Music Festival, Disappear Here Film Festival, Letterkenny Trad Week and Wainfest. Donegal also participates in a range of national celebratory events such as Seachtain na Gaeilge, Bealtaine, Heritage Week and Culture Night.

IBEC's research on Ireland's experience economy<sup>2</sup> commissioned in 2021 showed 330,000 people were employed in the sector which accounts for one in five private sector jobs in Ireland. The experience economy accounts for more than one euro in every three spent by an Irish household, compared to one in every four in the EU. The culture and creativity sector are an inherent part of the experience economy and are a catalyst for innovation in other sectors including local tourism and creative entrepreneurship.

While the pandemic had a huge impact on the creative and cultural ecosystem, and the wider experience economy, it also revealed the important role of culture and creativity as a resource for resilience, connection and recovery. The pandemic provided policy makers with the opportunity to devise new and imaginative ways to reimagine the future and to recognise culture and creativity as an integral part of the economic, social and environmental recovery.

*"We understand places to be dynamic and responsive to continuous change and to be inextricably linked with both individual and collective identity. It is for this reason we believe the arts and cultural expression are central to the creation of meaning in place, and the ideas of place identity and place-making."* **Arts Council policy framework for socio-spatial equity in the arts.**

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<sup>2</sup> Ireland's Experience Economy <https://www.ibec.ie/influencing-for-business/ibec-campaigns/experience-economy>

## Background Research

Creative placemaking can be defined as a community-led approach that uses creative activity to support collective decision-making and positive change for people and the places they live<sup>3</sup>. This aligns with Artlink's overall mission "to provide the expertise and physical resources to build a strong sustainable visual arts culture and contribute to the artistic and economic ecology of the North West of Ireland."<sup>4</sup> In Inishowen, these creative approaches to placemaking are considered through the lens of rurality which provokes reflections on identity, and belonging. One aspect of the rural, presented through art history and contemporary practice, is the concept of 'land', the landscape and our relationships with the places we inhabit.

At the beginning of the feasibility study the core group of practitioners engaged with these concepts by inviting a deeper exploration into the field of land art. Rooted in the 1960s and 70s, it emerged as an innovative art movement that sought to transcend the confines of traditional galleries and museums. As the discussion progressed the concept of 'place based art' (as described by Lucy Lippard in *The Lure of the Local*, see appendix) seemed like a better description of what it was we wanted to achieve. The rugged surrounds of Ireland's most northerly point is a natural fit for these forms of artistic expression which invite viewers to engage with the landscape in novel and immersive ways. These works are typically transient and subject to the processes of nature while encouraging contemplation of the ephemerality of existence and the ever-evolving relationship between humans and nature.

Drawing from an in-depth analysis of Artlink, including their archival project and community engagement, it is evident that there is an impetus to remain beyond the conventional gaze of the land artist and their interventionist methods. Instead, the aim is to evolve a rural art practice that originates from within rural situations, often in collaboration with local communities. This approach has been intrinsic to Artlink's 30 years of practice and any approaches to build capacity need to consider strategies that expand the organisation organically.

Grizedale Arts<sup>5</sup>, a well renowned arts organisation based in Cumbria, provides a valuable case study for the successful implementation of a community-led creative placemaking that resonates with Artlink's ambitions. Much like Artlink, Grizedale Arts has taken an embedded approach to connecting with local communities and landscapes, with projects that centre on locale-specificity and residencies. Their methods champion the creative involvement and empowerment of the community, fostering a collective decision-making process that aligns with Artlink's vision "of a time when rural areas in Ireland will have a vibrant, sustainable art community, confident in the uniqueness of its voice."<sup>4</sup>

The Coniston Water Festival, curated by Grizedale Arts, stands out as a compelling example. The organisation breathed new life into the festival, which had lost its spark over the years, and in collaboration with the village committee, turned it into a successful community project. Over time,

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<sup>3</sup> What We Do Now (WWDN) is a Creative Placemaking Network <https://whatwedonow.scot/about/>

<sup>4</sup> Artlink's vision and mission statements <https://www.artlink.ie/about/about-artlink/>

<sup>5</sup> Grizedale Arts <https://www.grizedale.org/>

control of the festival was passed to the villagers themselves, underscoring Grizedale's commitment to fostering ownership, control, and decision-making within the community.

This provides a powerful example of the role of the 'artist' in a rural setting. Taking a closer look at the central theme of Failte Ireland's flagship tourism strategy for the region<sup>6</sup> underscores the need for artists to play a central role in activating social, economic and environmental developments. This theme is *Inishowen's Creative Story* which aims to enrich communities, work collaboratively to add value to the sense of place. This creative story is viewed "*as a theme that resonates along the Wild Atlantic Way, but nowhere is its story so strongly etched into the land and culturescape, as on the Inishowen Peninsula. The opportunity to explore art and artistic traditions from Neolithic times through to the present and to engage in immersive experiences is on offer across the peninsula.*" Artlink, as the longest established professional art company in the region, will have an important role to play in crafting this story and inviting voices from the community to help shape the narrative.

The direction of travel for the tourism sector, in a climate and biodiversity emergency, remains a contested space. However, in the context of Inishowen and Artlink's approach, the intersection of art, culture, and environment offers a platform for sustainable and meaningful engagement that positions art as a critical tool for dialogue, learning, and action. This is a necessary consideration for any meaningful capacity building efforts and lessons can be learnt for environmental initiatives such as the slow food movement, which started in Italy in the 1980s, advocates for a food system that is good (tasty, fresh, and seasonal), clean (produced in a way that doesn't harm the environment), and fair (provides fair conditions and pay for workers).<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, arts organisations and arts festivals in a region such as Inishowen can operate with such values that echo the ethos of the Slow Food Movement, embodying practices that are not only 'good', in terms of aesthetic and cultural value, but also 'clean', meaning environmentally sustainable and sensitive to the local landscape, and 'fair', implying equitable representation, participation, and benefits for the local community.

A festival model that embraces these principles could incorporate participatory art projects that engage local residents and visitors alike, creating a collective artwork that not only explores and respects the land but also unites the community in shared creativity. These projects can also emphasise the use of local and sustainable materials, minimising environmental impact, and promoting a heightened consciousness of local ecosystems.

These considerations are explored in more depth throughout this feasibility study document with conversations happening between artist networks and community at both local and global scales. This work aims to inform the ongoing strategic work of the Arts Council with recommendations to support the priority areas detailed in their "Making Great Art Work: Festivals Policy & Strategy

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<sup>6</sup> Inishowen Peninsula Destination Experience Development Plan (DEDP)  
<https://www.failteireland.ie/inishowendedp.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> Slow Food Movement <https://www.slowfood.com/>



2020-2025"<sup>8</sup> which recognise the central role that arts festivals play in delivering the arts to the public by enabling communities to curate and define their history, social commentary, and reflect their identity through programmes and events. Festivals provide essential access to the arts particularly in areas of low engagement along with significant opportunities for artists to develop their practice.

The Arts Council advocates for and supports the development of a diverse and varied arts-festival ecology, and provides a suite of supports that encourage models of national and international significance and best practice. In addition, the Arts Council offers financial and developmental support to small festivals to deliver quality arts experiences for audiences, and prioritises programmes engaged with, and relevant to, local communities. This is primarily delivered through the Festival Investment Scheme which is open to multidisciplinary festivals and single artform festivals taking place between July and December 2024.

Festivals are at the forefront of nurturing street and spectacle arts in Ireland and central to its continued growth and development; providing a necessary environment for street and spectacle artists to test, foster and present work to audiences. The Arts Council values and champions the contribution of amateur and voluntary participation in festival practice and acknowledges the increasing role that localism plays in the development and sustainability of festival programmes.

In the context of Inishowen and Artlink's approach, the intersection of art, culture, and environment offers a platform for sustainable and meaningful engagement that positions art as a critical tool for dialogue, learning, and action. This aligns with the Arts Council's and other cultural strategies to provide a strong foundation for the development of an arts festival in the region.

*"Our vision for this Creative Ireland Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027 is that by the end of 2027 culture and creativity will be embedded in all aspects of daily life in Donegal. This vision is what shapes our focus on supporting and developing Creative Communities throughout Donegal as the main thrust of our Creative Ireland Strategy 2023-2027. The Strategy aims to make it easier for people to engage with culture and creativity as a part of daily life and as a democratic right"*  
- Creative Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

There is also a growing recognition of the arts and creative sectors to promote enterprise in the North-West region. The North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024 was launched by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in Sligo and Leitrim on 8 March 2022.<sup>10</sup> This plan identifies Donegal's Creative Coast as a key initiative and calls for further enhancement of the creative sector.

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<sup>8</sup> Arts Council Making Great Art Work: Festivals Policy & Strategy (2020-2025)  
[https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Research\\_and\\_Publications/Festivals\\_and\\_events/Festivals%20Policy%20and%20Strategy\\_2020-2025.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Research_and_Publications/Festivals_and_events/Festivals%20Policy%20and%20Strategy_2020-2025.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Donegal Culture and Creative Strategy, Creative Ireland  
<https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2019/12/Donegal-1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> North-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024  
<https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/north-west-regional-enterprise-plan-to-2024.html>



## Stakeholder Engagement

### 3.1. Methodology

Our methodology took a holistic approach to stakeholder engagement which is vital to form a comprehensive understanding of the cultural landscape of Inishowen. It was designed to be not only inclusive and engaging but also co-creative to tap into the rich and diverse perspectives within the community.

This process began with internal discussions among the core team, focusing on setting the direction and tone of our engagement strategy. This strategy involved the following set of engagements:

1. An in-depth exploration of the **Artlink archive** project to understand the historical background of Inishowen's and Artlink's efforts to shape the artistic and cultural landscape over the past 30-years. This provided a rich source of inspiration which helped to draw connections with the past before beginning to envision possible futures.
2. Next, we conducted **community engagement activities through three distinct workshops**, each targeting different groups within the Inishowen community. These workshops enabled us to gather insights from a variety of stakeholders, including artists, local residents, businesses, social enterprises and local authorities. Through these conversations, we gained an understanding of the community's hopes, dreams, challenges, and ideas for the festival.
3. We complemented these activities with a series of **expert talks** from individuals who have hands-on experience in arts and culture. These sessions provided valuable learnings and insights on successful cultural initiatives, offering the study an external perspective and expert wisdom to inform the final set of recommendations.
4. To experiment and capture the processes involved with running an event the **IGNITE! creativity workshops** were held over a single weekend. Delivered by a multidisciplinary team, these workshops encouraged participants to intertwine creativity with elements of nature, heritage, and wellbeing — where wellbeing was perceived as joy, play, and the promotion of positive emotional health.
5. Additionally, we initiated a **capacity-building training program for artists**. This program provided artists with the necessary skills and knowledge to take an active role in the festival's design and implementation, further embedding the festival in the local arts community.

By integrating these diverse engagement activities into our methodology, we sought to create a participatory process that emphasised reflection, shared learning, and collaboration. The varied nature of our approach ensured we tapped into a broad cross-section of the community, allowing us to generate a rich data set that painted a multi-faceted picture of Inishowen's cultural landscape.

The data collected from all these activities will be used to identify recurring themes, common threads, and unique insights. This approach will ensure that the final recommendations are not only robust and well-informed but also remain firmly grounded in the realities, aspirations, and values of the Inishowen community. In doing so, we believe that the proposed arts festival will be a true reflection of Inishowen, honouring its past, celebrating its present, and shaping its future.

### **3.2. The Artlink Archive**

Since 2022, Artlink has undertaken the construction of an institutional archive with the aim of identifying and preserving the organisation's non-current records accumulated over more than 30 years of work. This decision stems from the recognition that these records, comprising various physical media such as paper, photographs, audio and video tapes, computer disks, deserve proper recognition and documentation.

The primary motivation behind Artlink's archival work lies in the understanding that having an archive is crucial for providing evidence of activities and shedding light on the individuals and projects that form the organisation's history and ethos. By preserving these records, Artlink seeks to capture the essence of its journey and ensure that its past endeavours are not lost or forgotten. The archive serves as a repository of valuable information, enabling a comprehensive understanding of Artlink's evolution and contributions over time. Through the preservation of diverse physical media, Artlink can offer a tangible record of its activities, allowing future generations to delve into the organisation's history and gain insights into its artistic and cultural activities. The construction of the institutional archive represents Artlink's commitment to observe its past, preserving institutional memory, and providing a foundation for future exploration and understanding. By recognizing the importance of archiving, Artlink ensures that its non-current records are given the recognition they deserve and contributes to a richer understanding of the organisation's journey and impact.

The archival work undertaken by Artlink has emerged as a valuable resource in informing the feasibility study that aims to assess the potential of arts festivals in the Inishowen region. By drawing upon the insights provided by Artlink's archive, which serves as a repository of past experiences to ensure that any proposed festival concept aligns harmoniously with the local area, rooted in a deep understanding of the community's values and cultural landscape, rather than solely pursuing innovation and novelty. To achieve this goal, it is crucial to avoid disregarding the work of previous artists and the contributions of community stakeholders.

Through the process of organising and reviewing the institutional archive, valuable initiatives and projects from the past that align with the objectives of the current study have been identified, contributing to an expanded reflection. Noteworthy examples of such projects include Art in the Park, Resistance and Rebellion, Inishowen 100 x 100, and Edge Centring.

In addition, the works of David Farquhar and Maria McKinney were thoroughly analysed, considering the comments and discussions held in the workshops. Moreover, to enhance the understanding of the region and the potential scope of the arts festival, the history of cross-border projects was also incorporated. This inclusion serves as a means to provide deeper insights into the dynamics and characteristics of the region, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the context within which the arts festival would operate.

Through this approach, the study aims to create a concept that resonates with the community, upholds the organisation's historical legacy, and embraces new artistic expressions, ultimately resulting in a festival that is both relevant and transformative for the Inishowen region.

## Mapping Artlink

The archive project helped to illuminate Artlink's diverse ecosystem of collaborations as illustrated in the graphics below. These connections were mapped from past to present and on into the future with ambitions to deepen links in the region with new partners. These connections highlight the fundamental value of trust and reciprocal relationships, which have been crucial in embedding arts and culture across multiple sectors within the region.

### PAST

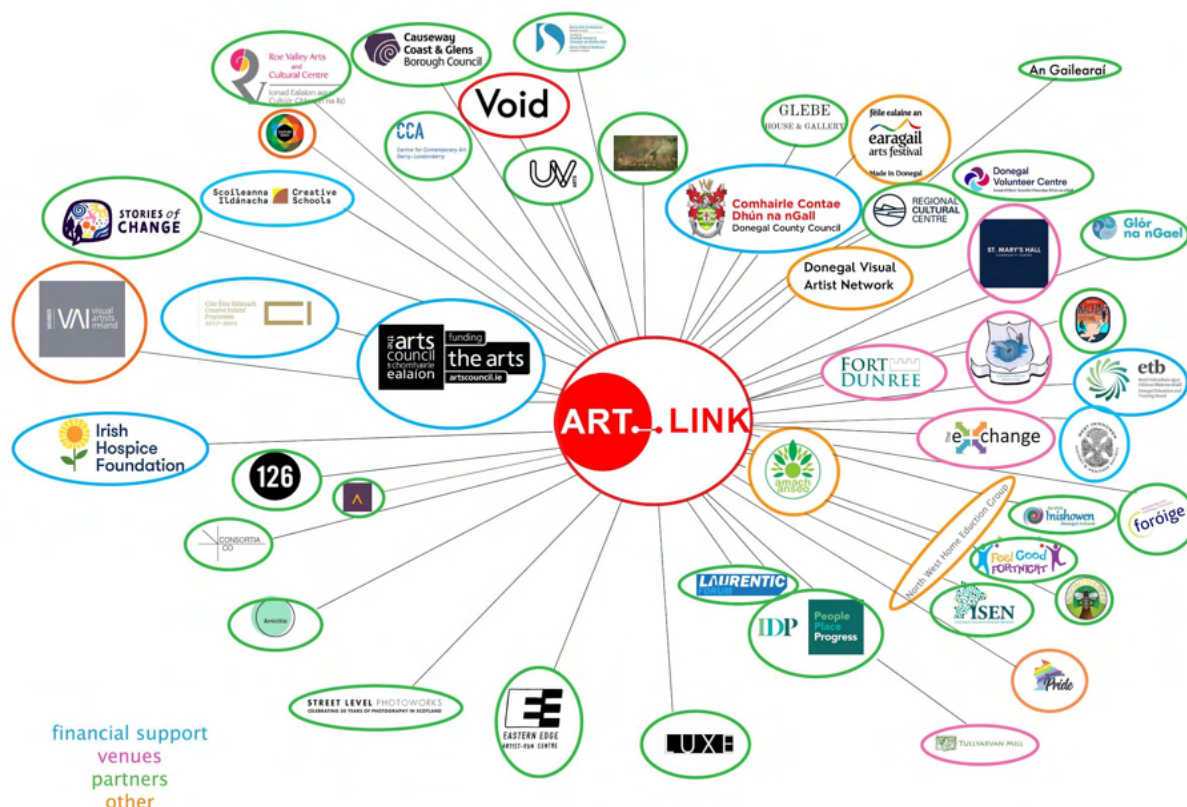


These organisations are categorised by financial support, venues, key partners, and other collaborators. Financial supporters like the Arts Council, Donegal County Council, Pobal, The Pushkin Trust, and the local education and training board have played a critical role in Artlink's early development.

Venue partnerships, particularly with Fort Dunree and Tullyarvan Mill, were equally significant in the formative years, providing essential spaces for Artlink to experiment with various artistic activities. These venues continue to host a wide range of Artlink's initiatives, acting as hubs for community involvement and creative expression.

Key partners including Beyond Borders, Donegal Volunteer Centre, The Playhouse, Donegal Youthreach, IMMA, Inishowen Development Partnership, and Simply Music, represent the organisation's strategic alliances. These collaborations have amplified Artlink's reach, driving engagement and facilitating an exchange of ideas and resources. In addition to these key partnerships, organisations like LUXE, CIRCA, and the Earagail Arts Festival formed part of Artlink's extended network in the early years.

## PRESENT



This network continues to evolve with expanded financial support from organisations such as the Irish Hospice Foundation and Creative Ireland. Venue collaborations, particularly with Fort Dunree and Tullyarvan Mill, persist as pivotal spaces for Art Link's artistic activities along with additional venues such as The Exchange. Meanwhile, the organisation's strategic partnership network has broadened, welcoming cross-sectoral contributions from Stories for Change, the Inishowen Social Enterprise Network, Foróige, and others.

Additionally, Artlink's extended network has grown to include Donegal Visual Artists Network, Inishowen Pride, and Culture Night. This expansion deepens the pool of expertise and support Artlink can access for projects to expand the potential of a regional Arts festival. This continued growth, rooted in nurturing relationships, underscores Artlink's commitment to enriching the region's arts and culture sector.

## FUTURE



This feasibility study's main goal is to outline strategies to build the capacity of Artlink and bring about a deeper integration of cultural practices in the region. The archive project has helped to reflect on past and present relationships while also opening a window into future partnerships. The proposal of an arts festival in the region helps to spur conversations on how these relationships might operate and how they can bring about new forms of fundings and access to additional spaces for cultural events.

The community engagement, detailed in the next section of the document, uncovered many of these potential partnerships with opportunities for funding the future from organisations such as the HSE, the Heritage Council, the EU and corporate sponsorship.

There is also significant scope to expand key strategic partners across academic institutions. ATU, Ulster University, North West Regional College and community organisations such as Tidy Towns groups, social enterprises and environmental action organisations.

Overall this mapping exercise underscores the strength of its Artlinks relationships and the important role of these collaborations to build capacity of the organisation in the future. The importance of these partnerships extends beyond shared goals and resources - they are the bonds that help Artlink build a vibrant artistic community, deeply embedded within the socio-cultural fabric of the region. The relationships nurtured with these entities are not transactional but rather embody shared value, highlighting Artlink's commitment to developing a sustainable arts and cultural ecosystem that reaches all corners of the peninsula.



### 3.3. Community Engagement

Capturing insight and local knowledge from community stakeholders was a key part of the overall engagement. This occurred across three workshops, in different areas of the peninsula, to ensure a diversity of opinions was gathered to inform the overall study. The next section of the document provides details on each of these workshops

#### Workshop #1: General public

**A public meeting was hosted by Artlink at St Mary Hall on Wednesday 2nd November 2022 to find out what people thought about the idea of an Inishowen based Art Festival.** The meeting was well attended with lively and engaging discussion. Artist John McCarron presented a version of his thesis, the Ethics of Land Art which looks at the beginnings of human interaction with land; like Portal Dolmens to the Spiral Jetty and temporary works as found in Burning Man Festival in Nevada.

Maria Coleman of Samhlaigh Arts Collective (meaning Imagine) presented an overview of public and permanent public artworks including works from Anthony Gormley that includes individual contributions from thousands of people to make one piece.



Artlink's Martha McCulloch and Rebecca Strain gave a brief overview of Artlink's 30 year journey and talked about the importance of this place - Inishowen, its people, culture and heritage and how a Biennale (an International art festival which happens every two years) could enable the stories of here to be explored, unfolded and shared. The attendees of the meeting which was held in two sessions from 2-5pm and 5.30pm to 7pm clustered in smaller groups to address issues such as timing, venues, themes, ethics, legacy and resources and to talk about what a festival would mean to them. After the tea-break the group rejoined to share their views and opinions. Below is a summary of the input of the participants:

### **Pre-Event Preparation:**

- A. Encouraging Community Creativity: Engage the community before the festival by organising workshops, art competitions, and interactive events that allow participants to contribute their ideas and creations.
- B. Artist Interaction: Facilitate opportunities for artists to learn from and collaborate with one another, creating an atmosphere of shared knowledge and inspiration.
- C. Artist Residencies: Provide artists with the opportunity to spend time in the festival location, allowing them to immerse themselves in the community and draw inspiration from the local environment.

### **Environmental Sustainability:**

- A. Carbon Offset and Leave No Trace Policy: Implement carbon offset initiatives and encourage a "leave no trace" policy to minimise the festival's environmental impact.
- B. Consideration for Natural Elements: Utilise the festival's coastal location by incorporating elements such as boats, tides, beaches, islands, and bothies (small remote shelters) into the event experience.

### **Audience Engagement:**

- A. Crescendo and Participation: Design the festival program to build up to a climax, creating a sense of excitement and engagement. Encourage audience participation through interactive installations, trails, open calls for art, and public voting for permanent art installations.
- B. Inclusion of Diverse Age Groups: Ensure that the festival caters to both youth and elders, creating spaces and activities that promote intergenerational connections and well-being.
- C. Local Community Buy-In: Prioritise involving the local community in the planning process, seeking their input and support. Engage local schools, businesses, and sponsors to foster a sense of ownership and collaboration.

### **Artistic Expression and Craftsmanship:**

- A. Indoor and Outdoor Art: Organise indoor art exhibitions during winter and take advantage of the summer season for outdoor art installations and performances.
- B. Showcasing Local Talent: Provide opportunities for local artists to showcase their work, particularly traditional crafts such as carving, blacksmithing, woodturning, and weaving, using native materials that reflect the region's heritage.
- C. Lasting Positive Impact: Emphasise the creation of art that not only captivates during the festival but also has a lasting positive impact on the community and environment.

### **Festival Characteristics:**

- A. Grassroots and Organic: Maintain a humble and grassroots approach, allowing the festival to evolve organically based on community input and involvement.
- B. Multigenerational Spaces: Create dedicated spaces and activities that cater to youth, encouraging their participation and fostering a sense of belonging.
- C. Storytelling and Alternative Communication: Incorporate storytelling as a means of connecting people and cultures. Explore alternative communication methods to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all attendees.



**Logistics and Infrastructure:**

- A. Transportation: Arrange shuttle buses to facilitate easy access to festival venues and minimise the impact of individual car usage.
- B. Utilise Disused Buildings and Schools: Make use of disused buildings and schools during the summer as temporary venues, giving them new life and purpose.
- C. Training and Support: Provide training and support to locals involved in the festival, enhancing their skills in areas such as listening, presenting, and fostering wonder and togetherness.

**Overall Experience:**

- A. Engaging the Senses: Design festival experiences that stimulate participants' senses through visual art, music, performances, and immersive installations.
- B. Regenerative Approach: Aim for a regenerative festival model that goes beyond sustainability, contributing positively to the environment and community.
- C. Celebrating Local Identity: Highlight the unique identity and traditions of each area within the festival, celebrating local art, culture, and heritage.

**Conclusion:**

Organising a festival that is playful, spectacular, and inclusive requires careful planning and community involvement. Referring to it as a Biennale is off-putting to local residents. Based on this feedback, for the remainder of this feasibility study, the festival was referred to as an Inishowen Art Festival.

By prioritising sustainability, community engagement, and artistic expression, the festival has the potential to create a memorable and transformative experience for both locals and visitors. With the outlined recommendations and considerations, the festival can emerge as an unmissable occasion that celebrates the existing art and culture while fostering new connections and nurturing the wellbeing of all involved.

## Workshop #2: Artists and creative practitioners

**Artlink hosted a meeting of artists, makers, and curators to explore the possibility of an art festival in Inishowen on 21st January 2022 in St Eugene's Hall in Moville.** The purpose was to gather individuals involved in art, craft, design, creative workshops, and outdoor activities to engage in a conversation about the potential for a festival in Inishowen. Despite the weather, the meeting was well attended, with participants travelling from various parts of Inishowen and beyond. The enthusiasm and contributions of those in attendance were inspiring, setting the stage for a productive discussion.



St Eugene's Temperance Hall, Moville

The meeting commenced with an introduction by Artlink, providing some background on the project. Following this, David Teevan, a renowned freelance creative producer, researcher, and arts consultant, delivered a talk on arts festivals in Ireland. Drawing from his extensive experience, including founding and managing Galloglass Theatre Company and serving as the artistic director of Clonmel Junction Festival for 15 years, David provided valuable insight. He prompted attendees to reflect on the value and spirit of festivals, the potential multidisciplinary or contemporary art focus of the Inishowen Art Festival, and the diverse range of festivals already taking place in Ireland.

*"A clustering of events in a defined timeframe and geographic area that bring people together, offering the possibility of a collective, shared experience."* - **David Teevan**

After a lunch break, the attendees gathered in small discussion groups to delve into various aspects related to the running of a festival. These groups examined issues such as timing, venues, location, duration, themes, legacy, and resources. They were also encouraged to imagine what they would love to see happen at the festival, without any limitations on resources or funding. Each group had lively discussions and subsequently reported their ideas and opinions to the larger group. The exchange of such a rich variety of ideas was fascinating, and common threads began to emerge.

One of the recurring themes was the significance of the coast and its connection to the festival. Participants recognised the unique qualities of the coastal environment and emphasised its inclusion in the festival's activities. They proposed the use of site-specific installations, where the audience could witness art being created against the backdrop of nature. The sensory experience, connections to the local ecosystem, and celebration of the coastal landscape were seen as integral components of the festival.

The idea of celebrating the sea as a starting point for the festival was also prominent. Participants envisioned incorporating seafood produce and emphasising the connection between food and the local environment. They proposed a flotilla of boats, with music, art, and writing activities taking place onboard. The inclusion of international artists and a public program that engaged the community were seen as important factors in creating a festive atmosphere.

Collaboration and community involvement were central themes as well. Participants suggested engaging local orchestras, involving landowners and farmers, and using underused buildings and remote sites for festival activities. They emphasised the importance of inclusivity, involving the youth and people who may be alone. Sharing the festival's time across different towns and supporting each other as a collective effort were highlighted as ways to create energy and celebrate the unique traditions and history of the region.

Other common threads that emerged from the discussions included a strong connection with the sea, the importance of trails, transport, and accessibility, utilising the landscape as a backdrop, and repurposing disused buildings. Participants emphasised the need to celebrate the uniqueness of the Inishowen area and its natural and cultural heritage.

In conclusion, the meeting of artists, makers, and curators in Inishowen revealed a shared appreciation for the coast and its significance to the local art community. The potential festival was envisioned as a celebration of the region's natural beauty, history, and traditions. Ideas such as site-specific installations, engagement with the sea, collaborative efforts, and community involvement were at the forefront of the discussions. The valuable insights and common threads identified during this meeting will serve as a foundation for further development and planning, as the potential festival seeks to bring together art, culture, and the unique coastal landscape of Inishowen.

### Workshop #3: Enterprise, community groups and local authorities

**On Tuesday, February 21st 2023 a workshop was held in Carndonagh to gather feedback and insight from businesses, social enterprises and local authorities.** This was a well attended event which began with introductory presentations from Artlink, Amicitia and ConsortiaCo before a co-creation session with participants broken into groups to take part in a guided activity of 'Think-Pair-Share'. In this activity participants are asked to think individually about a prompt before pairing with a partner and sharing their viewpoints. This was designed to encourage conversation and dialogue about a festival in the region.



Colgan Hall, Carndonagh

The next section will summarise the collective responses to the three prompts asked:

#### ***What would an arts festival in Inishowen mean to you?***

A key recurring theme was the potential of a festival to showcase Inishowen's unique identity, cultural heritage, and creative energy on both a national and international stage. Participants highlighted the opportunity to invite the wider world to experience their home as a vibrant hub of artistic and cultural activity.

Participants expressed enthusiasm for the festival's potential to bring the community together. It could connect different age groups, cultures, and community sectors while crossing physical spaces within Inishowen. This collective approach, engaging everyone from youth to seniors, and inclusive of different demographics, could catalyse societal change and leave a lasting legacy in the community.

Several individuals expressed an interest in the festival's capacity to foster a wide variety of art forms. There was a desire for multidisciplinary involvement, including music, dance, theatre, exhibitions, and crafts. Importantly, this creativity was seen as not confined to traditional spaces, but as

potentially springing up anywhere - parks, schools, churches, underused buildings, and indeed, the landscape itself.

The potential economic impact of the festival was noted, with references to its capacity to generate income for all involved. The festival could also amplify tourism, creating a synergy with existing local festivals and promoting the region as a dynamic cultural destination. However, alongside economic benefits, participants expressed the need for infrastructure development, such as improved transportation services, to support such an event.

Sustainability was another theme that resonated with many participants. The festival could serve as a platform for promoting environmental awareness and stewardship, with art and activities rooted in nature and place. There was also support for incorporating elements such as AR/VR and oral storytelling, expanding the festival's reach and making it more immersive.

Concerns were expressed about the practicalities of the festival, including the need for it to be sustainable and the challenge of securing adequate funding. Suggestions were made for a triennial model and the development of a long-term feasibility study for securing international funding. There was also recognition of the potential for the festival to serve as a catalyst for forging lasting relationships between organisations.

#### ***What could be your contribution to the festival?***

There was an overwhelming willingness to offer practical support. Many individuals mentioned their creative expertise, ability to facilitate groups, and willingness to provide administrative support. Others highlighted their capacity to contribute through hands-on involvement, including volunteering, mentoring, and offering spaces and equipment for use. Still others pointed to their existing relationships with artists and organisations that could be leveraged to support the festival.

The community's rich experience and deep local knowledge were frequently mentioned as assets. Participants noted their experience in delivering creative projects and their familiarity with the community, its people, and what works. These connections and this understanding could be invaluable in building bridges between various groups and organisations, and in ensuring the festival resonates with its audience.

Participants pointed to their potential contributions in networking and collaboration. From activating existing micro-networks to building new connections, there was a clear recognition of the value of collective effort. The ability to bring together pre-existing private networks, support cross-organisational collaboration, and community cohesion were all cited as valuable assets to the festival.

Financial contributions were also mentioned, including direct funding, fundraising abilities, and providing funding advice. Similarly, participants highlighted their capacity to contribute through promotional activities, such as advertising and raising awareness, which would be critical in ensuring the festival's success.

Lastly, a forward-thinking mindset emerged in responses such as "tenacity," "creative thinking skills," and a willingness to try "new ways of doing things." This open-mindedness, combined with the diverse skills, resources, and relationships within the community, suggests potential for the festival to be a transformative, innovative, and inclusive event that is truly representative of Inishowen if the appropriate structures are in place to support the enthusiasm of the local community.

### **What is the greatest need for a festival?**

These needs shed light on the foundational support required for the festival with a substantial concern across the board for funding, particularly for on-the-ground developments, project planning, and securing resources necessary to grow the festival. Another prominent need was the call for adequate human resources, including staff, skilled event managers, volunteers, and administrative support. These human resources are essential for the coordination, management, and successful execution of the festival.

Local support emerged as a recurrent theme, emphasising the necessity for support from local authorities and the public, as well as collaborations with local organisations. This need stresses the importance of a community-based approach and a sense of collective ownership for the success of the festival.

Infrastructure and accessibility were highlighted as fundamental requirements, indicating the need for venues, stages (both indoor and outdoor), and IT support to facilitate the festival. This call also underscores the importance of accessibility, both physical and virtual, to ensure the festival is inclusive and reachable to a broad audience.

Participants also expressed the need for a clearly defined project plan, goals, and targets. These elements would provide focus and direction, helping to secure ongoing support and sustainability, building confidence among stakeholders, and making the festival worth investing in. A more nuanced need was the aspiration to be part of something bigger, highlighting the importance of the festival as a platform to connect individuals and communities and to contribute to a broader cultural narrative.

Additionally, the desire for diversity in the festival offerings, the revitalisation of local crafts, and the restoration and regeneration of the natural and cultural ecosystem through the arts reflect a broader vision for the festival to celebrate and enhance local heritage and environment.

Finally, concerns about security, a reduction in bureaucratic hurdles, and effective communication were mentioned as requirements for a smooth and successful festival. This highlights the need for a supportive, efficient, and transparent administrative and operational environment. Taken together, these needs reflect the complex interplay of resources, support, planning, and community engagement required to successfully launch an arts festival in Inishowen. Addressing these needs will be critical in overcoming potential barriers and in ensuring the festival's success.

## Online Talk - John & Peggy Fisher



The community workshop closed with an online talk with John and Peggy Fisher from Port Rexton in Newfoundland who operate a social business, Fishers' Loft Inn. Inishowen and Newfoundland have well established links and the conversation offered an international perspective on arts and culture and its capacity to contribute significantly to the success of local businesses.

With a background in art history, gallery management, social planning, professional theatre, and documentary film production, the Fishers have a strong connection to the arts. Their partnership began in 1977, when they launched a bilingual cultural centre in Toronto, setting the stage for their future endeavours. The Fishers' Loft Inn, located in Newfoundland, has grown from a small B&B to a larger establishment, featuring 33 rooms and suites, an executive conference centre, dining room, bar, and library. Central to the inn's appeal is its focus on arts, culture, and community. The establishment is decorated with paintings and photographs by local artists, and hosts a reading series featuring Newfoundland and Labrador writers.

The Fishers have also sponsored an annual Opera Brunch, a music series at the Garrick Theatre, and workshops at the English Harbour Arts Association. The Fishers believe that tourism works best when driven by culture, rather than economics. This is evident in their commitment to preserving the area's history and celebrating the province's current cultural renaissance. They actively partner with local artists and artisans, showcasing their work throughout the inn and in their shop. In addition, they contribute to community organisations and initiatives, such as founding Business and Arts Newfoundland and Labrador to strengthen the relationship between the business and arts communities. The integration of arts and culture in their business has made Fishers' Loft Inn a unique and successful enterprise.

The Fishers support extends to the Bonavista Biennale, a contemporary visual arts festival held in Newfoundland. The event, which takes place every two years, showcases the works of local, national, and international artists across various locations in the Bonavista Peninsula. By transforming non-traditional spaces, such as community centres, heritage buildings, and outdoor locations, into temporary art venues, the Biennale encourages visitors to explore the region and engage with the culture and history of the area.

The Bonavista Biennale has played a significant role in revitalising the rural economy of the Bonavista Peninsula. By attracting visitors, artists, and art enthusiasts to the region, the festival has created a positive impact on local businesses, including accommodations, restaurants, and shops. Moreover, the event has helped raise the profile of the region's cultural assets, making it a more attractive destination for tourists and fostering a greater appreciation for the arts among the local population. By highlighting the creativity and talent of the artists participating in the Biennale, the Fishers



continue to strengthen the connection between their establishment, the local community, and the thriving arts scene in Newfoundland.

The Fishers' talk from Newfoundland provided a valuable case study for Inishowen participants on how arts and culture can bolster local businesses and communities. Their support for a biennial arts festival, use of non-traditional venues, partnerships with local artists all offer important lessons for Inishowen's festival plans. Their insights enhance the understanding of the intersection of arts with community and commerce to the need to consider these many layers when undertaking an arts festival in a rural area.

### **Conclusion**

The third workshop, involving businesses, social enterprises, and local authorities, provided practical insights to help bring about the Inishowen arts festival. The enthusiasm in the community, coupled with a wealth of talent and resources, underscores the potential for the event. However, to convert this readiness into action, needs, such as sufficient funding, skilled staff, robust infrastructure, and strategic planning, must be effectively addressed.

John and Peggy Fisher's talk highlighted real-world strategies for interweaving arts and culture with local business, providing a useful model for Inishowen. Their experiences reiterate the importance of local partnerships, innovative use of spaces, and a culture-driven approach.

In conclusion, the workshop demonstrated strong community support and identified crucial steps needed for the festival's success. The key will be a strategic approach to harness community potential and meet identified needs through a shared commitment among Inishowen's diverse community of stakeholders.

### 3.4. Expert Talks

The research was further enriched by on-site and online talks from international experts curated by Keith Whittle. These talks covered a broad range of topics that reflected on the complex situation of each biennial and specific local contexts, and how they deal with this complexity. So as not to reduce reflections to one single model but to explore and study a diversity of voices. The four research-focused talks brought together speakers responsible for distinct biennale's and that broadly encompass three recognised representative models:

1. City-wide regenerative philanthropic and or government and institutional enterprises, as is the case with the Liverpool Biennale.
2. Flexible event-oriented variety operating on the periphery to disrupt the zones of exclusion entrenched in both contemporary art systems and geopolitics, such Kochi-Biennial and Ghetto Biennale.
3. Socially engaged relational community art projects that take place outside of the museum, gallery and institutional frameworks, led by artists' collectives or NPO's embedded in those communities where the projects take place to reinvigorate existing communities.

Each speaker offered unique perspectives and reflections on the specifics of their biennales location and the diverse communities they work with. Background to and challenges they face, working with multiple stakeholders, representation and participation. How they navigate the intersections of the personal and collective history of local communities, foster and support creative practice, inclusiveness and its relationship to lifelong learning.

Furthermore, the role of creativity in supporting community space, social contracts, and processes, and the encouragement of civic engagement and pride. The community engagement process, highlighting the resilience and close connection between the biennale programmes and community life. Along with how they challenge cultural hierarchies and norms, while maintaining the benefits of existing practices and building relationships with funders, local businesses, alike.

#### **Lewis Biggs, founder and Artistic Director, Liverpool Biennale, 2000-2011**



The talk delivered by Lewis Biggs, founder and Artistic Director, Liverpool Biennale, 2000-2011 highlighted the background to the biennale, how it was in itself a late-comer on the rushing train of international biennials accelerating in the late 1980s and attempted to learn from the problems of earlier biennials and create a model significant both to the city, its citizens, its art circle, and the international art world.

The City of Liverpool has substantially invested in culture and has done so every decade with significant proceedings, starting with the opening of Tate Liverpool in 1988. While part of a series of projects supported by the Central Government, Arts Council England, and regional stakeholders and businesses.

The instigation of the Liverpool Biennial focused on localisation, context-sensitivity and community engagement. A focus led to a strong tradition of site-specific works by international artists. Most biennials have the intention and function to raise the profile of a city or region to an international level. The reinvention of place through the value of art and culture raises an interesting question. What value does art add economically or culturally but also at a community level? The Biennial attracts over 628,000 visitors and the company's ongoing public realm commissions generate audiences of tens of thousands each year. Liverpool Biennial is a vital element of Britain's arts offer, driven by partnerships with key organisations and institutions in the city and across the world.

Biggs discussed how his concerns with bringing art to the people of Liverpool had led him to the conclusion. That the museum institution tasked with doing so was itself part of the problem. Before he left Tate Liverpool, we began experimenting with showing art outside the museum in the city. For most people, the history of art and the art itself are not particularly relevant to their everyday lives. Some people make a special place for art in their lives and are happy to go to a museum to find that. But for many people, that is not the case. His considerable work, during his time as chief executive and artistic director of the Liverpool Biennial, and since, is all about bringing art into the public realm. A feature of the Liverpool Biennial is that it has successfully altered external perceptions of the city and its communities, and produced inward investment and made a difference in the economy and local tourism.

A key feature of the Liverpool Biennial is that it has successfully altered external perceptions of the city and its communities, and produced inward investment and made a difference in the economy and local tourism. Furthermore, the non-art-focused social functions of the Liverpool Biennale, particularly in the flow of knowledge between the local, national and international, are part of the biennale's remit. Cultural exchange and interaction, highlighting the uniqueness of the city's residents and shared histories. Putting Liverpool not simply on the cultural map, or as a brand in the global economy, but as an embedded part and major contributor to the understanding of the identity of the city and its communities.

## Lewis Biggs Feedback and Recommendations

1. **Why?** It seems to me that to reduce your position to its simplest, it would be that you would like an event to bring visibility to the artists with whom you are in regular contact. Artists crave visibility more than anything, and while it is a good in its own right, it's also the indispensable foundation for bringing income. The rest is strategy.
2. **What event?** The vision. I suspect that because of demographics, in order to fulfil the 'why' at all it must:
  - a. be an arts festival that includes all the arts, and include the city of Derry as well as Donegal. Cross border may seem complicated but I think it would open more avenues for funding, and is suggested by the geography and history despite the border.
  - b. be aimed at residents, to get them to move around within their own region and recognise / celebrate the contribution of culture. It will of course also attract external visitors, but I think that should be secondary.
3. **Positioning Artlink.** A small organisation in a competitive field (for funds). You don't have the capacity to lead the initiative. And an attempt to assume a leadership role might make you unpopular. You should create a consortium of like-minded organisations (big or small) that see the benefit of working together for the sake of promotion.
4. **Leadership.** The consortium should identify someone to lead the process. Needed for politics and media. This might be a cultural or business person, or celebrity, but not a politician and preferably someone not too closely identified with any member of the consortium. It would be an unpaid job done for love of culture.
5. **Festival Company.** The leader would need a secretariat - a company with a board of unpaid non-exec directors, who should also be unattached to the organisations that deliver the programme. Preferably the company would have no employees, and its functions would be executed by staff seconded to the Festival company by the consortium members.
6. **The Festival company would have two functions only:** to raise funds, and to be an umbrella for the programmes of the consortium. It would not get involved in programming. The funds raised by the company would likely be directed mainly to marketing, but hopefully some would also flow through to the consortium organisations.
7. **The consortium would create its own Festival steering group** to agree on a theme / title for that year's festival, and for planning and communicating to maximise synergies between programmes / audiences / dates. The inclusion of just two or three 'celebrity artists' from different art forms should be enough to add sparkle to the whole Festival.
8. **The festival should be spring or autumn but not summer.** For volunteer support and an audience, you need the university students and schools. The economic argument is to expand the summer movement of visitors into the quieter seasons. The cultural argument is that arts / cultural professionals and tourists travel in spring and autumn but take their holidays in the summer.
9. **Maybe there are some institutional legacies from Derry's year as Ecoc that might be appropriate for repurposing?**

### **Shubigi Rao, Curator of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, 2022-23**



Shubigi Rao's talk (hybrid event hosted at ATU Letterkenny) on 27th April shed light on her diverse artistic practice and her experiences as the curator of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which took place from December 2022 to April 2023. Shubigi's work spans various disciplines, including archaeology, neuroscience, libraries, archives, histories, literature, violence, ecology, and natural history. Her diverse interests inform her approach as a curator, emphasising the need for inclusivity and the foregrounding of underrepresented artists and practices. As the biennale's curator, she navigated the challenges of organising an international art exhibition in Kochi, a city known for its cultural pluralism and lack of existing infrastructure.

Rao gave an overview of the history of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (the first recurrent exhibition of international contemporary art in India). It began as a government initiative when the Department of Cultural Affairs of the Government of Kerala approached two artists - Riyas Komu and Bose Krishnamachari - to help organise an international platform for art in India. To establish itself as a new centre for artistic engagement in India by drawing from the tradition of public action and public engagement in Kerala, the location of Kochi, and its rich tradition of arts. It seeks to balance the interests and independence of artists, art institutions, and the public and to explore ideas of cultural pluralism, globalisation and multiculturalism.

As the biennale's curator, she navigated the challenges of organising an international art exhibition in Kochi, a city known for its cultural pluralism and lack of existing infrastructure. Rao explored and questioned in her talk the loosely self-organised autonomy of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, the specificity of the site and its participatory and relational mission. Kochi-Muziris Biennale governing body was well aware that Rao, an artist interested in disrupting the zones of exclusion entrenched in contemporary art, systems and geopolitics, was going to use the opportunity to curate artworks circulating locally and internationally that do not equally belong to contemporary art as a global aggregate of current artistic concepts, practices, and traditions that distinguish between local artistic experimentation and the international art market closely linked to North America and Europe.

Although this broadens participation, and based on her talk, she found the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, an organisational structure and format based on internationalising the local art scene, somewhat ineffective and doing little or nothing to challenge the existing status quo. On the fringes of the recognised art world, its energy is still validated and consumed by the centre, and the relationship between the rim and hub remains in place. What implications does Kochi-Muziris Biennale have for the identity of local artists as a community in the global art world? She hinted at how biennials are culturalist art concepts, with contemporary ones often unpacking globalisation and art history, and that the so-called periphery is still to gain true significance to the centre as an autonomous whole.

### **Fram Kitagawa, General Director, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, 2000~**



In the past two decades, Japan has seen a flowering of startlingly ambitious contemporary art festivals offering a response to the many crises the country faces today, ecological, social and economic. The groundbreaking Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale is at the heart of this creative social movement. One of the largest art festivals in the world held once every three years and located in the vast rural area of Satoyama, Echigo-Tsumari region in Niigata Prefecture. Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale offers an opportunity to reconsider our way of life in the age of globalisation.

The keynote speech was delivered by Fram Kitagawa, the visionary behind the festival, during a session chaired by Keith Whittle. Exploring the festival's inception, its role in revitalising a depopulated region, and its profound impact on the local community. How the benign neglect of rural communities in

Japan, and the absence of help from urban areas have given rural communities no alternative but to develop and solve problems by themselves without relying on aid from the government.

The Echigo-Tsumari Triennale, Kitagawa's life's work, is situated in the remote Echigo region of Japan, south of Niigata Prefecture. The name "Tsumari" refers to the area's remote nature, characterised by heavy snowfall and minimal human presence. The festival's preparations began in 1996, driven by a desire to reinvigorate this depopulated area and reactivate its inherent potential. The region faces the sea, experiencing dense snow, harsh winds, and heavy rainfall. Once a highly populated prefecture attracting immigrants from various countries, the advent of modernisation led to a decline in population as people migrated to industrial centres. However, the festival sought to restore pride in the local people and reconnect them with their natural surroundings.

Somewhat unobserved in international art theory and art history devoted to the aesthetics of a movement variously labelled "socially engaged art", "relational aesthetics," "community art", and "new genre public art". Kitagawa discussed how at its core Echigo-Tsumari Art Field aims to bring contemporary art to bear on the many social crises that locales and communities face, such as the highly isolated and ageing populations in settlements destined to die out soon with depopulation. He stressed his ecological vision of seeking to put the Japanese public in touch again with its regional roots and a sense of nature lost due to rapid urbanisation. How utilising contemporary art tourism aids regional revitalisation, often working under the most difficult political, demographic and financial conditions. Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale is an alternative, community-oriented and sustainable ecological, social and economic model where the sharing of resources, ideas, and knowledge is through human interactions free of the theoretical baggage that attends further discussions about contemporary life is all important.

**Leah Gordon, co-founder and curator, Atis Rezistans | Ghetto Biennale, 2009~**



Atis Rezistans | Ghetto Biennale artist collective brings together individuals from different localities and diverse communities to Haiti, providing and provoking dynamic interactions, participation and collaboration, and sharing of resources and networks with local distinct communities.

The talk was delivered by Leah Gordon, an artist, curator, writer and co-founder of the biennale, during a session chaired by Keith Whittle. Leah Gordon highlighted not only the ongoing harvesting of ideas, practices, events and processes; workshops, discussions and debates that are at the biennale, resulting in the artist disappearing

into the artistry of the collective - the source of the biennales inspiration and authenticity - one of shared networks and socialised community production. But also what happens when first world art rubs up against third world art? And what new practices, processes and relationships emerge from these, and it's often uncomfortable, entanglements. The predicament of this biennale being that it takes place in a 'Third World' country working with minimal resources under the gaze of a more well-to-do art world.

Gordon's talk also highlighted that not all biennials are equal and the Ghetto Biennale aimed to be a "third space ... an event or moment created through the collaboration between artists from radically different backgrounds". Culturally connecting and synchronising with global centre's, through an art event that attempts to open up discussion about diversity and probe the universality of assumptions of and around art history, is more testing for many biennials on the so called 'periphery'.

This and creating and sustaining the collective and the role of interdependence and democratic sharing of tasks therein; research, study, and sustainable programmes. Leah further explored the goal of inclusiveness and the contradictions and challenges such posed, and how subsequent Ghetto Biennales sought to confront them. Also, if the question remains whether or not, by seemingly being separated from the global avant-garde market, local art scenes, artists and audiences from peripheral areas are turned into malleable global others of institutional norms and interpretative patterns through the model of the biennale.



## Conclusion

In these talks, key insights and challenges are explored and what stands out in all is not only the subject of each biennale's methodology and value, but also its meaning, one not sitting with the producer who actually creates or commissions the project, but rather the entire set of agents engaged in the process of its realisation, and the difficulties such relationships pose. Each provides valuable insights into the challenges of curating an international art exhibition; how all the biennales are complex expressions of a set of values built around social relations and community cohesion, offering an opportunity to review not just artistic and economic models, but principles such as collectivity, communal resource sharing, and equal allocation and collaboration.

The building of social relationships and questioning of power dynamics and how sustainability is a key factor in each festival's continuity, with ongoing efforts to secure donations, sponsorship, and funding. How strong local ownership and support from the community is central to each biennale's success, longevity and significant impact, making them a hub for artistic engagement and discourse. Addressing issues, each biennale generates awareness and prompts critical discussions within the arts community and the wider-public through strong-local engagement, inclusivity, and a commitment to addressing socio-political issues.

Reflecting on his experiences, Kitagawa, for example, offers two essential pieces of advice to Artlink in starting a festival. Firstly, he highlights the importance of bridging the gap between the rural community and contemporary art. By educating and assuring locals of the transformative power of art, the festival can instil a sense of anticipation and excitement. Secondly, the value of introducing something entirely new to the community, creating a unique and motivational experience. By embracing the unfamiliar, artists and locals can be inspired, fostering personal and collective growth. Lewis Biggs talk offers insights into organisational structures, capacity building, advocacy and demographics. How all are key to a festival's ability to deliver an ongoing sustainable programme.

Shubigi Rao and Leah Gordon's talks emphasise the need to challenge and dismantle gatekeeping within the art world. They advocate foregrounding the underrepresented, addressing imbalances, and creating visibility for artists, who are often ignored or marginalised. Dissent, contradiction, and different ways of working are celebrated and provide an opportunity to move away from individualistic and competitive approaches. Both sought out collectives and collaboration as a means to foster inclusivity, and combat the nepotistic tendencies of the art world. A testament to the power of collective engagement, fostering change, and promoting inclusivity within the realm of contemporary art. Also, the foregrounding underrepresented artists and challenging the art establishment as a call to action for the global art community.

Through visionary leadership and dedication, each biennale has clearly paved the way for a transformative social movement, fostering collaborations between artists, locals, and volunteers from around the world. Each serving as a reminder that art has the potential to reshape our understanding of place, time, and our role within communities, offering hope, pride, and a path towards a more vibrant and sustainable future. Promoting inclusivity, where tokenism is avoided and genuine effort to recognise the work of others is implemented. These biennale's impact extends beyond the art world, and helps generate sophistication among the local audience and challenge the notion that contemporary art is only for a select few.

As platforms for social exchange and with an eye to critical regionalism. Each puts forward principles of re-establishing close relationships between contemporary art and real life. The interactive relationship among artists, work and communities being at the very centre of the concerns of such projects. A way of working based on alternative, community-oriented models of sustainability in ecological, social and economic terms, in which resources, ideas or knowledge are shared, as well as social participation. Or the idea of sustainability comprehensively considered and its manifestations in each biennale.

It is clear that each speaker is deeply interested in the creation of new relationships and dialogues, and in the context of these biennial such dialogues between creative practitioners, and communities. Key to such being communication and collaboration bringing diverse stakeholders together; local communities, local government, academic institutions, corporations, and civic groups being a central motivation: the invitees include creative practitioners with the public systematically involved in key and active ways. They play an essential role in stirrings of and informed by the nascent desire for social change amidst economic or social disparity. Opening dialogues with the public, therefore, bridging art and life, urban/rural locations. This prompts a fundamental shift from the relatively "metaphysical" nature of say land art and injects important doses of sociological and cultural, even political issues, and often taking progressive stances. They are then significant developments and offer a valuable model for Artlink.

In short, one may argue that the often unstable and fluid social and economic state of a location, its regions and cultural profile, is met by each biennials collective re-examination of it through art, and culture and community. Furthering active discussion that includes fields outside of art history and aesthetics such as sociology, cultural economics, cultural policy, rural and urban planning and legacies that activate forms of social capital, re-connecting communities not only with place, its history, but geography, topology, and its role in the formation of civil societies.

### 3.5. IGNITE! Creativity Workshops

From May 28th to 30th in 2023, the Samhlaigh Arts Collective, a group of socially engaged multidisciplinary creatives, facilitated a set of action-research workshops at Tullyarvan Mill, Buncrana. These workshops were an integral part of the feasibility study for the Inishowen arts festival to capture the processes involved with running a multi-day event during the research. The collective hosted a series of events known as 'IGNITE!' with a concentrated focus on intertwining creativity with nature, heritage, and wellbeing; which was interpreted as joy, play, and good emotional health.

A multidisciplinary team were brought together to deliver the programme of events including artist and researcher Maria Coleman (Samhlaigh), psychologist and eco-therapist Dr. Caroline Burrow (Samhlaigh), community artist Kathleen O'Hara Farren, folklorist Seoirse Ó Dochartaigh, dancer Tonya Sheina and costume technician Amy Carroll. Nine participants attended the workshop on Friday 29th, ten attended on Saturday 30th and thirteen people attended on Sunday 31st, with two facilitators hosting each workshop.



The brief from the outset for The IGNITE! workshops was to engage with the community of Inishowen, seed curiosity and help people connect with their innate creative impulses. This was to be achieved by blending the expertise of a multidisciplinary team to design a series of events that bring together creative practitioners (artists/makers/activists/creators). Practices and subjects covered by the team included eco-therapy, mask-making, percussion, singing, drawing, dancing, heritage crafts, Irish language, folklore and alternative models for organising group work.

The workshop format was understood to best accommodate these creative processes and help build human connections through immersive and participative experiences. Each workshop ran over six hours 10am - 4pm daily and were scheduled over consecutive days in a venue that allowed for optional overnight stays. They were made as accessible as possible, with low ticket prices and an open invitation to attend part of the Saturday workshop free of charge.

The content and direction of these workshops were informed by an online questionnaire. With the majority of respondents based in Inishowen with Letterkenny and Derry also listed as addresses with a primary interest in 'the Arts'. Based on the responses to the questionnaire the themes chosen to guide the three days were 'Creativity and Nature', 'Creativity and Heritage' and 'Creativity and Wellbeing'. These themes also matched well with the aims of the Samhlaigh Arts Collective.

### **Creativity and Nature**

It was felt that this theme would likely appeal to a broad section of the public with the environment indicated as strong interests by respondents to the questionnaire. Since environmental campaigning can raise divergent political views or sometimes even feelings of despair, it was decided to use the workshop as an opportunity to simply deepen nature connection, and use this connection to inspire art-making and inform role-playing. Led by eco-therapist Dr. Caroline Burrow, the workshop entitled "*Seeing with New Eyes*," was formulated, which involved meditation and movement practices that allowed for deep nature immersion. The wooded river walk adjacent to the venue was ideal for these purposes.



The promotional material for the workshop read: *"We are part of the collective ecosystem that is held within this planet ... Sometimes we fail to see this connection, leading to feelings of separation, disenchantment and disconnect. In connection we can find inspiration, healing and life source energy. In connection we can come home to our place within the web of life and develop a reciprocal relationship with the Earth."*

The participants' time in nature led them towards identifying with a non-human being, and then, mask-making, facilitated by Amy Carroll allowed a process of creative connection and deeper embodiment of these 'beings'. (The beings were diverse in nature: moss, a mossy rock, a bench, a hawthorn bush, birds, the shimmer of light on the water, the river itself, lichen, a fly, a goat.)

## Creativity and Wellbeing



The response to this theme was to meet some of the most prominent 'art needs' identified in the public questionnaire.

Aimed at making a positive difference to emotional wellbeing, and expanding creative confidence, the workshop was designed to push people gently outside of their comfort zones, in order to draw out playfulness, release any blockages and decrease any inhibition, in a safe, supportive environment.

To achieve this, the workshop consisted of six different exercises/mini-workshops, which ran as follows:

1. **Visualisation exercise** which involved a guided 'Inner Child' relaxation.
2. **Dance workshop** that involved movement games, solo and duet improvisations.
3. **Life-Drawing workshop** that included gesture and left-brain drawing exercises.
4. **Percussion workshop** held outdoors that involved learning to play a simple beat on percussion instruments called a 'boom whackers'. Through a series of exercises the group learned an arrangement that allowed them to accompany themselves as they sung the Irish language song Óró 'sé do bheatha abhaile.
5. **Song workshop** held outdoors that involved learning a traditional song The May Morning Dew and using "Om" chanting as an accompanying drone tone.
6. **Integrating relaxation** with Tibetan singing bowls where a closing guided relaxation reconnected to the 'Inner Child' and encouraged reflection upon and integration of the day's activities.

### **Creativity and Heritage**

This theme was covered through a workshop that ran on Saturday April 29th, called ‘Dúlra an Chroí’ (Nature/Heritage of the Heart). It approached ‘heritage’ from a wide inclusive point of view, allowing it to address some of the remaining interests, namely, environment, community and heritage, indicated as significant to respondents of the opening public questionnaire.

At the core of this workshop was a sharing circle, where all participants had ample opportunity to ask questions, contribute views, and share stories, inspirations or even songs. The ‘Acorn’ community organising model played a significant role in the process, with the various stages of the day moving as follows: opening, a stage of inspiration, towards an activation process, towards a time of focus, then time for rest and play, then gathering and sharing, reflection, integration and closing. At the beginning of the process, participants undertook a role within the group and collectively decided an agreement to ‘govern’ group interactions.

With the sharing circle and agreements underpinning it all, the group shared heritage crafts (butter making, felting) and engaged in a focussed analysis of the ‘logainmneacha’ (Irish language place names) of the Clonmany parish of Inishowen. These offered clues as to the characteristics of the land in particular areas, as well as historical uses of the land. The defining characteristic of the day workshop was the nuanced lengthy group discussions that emerged, with much of the ‘learning’ emerging the participants’ sharing.

### **Learning Outcomes**

The workshops provide learning outcomes for the final set of recommendations by touching on important topics such as wellbeing, the connections between art and nature, and the ability of the workshops to expand creative confidence. This event was a live example of a multidisciplinary group of artists coming together to design and develop an event by drawing on the needs and aspirations of the local community through a public questionnaire.

The event also touched on other areas highlighted in this feasibility study including tourism opportunities created through events, cultural stewardship and alternative organisational models to collectively decide and govern group interactions. Research was a core part of these workshops with quantitative and qualitative data capture throughout to present action research methods that could be incorporated into the overall design and programming of an arts festival in Inishowen. A link to the full report, including this data and further information on the learning outcomes is provided below.

**[Read the Samhlaigh Arts Collective - Full Report](#)**

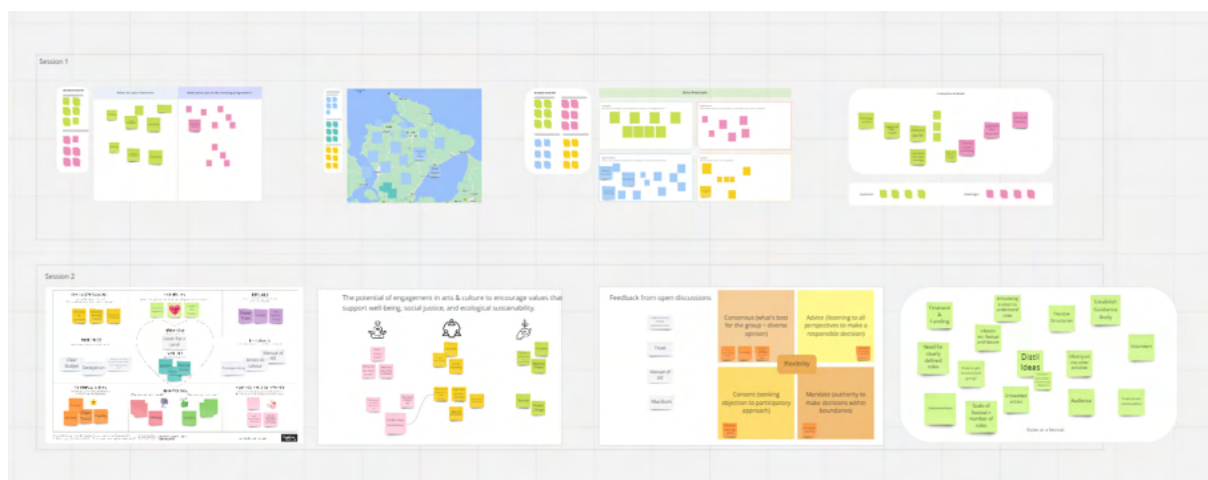


### 3.6. Capacity Building Training Programme

To address the capacity-building challenges in hosting and managing a festival in a rural region, an online training programme for local artists and community members was delivered as part of the project. This seven-session program covered topics such as self-organisation, place-based community development, social economy, digital tools, and funding strategies tailored to rural arts organisations. The training proved to be very popular with all twenty places signed up for. There were some drop offs from this number as the sessions were rolled out with commitment across a full seven sessions difficult for some. Overall there was active participation from 12 members throughout the programme creating space for discussion and sharing of experiences among the group.

In line with our overall methodology which placed an emphasis on the importance of co-creation and shared learning the training had a dual purpose. On one hand, it informed participants about specific topics relating to self organisation and shared responsibility, while on the other, it recognised the invaluable contributions of the participants' experience to the feasibility process and the final recommendations presented in this report.

By recording each online session and utilising a virtual whiteboard, Miro, participants' insights were captured further fostering the process of co-creation and knowledge exchange across each of the two hour sessions.



Virtual whiteboard

#### Wednesday March 1st: Place-based creative practices

The first training session focused on co-creation, knowledge sharing, and understanding "place" beyond geography, emphasising the artists' personal connections to Inishowen. The group explored evaluation methods to assess the festival's potential social, cultural, and economic impacts. They also discussed self-organisation strategies for effective collaboration and decision-making. Other topics included potential challenges, community engagement, and the festival's potential contribution to Inishowen's development. This session laid the groundwork for the artists' collective learning journey.



### Wednesday March 8th: Decentralised teams to support place-based practices

The second training session focused on the benefits of decentralisation in organising arts festivals effectively. The group explored how distributing responsibilities among team members, rather than centralising them, could give agency and a sense of ownership to those involved. The group explored the importance of their connections to Inishowen and personal experience in informing roles within the team. Effective communication and active listening were highlighted as crucial for collaboration within decentralised teams. The concept of "holding space" was also highlighted, emphasising the need for a safe and inclusive environment that encourages participation and diverse perspectives.

### Monday 13th: Relationships of care and trust

The third training session, emphasised the importance of mutual support, well-being, and trust within the team. The group discussed how these elements, nurtured through open communication and shared decision-making, are crucial for a successful collaboration. They also touched on practical aspects of festival organisation, including budgeting, funding, and resource management, highlighting the role of transparency and accountability in building trust. This session underscored the significance of interpersonal relationships in any collective undertaking with particular challenges associated with running an arts festival across shorter frames of time.

### Wednesday March 15th: Accountability, conflict and power dynamics.

The fourth training session delved into the complexities of team dynamics. The group discussed the importance of accountability in a decentralised team. Conflict was acknowledged as natural in collaborative environments with strategies explored that can support constructive resolution, underlining the role of open communication, empathy, and respect. Power dynamics were also addressed, with discussions on recognising and managing these to ensure fairness and inclusivity. The session also touched on 'money stories', leadership styles, and organisational tools, reinforcing the understanding of the necessary components of decentralised networks. This session provided valuable insights into navigating team dynamics in the context of festival organisation.

*"I just want to say first of all thanks very much for the seven courses. When I signed up I didn't know what to expect and I'll be brutally honest I thought I'd be bored out of my tree because I thought it would just be schedules and diagrams of management and all that kind of stuff. This has been absolutely a wonderful surprise and I love the fact that we had a chance to communicate together and voice our opinions and share experiences and stories. It's been incredibly insightful and I learned so much. I have so much to process now so thank you."* - **Feedback from a participant on the training programme.**

### Wednesday March 22nd: Digital tools for self-organising teams

The fifth training session explored the use of digital tools to facilitate collaboration in festival planning. The importance of digital literacy was discussed along with platforms such as Google Suite for document sharing, scheduling, and communication. The session also touched on project management tools for task organisation, progress tracking, and accountability. Ethical considerations, such as data privacy and digital security, were also discussed. This session equipped the team with practical knowledge to effectively navigate the digital landscape in organising the arts festival.

### **Monday March 27th: Social economy for place-based creative practices**

The sixth training session explored the role of social economy in the context of the arts festival. The group discussed how the festival could contribute to Inishowen's social economy by creating jobs, fostering community engagement, and enhancing cultural identity. They also revisited practical strategies for resource management, fundraising, and budgeting. Other topics included the need for collaborative networks to respond to systemic issues such as climate change, the changing role of Arts Officers and coordinators, and the planning of a launch event to showcase the findings of the feasibility study. This session provided valuable insights into the integration of social economy principles into the planning of an arts festival.

### **Wednesday March 29th: Cluster models**

The seventh training session explored the use of cluster models in organising the arts festival. The group discussed how this approach can support collaboration and resource sharing among artists, organisations, and community groups. Various funding opportunities beyond traditional arts funding were explored including EU programmes, Peace Plus cross-border initiatives and the Just Transition Fund. This session provided insights into the potential application of cluster models in festival planning and the opportunities.

*"Thank you so much for delivering this brilliant course over the month. Your highly professional delivery was educational, empathic and inclusive. It has provided a wonderful opportunity to reflect, consider and participate as well as giving us the tools and overview to bring about something special to our unique peninsula."* - **Feedback from a participant on the training programme.**

### **Conclusion**

Over many years, artists have been pioneers at the forefront of self-organising through collectives and counter cultural movements that have dared to challenge established norms and cast a spotlight on the struggles of marginalised communities. In the midst of a climate and biodiversity crisis there is a pressing need for new forms of governance, self-organisation and ideas about alternative, more sustainable, paths that society can take.

The training programme proved to be a critical component of the feasibility study. The seven sessions became a platform for discussions on these alternatives and the function of an arts festival to create space for deeper conversations among people with a diverse set of skills and opinions. There was an appetite for further networking and learning through these forms of co-creative processes. The challenge is now to maintain momentum generated through the programme to strengthen the resilience and vitality of the arts community in Inishowen and beyond.

### 3.7. Conclusion

Beginning with a look through the Artlink Archive, to the heart of our community workshops, the inspiration from expert talks, the illuminating IGNITE workshops, and the comprehensive capacity-building training programme, this feasibility study has drawn information from a diverse range of sources to ascertain the potential of an arts festival in Inishowen. It is clear from the enthusiastic responses that a festival would be welcomed and supported by residents of the peninsula. The question then becomes: what type of festival would be most fitting, and what is Artlink's role in the delivery of such an event?

This is an important consideration. Arts festivals in rural areas can foster community engagement, stimulate local economies, and promote cultural heritage. However, as highlighted in the case of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and in discussions with John and Peggy Fisher, success can also bring potential risks, such as locals feeling left out, loss of authenticity, and gentrification. Rising costs and strain on resources due to increased tourism can negatively impact the community. Additionally, environmental degradation and cultural commodification may arise, undermining the festival's original mission.

This calls on festival organisers and designers to holistically consider the many layers and impacts of a festival and maintain a harmonious balance between local engagement and tourist appeal. It was evident throughout the community engagement process that there is a strong sense of pride in the region with participants highlighting the resilience and close connection with nature that shapes community life. Participants highlighted the need to fully embrace this community life by tracing the history and understanding the legacy of what has gone before. They recognised that previous attempts to establish arts festivals had taken place, and in order to learn from those efforts, it was essential to examine why these endeavours did not succeed. Through this introspection, they sought to uncover the challenges faced by those earlier initiatives and to garner wisdom from those experiences, so as not to repeat the same mistakes.

Participants also acknowledged the need to fully consider the existing festivals and events that were already thriving within their community. They were keenly aware of the need to support and uplift ongoing efforts rather than undermine them. Central to this was adding value to these existing projects through meaningful artistic engagement, rather than displacing them with a new festival that could potentially polarise the community.

The recommendations and findings in the next section of the document are presented with an understanding and consideration of the many complex layers that were discussed throughout the stakeholder engagement process. The challenge ahead lies in maintaining the momentum of the community and harnessing the energy, creativity, and dedication of all those involved to bring the right kind of festival into fruition.

As the project moves forward, it is important to continue capturing the valuable perspectives of a diverse group of stakeholders to guide the festival's development. This feasibility study marks not the end of a process, but the beginning of an exciting journey of co-creation to further embed arts and culture into all aspects of community life in the region, with Artlink playing a prominent role to support this ambition.

## Recommendations & Funding Pathways

This final section of the document embodies the diverse perspectives and opinions gathered from the myriad stakeholders involved in this project. The goal is to translate these inputs into a set of practical recommendations that can enhance the cultural capacity of both Artlink, the organisation, and Inishowen, the region in which it operates.

Recognising the ever-changing and unpredictable nature of funding cycles, we recognise that these recommendations need to maintain a degree of flexibility and adaptability. Central to this fluid approach is the need to build the capacity of the artistic community within the region, whilst also extending a network of partners beyond the confines of the peninsula.

These recommendations are distilled into a series of action items below:

- Action 1: Condense and share the key findings of the study
- Action 2: Encourage the creation of a new collective with key stakeholders, with the view to making joint funding applications
- Action 3: Design a second iteration of the training programme for a broader group of participants.
- Action 4: Create a mission, governance, and evaluation practices with the new collective.
- Action 5: Continue to work on acquiring Creative Places funding to enhance the promotion of local arts and culture across sectors.
- Action 6: Encourage the inclusion of Visual Art as part of existing regional and local festivals.
- Action 7: Expand the new collective's reach through strategic network building.
- Action 8: Prioritise sustainability and inclusion in all aspects of the new collective

To fund these initiatives, we have identified potential sources including the new Leader programme, the Arts Council Festival Investment Scheme, the newly announced Arts Council Creative Production Supports award and various EU opportunities listed in Appendix 1.

However, the broader objective of this capacity-building effort is not merely to secure funding but to develop a diverse range of long-term, cross-sector relationships which will in turn lead to new sources of income. By expanding a new collective's network in this way, we can ensure the resilience and growth of the organisation and, in turn, invigorate the cultural life of the Inishowen region.

### Action 1: Condense and share the key findings of the study

This action seeks to address the accessibility issue of the text-heavy feasibility study and the content collected for the Artlink archive. Recognising the need for diversified communication channels, this action calls for the development of various engaging and easily understandable materials that will effectively convey the rich content of the study and the archive to reach a broad audience including members of the community who have contributed to these works.

Strategic Objective	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Audience Identification:</b> Determine the key audiences for the communications materials. This could include local community members, artists, potential funders, partners, and other stakeholders.</li><li>● <b>Content Simplification:</b> Break down complex information from the feasibility study and Artlink archive into concise, engaging, and easily digestible content.</li><li>● <b>Multimedia Usage:</b> Leverage different forms of media such as infographics, videos and interactive web platforms to diversify the presentation of information and appeal to various audience preferences.</li><li>● <b>Language Accessibility:</b> Ensure that all communications are written in clear, jargon-free language, and consider translation into other languages as needed to increase accessibility.</li><li>● <b>Visual Storytelling:</b> Use compelling visuals and narratives to bring the content of the feasibility study and the Artlink archive to life. This could include artist profiles, stories, and testimonials.</li><li>● <b>Visualise Network:</b> The archive and information captured through action #4 should also be visualised to showcase the depth of Artlink's impact over their 30 years of projects.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Design and create a simple leaflet that can be distributed to the key potential partners</li><li>● Identify all community gathering events over the next 6 months and insure Artlink have a presence there</li><li>● Present a summary of the report at ISEN meeting</li><li>● Add the report to <a href="http://www.artlink.ie">www.artlink.ie</a></li><li>● Create a press release (Shane Kirby)</li></ul>

## Action 2: Encourage the creation of a new collective with key stakeholders, with the view to making joint funding applications

This action is centred around capitalising on the community's interest in ongoing dialogue as captured in the stakeholder engagement sessions. Leveraging the findings of the feasibility study, Artlink should aim to use these insights as a catalyst for continued conversation and collaboration. This effort seeks to ensure that the project's momentum is sustained and that co-creation becomes a key part of cultural initiatives in the region.

Strategic Objective	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Findings Presentation:</b> As per action item #1, transform the findings of the feasibility study into a format that is engaging and accessible, such as a simple leaflet with a link to the full report</li><li>● <b>Stakeholder Engagement:</b> Reach out to stakeholders who participated in the feasibility study, thanking them for their contributions and inviting them for further discussions.</li><li>● <b>Feedback and Continuous Dialogue:</b> Put systems in place for ongoing, productive, dialogue with stakeholders about the project's progress and future plans. Use feedback from these sessions to inform the evolution of the project and to ensure that it continues to align with community aspirations.</li><li>● <b>Public Events:</b> Organise public events, such open forums or community workshops, where findings are presented, and stakeholders can discuss the next steps and ask questions.</li><li>● <b>Youth Engagement:</b> Identify strategies to reach a younger audience and communicate avenues for them to get involved in arts projects in the region.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Organise discussion event online as opposed to at a venue so that the geographical area isn't biased to one town or another</li><li>● Keep the festival as part of the ISEN agenda at their bimonthly meetings</li><li>● Being present at upcoming community events such Clonmany Agricultural Show, Greencastle Regatta and winter Arts and Crafts Fairs</li><li>● Meet with North West Regional College in the new term to discuss how creating a project as part of professional practice modules</li><li>● Get back in touch with Youth Reach and invite them to create activities</li><li>● Have an event as part of Artlink Members Show (August 2023)</li></ul>

### Action 3: Design a second iteration of the training programme for a broader group of participants.

This action aims to extend the reach of the successful initial training program by involving a wider group of stakeholders, including members from social enterprises and community development groups to develop a more inclusive arts community in the region. The renewed programme will include in-person sessions to facilitate stronger connections, create opportunities for collaboration and spark shared learning experiences among different sectors.

Strategic Objective	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Programme Review:</b> Review the first iteration of the artist training programme to identify successes, areas of improvement, and potential expansions.</li><li>● <b>Stakeholder Analysis:</b> Identify potential new participants for the training programme, specifically looking at community groups, social enterprises, and other non-artistic networks that could benefit from and contribute to the programme.</li><li>● <b>In-person Engagement:</b> Increase the number of in-person sessions to foster a sense of community, facilitate face-to-face networking, and encourage collaborative learning.</li><li>● <b>Collaborative Design:</b> Engage with both former and potential new participants to co-design the training program, ensuring it meets the needs and expectations of a diverse set of stakeholders.</li><li>● <b>Peer-to-Peer Learning:</b> Adapt programme to leverage the benefits of peer-to-peer learning which also supports networking and builds relationships between participants.</li><li>● <b>Programme Promotion:</b> Develop and execute a communication plan to promote the programme effectively to the wider community, showcasing the benefits and opportunities it offers.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Liaise with Donegal ETB to seek funding for a hybrid training programme</li><li>● Train local trainers in the delivery of the programme</li><li>● Tailor the training for community leaders and social enterprise managers</li><li>● Liaise with IDP to recruit participants</li></ul>



#### Action 4: Create a new collective/consortium with a mission, governance, and evaluation practices

This action calls for the new collective to use the tools from the training to develop mission, values, and governance structure. Align with new evaluation methods such as the EU Creatures Framework and UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Effectively measure and communicate socio-economic impact, build on initial mapping exercises, and establish strong foundations for future developments put forward in this feasibility study. This process will also allow the new collective to put into practice the learnings from the second iteration of the training programme detailed in action #3. This should be carried out using creative processes that explore alternative governance systems as per the case studies in the training programme.

Strategic Objective	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Mission:</b> Ensure alignment with the community's needs and aspirations as revealed in the feasibility study.</li><li>● <b>Governance and Programme Evaluation:</b> Identify areas for improvement to facilitate participatory decision-making, self-organisation that incorporates findings of the feasibility study in future programmes.</li><li>● <b>Impact Assessment:</b> Develop an impact measurement framework using the EU Creatures Framework and UN's Sustainable Development Goals (Appendix 2) to effectively capture the impact of collective/consortium 's initiatives on the local community.</li><li>● <b>Stakeholder Engagement:</b> Involve key stakeholders in the process, gathering their feedback and insights to ensure the collective remains closely connected to the community it serves.</li><li>● <b>Network Analysis:</b> Capture the skills and capacity of existing networks and identify avenues to leverage any untapped resources.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Engage Inishowen Development Partnership in facilitating this process</li><li>● Members of the collective/consortium will be recruited through conversations with our network and beyond</li></ul>

**Action 5: Continue to work on acquiring Creative Places funding to enhance the promotion of local arts and culture across sectors.**

This action proposes the integration of a fully-funded, full-time creative producer within the community. This embedded creative producer will have a versatile role which will serve as a vital link between the new collective/consortium, the community, and other sectors, using creative thinking to build relationships and encourage ongoing collaboration. By collaborating across sectors in this way the embedded creative producer will be able to identify new streams of funding and diversify income opportunities for artists in the community.

Strategic Objective	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Talent Promotion:</b> Identify, support, and promote local artistic talent, facilitating opportunities for growth and exposure.</li><li>● <b>Cultural Asset Mapping:</b> Systematically identify and map existing cultural resources, assets, and activities in the region, highlighting potential opportunities for collaboration and development. This would include existing festivals and other community-based events.</li><li>● <b>Cross-Sector Collaboration:</b> Initiate and nurture collaborations between the arts and other sectors, such as education, social services, and business embed a culture of creativity and innovation.</li><li>● <b>Community Engagement:</b> Actively engage with the local community, participating in local events, and becoming a visible, approachable presence.</li><li>● <b>Capacity Building:</b> Develop and deliver creative workshops, talks, and events to build the artistic capacity of the local community.</li><li>● <b>Visibility and Advocacy:</b> Advocate for the arts at the local and regional level, ensuring the arts are recognised as a vital part of community life.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Work with IDP and their partners on Creative Places Application 2024</li></ul>

#### Action 6: Encourage the inclusion of Visual Art as part of existing regional and local festivals.

This action suggests a move away from the conventional, often competitive, approaches to organising festivals and instead encourages the new collective/consortium to support and collaborate with existing community events. This approach aligns with the example of The Coniston Water Festival, revitalised by Grizedale Arts in collaboration with the local community. This method ensures sustainability, honours the region's history and heritage, and allows the new collective/consortium to contribute meaningfully without creating competition. It's a shift towards an economy of care, maintenance, and relationships, which involves a process of unlearning traditional practices of project development.

#### Strategic Objective

- **Collaborative Engagement:** Actively seek and form partnerships with existing local groups and events, contributing expertise and resources.
- **Unlearning Process:** Challenge traditional festival development models and adopt a mentality that values longer-term, sustainable involvement with the community.
- **Community Heritage:** Honour and incorporate the history and heritage of local areas in all collaborations, ensuring projects are culturally sensitive and regionally relevant.
- **Long-term Involvement:** Commit to an extended timeline that spans several months to years, providing consistent, steady support to existing events and projects.
- **Capacity Building:** Leverage partnerships to build the capacity of local arts and cultural sectors, enhancing skills and resources through shared learning and collaboration.
- **Non-competitive Approaches:** Actively avoid creating competition within the community, but instead aim to support, uplift, and complement existing initiatives.
- **Community-Centric Outcomes:** Keep the well-being of the community at the heart of all decisions, prioritising actions that strengthen community ties, enhance cultural expression, and contribute to local resilience.

#### Partners

- **Inishowen Social Enterprise Network**
- **IDP**
- **West Inishowen Historical Society**
- **Go Visit Inishowen**
- **DCC**

### Action 7: Expand the new collective's reach through strategic network building.

This action emphasises the importance of creating strong alliances both within and beyond Inishowen in order to explore new avenues of artistic engagement and collaboration. Leveraging the digital sphere, this action proposes that the new collective/consortium connect with new groups and institutions, such as [West Cork Arts Festivals Cooperative](#), [Irish Early Music Network](#), [IN SITU](#), and [BE PART](#). These networks could provide further opportunities for shared learning, funding and support, strengthening the collective/consortium's position. Additionally, this action suggests considering potential EU projects listed in Appendix 1 for future, larger-scale, endeavours.

Strategic Objective	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Expanded Outreach:</b> Actively reach out to and engage with local and international arts organisations, seeking opportunities for collaboration and exchange.</li><li>● <b>Digital Networking:</b> Utilise digital platforms to maintain connections, exchange ideas, and foster collaborative projects.</li><li>● <b>Cross-Border Collaboration:</b> Explore and develop partnerships with international networks, sharing knowledge and best practices.</li><li>● <b>Funding Opportunities:</b> Leverage new connections to access alternative sources of funding and support for Artlink's programmes and initiatives.</li><li>● <b>Inclusion and Diversity:</b> Encourage diversity in the network by connecting with organisations that represent different cultural backgrounds and geographic locations.</li><li>● <b>Continuous Learning:</b> Seek opportunities for professional development within the network, promoting a culture of continuous learning and improvement.</li><li>● <b>Participation in EU Projects:</b> Consider the potential EU projects outlined in Appendix 1 as opportunities for collaboration, funding, and increasing the organisation's profile.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Create a database of relevant groups and institutions to connect with both within and beyond Inishowen.</li><li>● Invite arts organisations in Donegal and the city of Derry~Londonerry to roundtable discussion about potential collaboration.</li></ul>

## Action 8: Sustainability and Inclusion

This action underscores the urgency of addressing both environmental and social challenges in our current era. In response to this, the new collective/consortium should consider environmental stewardship into all future projects, collaborating with environmental organisations and experts to implement strategies that protect local ecosystems and habitats. Additionally, the action advocates for a "just transition" that places social justice at the forefront of sustainable transformations, ensuring that all segments of society are considered and included. Echoing the views of artists Shubigi Rao and Leah Gordon, the new collective/consortium is urged to confront gatekeeping within the arts, promote the underrepresented, and celebrate alternative ways of working that provide an opportunity to move away from individualistic and competitive approaches.

Strategic Objective	Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Environmental Stewardship:</b> Incorporate environmentally responsible practices into all project planning and execution, minimising an art festival's ecological footprint.</li><li>● <b>Collaborative Partnerships:</b> Forge partnerships with environmental organisations and experts to ensure the implementation of best practices in environmental protection and sustainability.</li><li>● <b>Just Transition:</b> Emphasise a "just transition" that ensures the benefits and burdens of sustainability efforts are equitably shared across the community.</li><li>● <b>Inclusive Representation:</b> Strive to increase the visibility of underrepresented artists, challenging the norms and biases that pervade the art world.</li><li>● <b>Promoting Diversity:</b> Celebrate diversity and dissent, fostering a creative environment that values and supports different ways of working.</li><li>● <b>Challenging Gatekeeping:</b> Proactively challenge gatekeeping within the arts sector, advocating for more open, inclusive, and equitable access to resources and opportunities.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>An Taisce</b></li><li>● <b>Inishowen Rivers Trust</b></li><li>● <b>IDP</b></li><li>● <b>Inishowen Upland Farmers</b></li><li>● <b>Irish Environmental Network</b></li><li>● <b>Artist Run Alliance (Ireland)</b></li><li>● <b>Visual Artist Ireland</b></li></ul>

## Appendix 1: EU Funding Programmes

Title & Link	Opening Date	Deadline Date	Programme	Scope
<i>Previous (research of previous calls can help to identify partners and build a greater understanding of the types of projects funded)</i>				
<a href="#">Support to European Networks of Festivals Action 2</a>	19 September 2019	21 May 2020 17:00:00 Brussels time	Creative Europe Programme (CREA)	Within the field of promoting transnational circulation, one of the priorities of the MEDIA Sub-programme shall be to support audience development as a means of stimulating interest in and improving access to European audiovisual works, particularly through promotion, events, film literacy, and festivals.
<a href="#">Networks of European Festivals</a>	03 February 2022	07 April 2022 17:00:00 Brussels time	Creative Europe Programme (CREA)	The Networks of European festivals shall provide support to coordinated/collaborative activities among European audiovisual festivals aiming at increasing audiences' interest in non-national European audiovisual content and promoting its circulation and visibility.
<a href="#">Back to earth: bringing communities and citizens closer to soil</a>	17 January 2023	20 September 2023 17:00:00 Brussels time	Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON)	The cultural and creative sectors were particularly affected during the COVID-19 crisis, but they are considered to be “a significant driver of local development through job creation and income generation, and generate important spillovers to the wider economy” [4] as well as to the society.
<a href="#">Art</a>	14 September 2022	10 November 2022 17:00:00 Brussels time	European Parliament	The main objective of the call is to build and strengthen European citizenship among young people, raise awareness about how the EU works and the democratic role of the European Parliament, and empower them to become active citizens, encouraging their active involvement and participation in the European Elections 2024. The purpose of the Category 2 activities (Art & Cultural Programme) is to complement the activities organised under

				Categories 1 and 3 by offering activities that create cultural understanding and acceptance through art, overcoming linguistic barriers.
<i>Forthcoming</i>				
<a href="#">Ocean &amp; water and arts</a>	17 January 2023	20 September 2023 17:00:00 Brussels time	Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON)	Art and creative sectors can play an important role in the mobilisation of citizens, stakeholders, and civil society actors for the protection and restoration of the ocean and inland waters, their biodiversity, aesthetic, and cultural heritage. This action aims to bring together citizens, museums, aquaria, research institutions, engineers, architects, civil society, and artists to foster interdisciplinary experimentation and entrepreneurship, with close cooperation with the scientific community and philanthropists. Proposals are encouraged to build synergies with relevant activities supported under the Creative Europe programme and with other New European Bauhaus projects, notably those based in coastal and maritime regions.
<a href="#">Land use change and local / regional climate</a>	17 October 2023	22 February 2024 17:00:00 Brussels time	Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON)	Project implementation is expected to contribute to mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and to help achieve climate-neutrality in the land-use sector by 2035 (combining net removals from Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry with biogenic emissions from agriculture) and climate neutrality of all sectors by 2050. The conservation and enhancement of Earth's natural terrestrial carbon sinks such as soils and plants in forests, on farmed lands as well as peatlands and wetlands is crucial. The European Green Deal and EU sectoral policies such as the common agricultural policy give research and innovation (R&I) a significant role to play in supporting the design and implementation of policies that will ensure the achievement of the EU's climate objectives.
<a href="#">Arts and cultural awareness and expression in education and training</a>	04 October 2023	07 February 2024 17:00:00 Brussels time	Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON)	Arts in education and developing cultural awareness and expression - one of the key competences for lifelong learning - have value in themselves. They are also used to develop creativity, innovation, critical and design thinking, communication, collaboration and intercultural skills. Stronger evidence is needed to better understand and assess these impacts.



<a href="#">Cultural and creative industries for a sustainable climate transition</a>	04 October 2023	07 February 2024 17:00:00 Brussels time	Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON)	The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are an important source of growth and job creation in the European economy. Moreover, the CCIs play a key role in shaping culture, values and perceptions across the European Union and beyond. Thus, the role of the CCIs in achieving the European Union's climate transition objectives is crucial. At the same time, the CCIs are characterised by a large and diverse number of chiefly small and micro enterprises, as well as by hefty differences across geographical and sectorial divides. Large parts of the CCIs, thus, lack the capacity to take the necessary measures to adapt to and thrive under the climate transition, not to speak of driving this transition. Specific approaches are therefore needed to enable Europe's CCIs to develop their full potential to support a sustainable climate transition.
<a href="#">Leverage the digital transition for competitive European cultural and creative industries</a>	04 October 2023	07 February 2024 17:00:00 Brussels time	Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON)	This topic aims to explore and leverage the digital transition for the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in Europe. The expected outcomes include validated and refined measures to increase the use of innovative digital technologies by CCIs, with a focus on increased competitiveness and sustainability. The scope encompasses the diverse landscape of CCIs and the opportunities and threats brought by the ongoing digital transition. Lump sum funding is available for this topic.
<a href="#">Culture, the arts and cultural spaces for democratic participation and political expression, online and offline</a>	04 October 2023	07 February 2024 17:00:00 Brussels time	Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON)	This topic focuses on the role of culture, the arts, and cultural spaces in fostering democratic participation and political expression, both online and offline. The expected outcomes include recommendations on how to foster civic participation through the analysis of non-traditional democratic spaces, policy recommendations for ensuring positive impacts of digital spaces on democracy, and experimentation of solutions for democratic behaviour on social media. The scope encompasses the evaluation of alternative outlets for political expression, the impact of art and cultural productions as political mediators, and the potential of virtual spaces, including metaverses, for democratic engagement.

## Appendix 2: SDG Alignment

Artlink are committed to advancing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by continuously working to identify areas in which the organisation can contribute to a more sustainable world. These 17 goals, visualised below, provide a blueprint for global prosperity, ensuring a sustainable, equitable, and inclusive future for all.



As part of this feasibility study a mapping exercise was undertaken to reflect on the work of Artlink through the lens of the SDG's. The principle of leaving no one behind aligns with Artlink's commitment to **SDG 1: No Poverty**. In 2022, Artlink ensured fair compensation by paying 33 artists at the rates devised by Visual Artists Ireland and hiring 43 local people to deliver our programmes. By building capacity of the organisation they aim to generate new economic opportunities while upholding fair pay standards for all.

In the spirit of **SDG 2: Zero Hunger**, Artlink initiates and participates in activities that explore and preserve the food heritage of the community and beyond, such as the Seed It Union's Seed Saving for Exchange and the Food Sovereignty project. Artlink are dedicated to passing on these vital skills to event visitors, especially those engaging with the community garden.

Education is a pillar of Artlink's programming, linking to **SDG 4: Quality Education** through an annual series of adult education courses, thanks to the support of the Donegal Education and Training Board. Artlink actively promotes **SDG 5: Gender Equality** by partnering with the Donegal Women's Collective. Through this partnership they provide opportunities for women to learn through creativity for more inclusive communities.

Artlink uses a solar generator to charge devices in an effort to promote **SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy**. They also encourage staff and visiting artists to use our e-bike for commuting, aligning with **SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure**.

Artlink promotes **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** by encouraging carpooling and online meetings for long journeys. They are building their collection of electric bicycles for local travel.

These green initiatives further support **SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production** with Artlink researching companies packaging policies to ensure the use of recycled materials. Artlink has also joined the Green Arts Initiative, an interactive community of Irish arts & cultural organisations playing their role in dealing with the climate emergency. Artlink's art workshops have a focus on reusing and recycling materials in order to promote sustainability and to encourage the public to see the value of the usually discarded.

Artlink's commitment to **SDG 13: Climate Action** and **SDG 15: Life on Land** is demonstrated through their community garden project. They have planted two 'Tiny Forests' in Buncrana, run courses on biodiversity, and have a 5-floor bug hotel. They have also dedicated a space at Fort Dunree free of pesticides.

As a coastal community, Artlink are also conscious of protecting **SDG 14: Life Below Water**. They are implementing a long-term project on marine heritage and work with local experts to highlight the maritime legacy of the region. Finally, Artlink, as demonstrated throughout this document, are committed to building and sustaining long lasting relationships with organisations that share their values and commitment to more sustainable ways of being in the world. This represents an evolving commitment to **SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals** with the recognition that climate and biodiversity emergency requires collaboration and new forms of sharing explored throughout this feasibility study process. Moving forward, Artlink aims to use the SDG's as a guide for future programme design and evaluation.

# Appendices

1. Recommendations from Lewis Biggs
2. Notes from Shubigi Rao talk
3. Notes from Fram Kitagawa Talk
4. Notes from Leah Gordon Talk
5. Festival Data from David Teevan
6. Excerpt from *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (2007) by Lucy Lippard

## 1. Recommendations from Lewis Biggs

I learned a lot about the Donegal situation while I was with you, of course, and naturally only scratched the surface. But I can't resist adding a few thoughts that would not have been appropriate in my talk even if I had had them then!

These may all be well-worn thoughts (and possibly rejected) for you already, but me saying them again might just provide another perspective, despite or because of the fact that I know so little about the whole history and context. Forgive me I don't have time to research the field properly.

1. Why? It seems to me that to reduce your position to its simplest, it would be that you would like an event to bring visibility to the artists with whom you are in regular contact (possibly almost every artist resident in Donegal, and some further afield?) Artists crave visibility more than anything, and while it is a good in its own right, it's also the indispensable foundation for bringing income. The rest is strategy.

2. What event? The vision. I suspect that because of demographics, in order to fulfil the 'why' at all it must

- be an arts festival that includes all the arts, and
- include the city of Derry as well as Donegal. The Derry/Donegal Arts Festival? Cross border may seem complicated but I think it would open more avenues for funding, and is suggested by the geography and history despite the border.
- be aimed at residents, to get them to move around within their own region and recognise / celebrate the contribution of culture. It will of course also attract external visitors, but I think that should be secondary.

3. Positioning Artlink. A small organisation in a competitive field (for funds). You don't have the capacity to lead the initiative. And an attempt to assume a leadership role might make you unpopular. You should create a consortium of like-minded organisations (big or small) that see the benefit of working together for the sake of promotion.

4. Leadership. The consortium should identify someone to lead the process. Needed for politics and media. This might be a cultural or business person, or celebrity, but not a politician and preferably someone not too closely identified with any member of the consortium. It would be an unpaid job done for love of culture.

5. Festival Company. The leader would need a secretariat - a company with a board of unpaid non-exec directors, who should also be unattached to the organisations that deliver the programme. Preferably the company would have no employees, and its functions would be executed by staff seconded to the Festival company by the consortium members. All experience gained in the process would be retained by consortium staff members.

6. The Festival company would have two functions only: to raise funds, and to be an advocacy / marketing umbrella for the programmes of the consortium. It would not get involved in programming. The funds raised by the company would likely be directed mainly to marketing, but hopefully some would also flow through to the consortium organisations.

7. The Consortium would create its own Festival steering group to agree on a theme / title for that year's festival, and for planning and communicating to maximise synergies between programmes / audiences / dates. The inclusion of just two or three 'celebrity artists' from different art forms should be enough to add sparkle to the whole Festival.

8. The Festival should be spring or autumn but not summer. For volunteer support and an audience, you need the university students and schools. The economic argument is to expand the summer movement of visitors into the quieter seasons. The cultural argument is that arts / cultural professionals and tourists travel in spring and autumn but take their holidays in the summer.

9. Maybe there are some institutional legacies from Derry's year as Ecoc that might be appropriate for repurposing?

## 2. Shubigi Rao's Insights and Challenges at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale

Shubigi Rao's talk ( a hybrid event hosted at ATU Letterkenny) on 27th April shed light on her diverse artistic practice and her experiences as the curator of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which took place from December 2022 to April 2023. Shubigi's work spans various disciplines, including archaeology, neuroscience, libraries, archives, histories, literature, violence, ecology, and natural history. As the biennale's curator, she navigated the challenges of organising an international art exhibition in Kochi, a city known for its cultural pluralism and lack of existing infrastructure. In this essay, we will explore the key insights and challenges presented by Shubigi Rao during her talk.

Artistic Exploration and Curatorial Vision:

Shubigi Rao is renowned for her complex and layered installations, which often feature tongue-in-cheek elements. Notably, she has created an archaeological archive of garbage and written how-to manuals for building a nation from scratch. These works reflect her fascination with various subjects, including archaeology, neuroscience, literature, and violence. Her diverse interests inform her approach as a curator, emphasising the need for inclusivity and the foregrounding of underrepresented artists and practices.

### **The Kochi-Muziris Biennale:**

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale emerged as a government initiative when the Department of Cultural Affairs of the Government of Kerala sought assistance from artists Riyas Komu and Bose Krishnamachari to establish an international art platform in India. Unlike established biennales, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale faced challenges due to the lack of infrastructure and institutional support. Nonetheless, the event grew to become the largest festival in the Asian subcontinent, featuring not only visual art but also performances, theatre, and film.

### **Kochi: A Unique Cultural Landscape:**

Kochi stands out among Indian cities for its pre-colonial traditions of cultural pluralism. Situated on the Malabar Coast of the Arabian Sea, Kochi has a rich history of colonisation, having been colonised multiple times. This history has resulted in a polyglot of languages and a vibrant artistic community. Notably, Kochi has no main museum, and the biennale operates without a dedicated physical space. Instead, precious artworks are displayed in unconventional settings, challenging the traditional notions of the museum.

### **The Importance of Local Engagement:**

One of the significant aspects of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale is its strong local ownership and support from the community. The event's success and longevity can be attributed to the investment and involvement of the local community. It acts as a magnet, attracting a large audience from the region and beyond. The biennale's four-month run contributes to its significant impact, making it a hub for artistic engagement and discourse.

### **Challenging the Art Establishment:**

Shubigi Rao's talk emphasises the need to challenge and dismantle gatekeeping within the art world. She advocates for foregrounding the underrepresented, addressing imbalances, and creating visibility for artists who are often ignored or marginalised. Dissent, contradiction, and different ways of working are celebrated, providing an opportunity to move away from individualistic and competitive approaches. Shubigi sought out collectives and collaboration as a means to foster inclusivity and combat the nepotistic tendencies of the art world.

### **Addressing Socio Political Issues:**

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale serves as a platform to engage with pressing sociopolitical issues. Artists at the biennale tackle subjects such as femicide, waste generation, and the misuse of art for money laundering. By addressing these issues, the biennale generates awareness and prompts critical discussions within the artistic community and the wider public.

### **Creating Change and Promoting Inclusivity:**

Shubigi Rao emphasises the importance of reclamation and creating systems that promote inclusivity. Tokenism is to be avoided, and genuine efforts to recognize the work of others must be implemented. The biennale's impact extends beyond the art world, as it helps generate sophistication among the local audience and challenges the notion that contemporary art is only for a select few. Additionally, the notes highlight the need to curate our own information feeds, fostering a diverse range of perspectives and combating apathy.

#### **Conclusion:**

Shubigi Rao's talk during the Kochi-Muziris Biennale provides valuable insights into her artistic practice and the challenges of curating an international art exhibition in a city with limited infrastructure. The biennale's success is a result of strong local engagement, inclusivity, and a commitment to addressing socio political issues. Shubigi's emphasis on foregrounding underrepresented artists and challenging the art establishment serves as a call to action for the global art community. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale stands as a testament to the power of collective engagement, fostering change, and promoting inclusivity within the realm of contemporary art.

### **3. Echigo-Tsumari Triennale: Transforming Rural Japan Through Art**

In the past two decades, Japan has witnessed a surge of ambitious art festivals that aim to address the numerous challenges the country faces, ranging from socio-economic to ecological issues. At the forefront of this uniquely creative social movement is the groundbreaking Echigo-Tsumari Triennale. As a keynote speaker, Fram Kitagawa, the visionary behind this transformative festival, sheds light on its significance and impact. Chaired by Keith Whittle, this essay explores the evolution of the festival, its connection with the local community, and the prospects for its future.

#### **Revitalising a Remote Region**

Echigo-Tsumari is an area nestled in the remote landscapes of Japan, located south of Niigata prefecture. "Tsumari" refers to the region's remoteness, characterised by heavy snowfall and sparse population. Kitagawa embarked on his life's work in 1996 when he initiated the preparations for the Echigo-Tsumari Triennale. The location itself poses numerous challenges, with its coastal proximity subject to harsh winds and heavy rainfall. Furthermore, the region has a rich historical background, once densely populated and attracting migrants from other countries. However, as Japan modernised, people gravitated towards industrial centres, resulting in a decline in the region's population.

#### **Reconnecting with Nature and Agriculture**

The central idea behind the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field is the notion that "Humans are a part of Nature." Kitagawa identified a significant problem in the disconnect between the central government and the rural communities' relationship with the natural environment. The festival aimed to reinvigorate the depopulated area by leveraging art as a means to restore pride and reconnect people with nature. Artists from around the world were invited to develop artworks in the area, employing local resources and collaborating with the community.

#### **Art Discovering Local Resources**



The festival's success lies in its ability to utilise existing elements to create new values. Artists have ingeniously incorporated local resources into their creations, showcasing the unique cultural heritage of the region. For instance, MAD Architects from China worked with a dismantled tunnel, making it visible for people to appreciate its beauty. Emila Kvavcof's artwork showcased the labour involved in maintaining a rice paddy, highlighting the importance of agriculture. Such collaborations transcended regional boundaries, generations, and professions, fostering a deep sense of community.

### **Transforming Abandoned Spaces**

One remarkable aspect of the Echigo-Tsumari Triennale is its transformation of abandoned spaces into hubs of artistic expression. Old schoolhouses, once forgotten, became canvases for artists like Christian Boltanski. These spaces were renovated and revitalised, attracting visitors and creating economic opportunities for the locals. Additionally, some abandoned rice paddies were repurposed, and local artisans collaborated with visiting artists, sharing their skills and knowledge.

### **Impacts and Challenges**

The festival has garnered widespread support, thanks to the dedication of volunteer supporters, with approximately 8,000 international volunteers involved. While art cannot single-handedly fix all the world's problems, it offers solutions by fostering a deep connection between people, nature, and cultural heritage. However, maintaining the festival's artefacts and installations in the face of heavy snowfall remains a challenge. The organisers rely on donations, sponsorship, and funding schemes to develop and preserve the artworks.

### **The Future of Art Festivals**

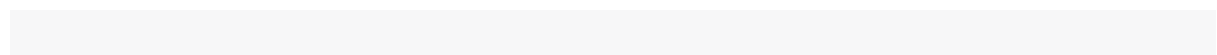
When contemplating the future of art festivals, Kitagawa acknowledges the uncertainty of their durability but asserts that as long as human beings reside in a place, art festivals remain possible. Sustainability and adaptability are key considerations, ensuring that festivals evolve with changing times while remaining rooted in their communities.

### **Lessons for Artlink in Starting a Festival**

Kitagawa offers valuable advice to Artlink for starting a festival. Firstly, he emphasises the importance of bridging the gap between rural communities and contemporary art. Engaging the locals and assuring them of the benefits and enriching experiences that art can bring to their native land is crucial. Secondly, introducing something new and unfamiliar to the local population ignites their curiosity and motivation, sparking a special connection and a desire for growth.

### **Conclusion**

The Echigo-Tsumari Triennale stands as a testament to the transformative power of art in revitalising rural areas and reconnecting communities with their cultural heritage. Fram Kitagawa's visionary approach, combined with collaborations between artists and the local populace, has brought about a remarkable renaissance in the Echigo-Tsumari region. As Japan continues to face social and ecological challenges, festivals like this offer a blueprint for utilising art as a means to inspire change, foster community, and celebrate the natural world.



## 4. Ghetto Biennale: Embracing Uncomfortable Entanglements

In December 2009, the Ghetto Biennale made its debut in the Grand Rue area of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Conceived by Atis Rezistans, the Sculptors of Grand Rue, this unique event aimed to bring together artists from diverse backgrounds, including fine artists, filmmakers, musicians, writers, and academics. The central question driving the Biennale was, "What happens when first-world art rubs up against third-world art? Does it bleed?" This question, inspired by a quote from Gloria Anzaldúa, initiated a fascinating exploration of new practices, processes, and relationships that emerged from often uncomfortable entanglements. In this essay, we will delve into the contradictions and challenges faced by the Ghetto Biennale, its response to Haiti's political crisis and insecurity, and how it fosters meaningful discussions about sameness, difference, and de-centered art in a world still grappling with ghettoization.

### **The Birth of Ghetto Biennale:**

Leah Gordon, a curator/artist hailing from the post-punk era, recognized the significance of democratising access to the arts, transcending barriers of ability and class. The fusion of "Ghetto" and "Biennale" created a socio-economic concept rather than merely a racial one, allowing for unconventional funding from philanthropists. Freed from the constraints of formal funding application criteria, the Ghetto Biennale offered a platform for artists to engage in a process-driven approach without the expectation of financial compensation.

### **Ghetto Biennale: The Early Stages:**

During its inception, the Ghetto Biennale had no specific theme, opting for an open call and a website to invite participants. It ran on a modest budget of \$10,000 and lasted for three days. Artists were well aware they wouldn't receive compensation for travel, accommodation, materials, or their time. The event aimed to be culturally relevant to the neighbourhood, sparking local responses, and challenging conventional power dynamics.

### **Confronting Inequalities:**

Through "Ghetto Telly," a reversal of the gaze, the Ghetto Biennale exposed inequalities exacerbated by the earthquake and scrutinised the relationships with aid agencies, revealing how collaboration could sometimes hide paternalistic attitudes. The biennale addressed the exoticism of poverty, opting for professional documentation instead of allowing photography by visitors. To expand its audience, the event initiated processions and parades, reaching out to diverse demographics, fostering new meetings of minds.

### **Growth and Expansion:**

With time, the Ghetto Biennale evolved, attracting visiting artists who brought in financial support. They had to reside within the neighbourhood and refrain from using resources from middle-class areas, emphasising the vernacular and local ways of organising. Initially, Haitian artists were not

invited through the open call, but by the fourth biennale, they were included, breaking away from conventional biennale norms.

### **Transcending Boundaries and Challenges:**

The Ghetto Biennale confronted the limitations of hosting a traditional academic conference, opting for a roundtable format that allowed for testimony and open discussions. It provided a platform for small group discussions with notetakers, encouraging an inclusive, participatory approach to exchange ideas and experiences.

### **Documenta 15 and Beyond:**

Invited to Documenta 15, the Ghetto Biennale faced challenges due to visa restrictions, preventing many Haitian artists from travelling. Despite this, the exposure at Documenta led to momentum and recognition. However, Haiti is currently gripped by vicious gangs who dominate daily life. Armed gangs control a majority of the capital city, Port-au-Prince making it unsafe to continue to organise the biennale in the Grand Rue area of the city. The organisers are currently planning to move the event to another town at least in the short term.

### **Conclusion:**

The Ghetto Biennale successfully embraces the entanglement of diverse artistic expressions and backgrounds, challenging established power structures and hierarchies. By fostering discussions on sameness, difference, and de-centered art, it highlights the need for inclusivity and accessibility within the art world. The event's evolution shows a commitment to cultural relevance and local forms of resistance while critically engaging with the concept of the "ghetto." Through the Ghetto Biennale, artists and participants worked together to free the neighbourhood through art, creating a space for meaningful engagement, understanding, and transformation.

## 5. David Teevan: Festival Data

### What is a festival?

*"Formal periods or programs of pleasurable activities, entertainment, or events having a festive character and publicly celebrating some concept, happening or fact"*

(Janiskee 1980: 97)



*"[Arts] Festivals are platforms for people to meet and for artists to present their work."*

(Kathrin Deventer, Director of European Festival Association 2016)

*"Festival is a passport to the idea that you can belong inside space and time."*

(Jude Kelly, Keynote Speaker, Change Makers Conference 2020)

*"A clustering of events in a defined timeframe and geographic area that bring people together, offering the possibility of a collective, shared experience."*

(Teevan, 2022)

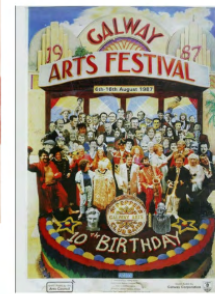
*"Festivals are not homogenous in terms of their rationales, contexts, or relationship to place and people."*

(Maughan & Jordan, 2015, p. 5)

## Arts Festivals in Ireland



Wexford Festival Opera  
Est. 1951



Galway Arts Festival Est. 1977



Ballydehob Jazz Festival. Est. 2007



Boyne Music Festival. Est. 2013

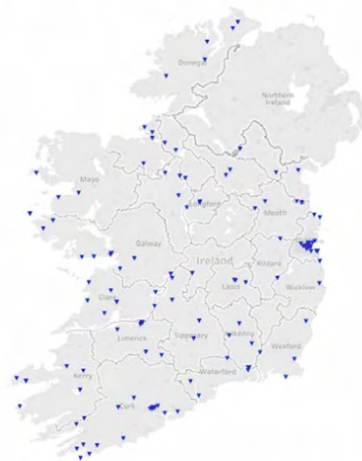
Year	# of festivals funded	Reference
1977	12	The Arts Council Annual Report, 1978
1999	76	The Arts Council Annual Report, 2000
2018	173	The Arts Council Report, 2019

## Arts Council arts festival's in Ireland

The Arts Council/  
An Chomhairle Ealaíon

- annual support 8 multi-disciplinary festivals and 18 single artform festivals across Ireland.
- provides funding support to over 150 small festivals spread across every county and every artform
- The total strategic funding investment to the arts festival ecology in 2017 was €5.95 million

Figures provided relate to 2017  
<http://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Festivals/Overview/>



The geographic spread of festivals funded by the Arts Council in 2017

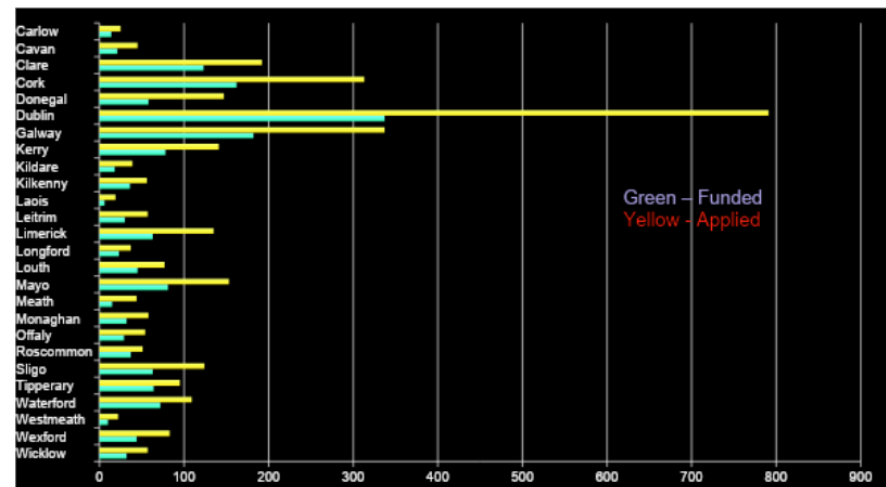
## Geographical Spread

10 Years (2005 – 2015) Festival & Events Award Scheme

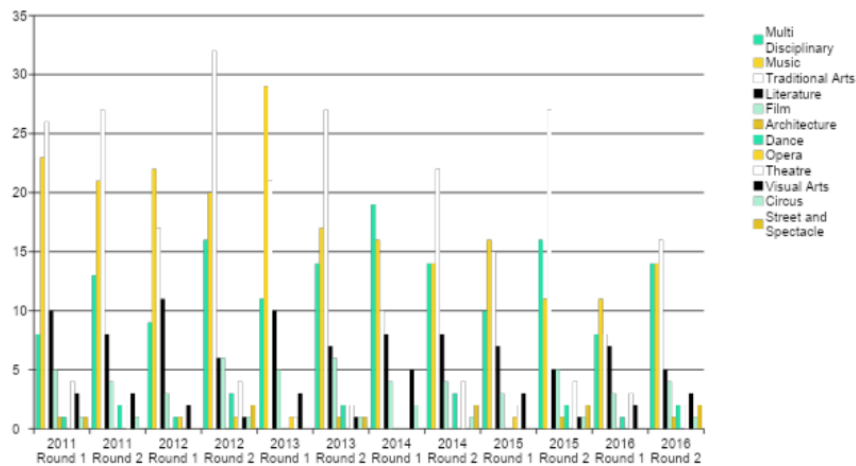
€8,969,193 invested

3,339 festivals applied

1,679 festivals funded



## Artform Spread



## Arts Council Funded festivals in Donegal 2022

Inishowen Traditional Music Project – April - Trad

Cup of the Tae Festival – May - Trad

Ceol na gCruach – May - Trad

Féile Róise Rua – May - Trad

Swell Fest – July - MDA

Earagail Arts Festival – July - MDA

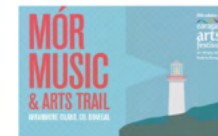
Annual Donegal Fiddle Summer School – July - Trad

Carnstock Festival – Aug - MDA

Annual Glenties Fiddlers Weekend – Oct - Trad

Seamus Grant Festival – Oct - Trad

Scoil Gheimhridh Ghaath Dobhair - Dec - Trad





# Arts Council funded Visual Arts Festivals

Kilkenny Ink Festival - Kilkenny

Listowel Visual Arts Festival – Listowel, Co Kerry

PhotoIreland Festival - Dublin

The Rathdrum International Cartoon Festival – Rathdrum, Co Wicklow

Welcome to the Neighbourhood – Askeeton, Co Limerick

Dublin Live Art Festival 2017 - Dublin

39th EVA International - Limerick

TULCA Festival of Visual Arts - Galway

Lay Of The Land, Kerry, Donegal - West Cork

In-Vision: The Dublin Festival of Video Art and Creative Film \_ Dublin





# THE LURE OF THE LOCAL

Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society

LUCY R. LIPPARD

SPECIFIC enough to engage people on the level of their own lived experiences, to say something about the place as it is or was or could be.

COLLABORATIVE at least to the extent of seeking information, advice and feedback from the community in which the work will be placed.

GENEROUS AND OPEN-MINDED enough to be accessible to a wide variety of people from different classes and cultures, and to different interpretations and tastes. (Titles and captions help a lot here; it seems like pure snobbery—even if unintended—to withhold from the general public the kind of vital information that might be accessible to the cognoscenti.)

APPEALING enough either visually or emotionally to catch the eye and be memorable.

SIMPLE AND FAMILIAR enough, at least on the surface, not to confuse or repel potential viewer-participants.

LAYERED, COMPLEX AND UNFAMILIAR enough to hold people's attention once they've been attracted, to make them wonder, and to offer ever deeper experiences and references to those who hang in.

EVOCATIVE enough to make people recall related moments, places, and emotions in their own lives.

PROVOCATIVE AND CRITICAL enough to make people think about issues beyond the scope of the work, to call into question superficial assumptions about the place, its history, and its use.

Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers.

— WALTER BENJAMIN

"A map of the world without Utopia is not worth glancing at"  
Oscar Wilde

♡ ♡  
'When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect'  
Aldo Leopold

♡ ♡  
'the culture of any nation is unintentionally reflected in its ordinary vernacular landscape'  
Pierce Lewis

## START

In a rural landscape the best place to begin to think about land use and abuse might be where the gardens, plants, yards, gates, fields, corrals, windmills, ponds, out buildings and for sale signs are located and why?