

## REGIONS, REGIONALITY AND REGIONALIZATION IN IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC: THE ROLE OF COMHALTAS CEOLTÓIRÍ ÉIREANN

*By Daithí Kearney*

### Introduction

There is a paradox in the study of regions in Irish traditional music which is relevant to CCÉ. The organization is critiqued for creating a context in which regions are subsumed within a national or canonical tradition and yet CCÉ also promotes regional traditions and stories in various ways. Previous academic studies concerning CCÉ have focused on the structures of the organisation (Henry, 1989) and debates concerning 'old' and 'new' in Irish traditional music (Henry, 1989; Fleming, 2004). Larson Sky (1997) has considered the impact of competition on regional styles and her work is complemented through the use of different methodologies in this paper. Furthermore, although Fleming (2004: 236) acknowledges a tension between local and national entities of the organisation, within this discourse, there is a limited consideration of the regional structures and impact of the organisation. This paper briefly examines the history and ideology of CCÉ, focusing on three aspects: the role of competitions and festivals (*Fleadhanna Cheoil*) in the development of regional identities in Irish traditional music; the promotion of local and regional identities through the summer entertainment programme (*Seisiún*); and an analysis of the diffusion of infrastructural projects in recent years in which further consolidate regional divisions and identities in Irish traditional music (*Athnuachan*).

I have been a member of CCÉ for most of my life, gaining experiences that shape my understanding of the organisation and the perspective presented in this paper. At a young age I joined the local branch of CCÉ, Craobh Trá Lí, under the guidance of Máire Bean Uí Ghríofa, whose father, Salbheastar MacConnmhaigh, was a former president of CCÉ. With them I performed and competed regularly, including for *Seisiún* and in *Fleadhanna Cheoil*, thus experiencing different aspects of the organisation's activities including local performance and competitive environments. The *Seisiún* and other performances presented by Craobh Trá Lí CCÉ often had a local theme and though we learned a very generic repertoire from the Irish traditional music canon, on occasion the local importance of some tunes was highlighted to us.

I have also taught for a number of branches of CCÉ around the country and at *Scoil Éigse*, the master classes that precede *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*. In my teaching, I have often explored local repertoires but have also encountered a desire amongst

teachers and students to learn from a limited canon, often influenced by the perception of 'good competition tunes' and recent commercial releases by prominent bands and artists. I regularly adjudicate competitions for CCÉ and encourage my students to participate, acknowledging the benefits and potential negative impact for the student. As well as the competition space, I engage with other aspects of *Fleadhanna Cheoil* including informal music making at sessions and formal performances by both voluntary and professional groups that enhance the musical experience.

I have produced *Seisiún* performances and toured with groups under the banner of CCÉ, thus engaging with the politics of representation and audience expectation, often influenced by the tourist gaze (Urry, 1995; Williams, 1998). I have been part of local committees and served on a County Board. These accomplishments and experiences have provided both positive and negative insights into the activities, role and impact of CCÉ on Irish traditional music in relation to music education, competition and (re)presentation and play an integral role in the development of this paper.

### **Regions in Irish Traditional Music**

The existing concept of regions in Irish traditional music is based on an understanding of varying musical style within a musical tradition, though I suggest a broader understanding of regional identity is required to fully understand regionality and regionalisation in Irish traditional music (Kearney, 2010). The concept of regional musical style has been dominated by a select number of musicians, many of whom gained prominence in the early days of recording and radio transmission (Ó Riada, 1962, 1982; Keegan, 1997; Vallely, 1999b). The common association of Donegal, Sligo and Sliabh Luachra with John Doherty (d. 1980), Michael Coleman (1891-1946) and Pádraig O'Keeffe (1887-1963) respectively is an oversimplification of regional diversity in Irish traditional music. Nevertheless, the recordings of these musicians have become a reference point for those seeking to define regional style based on historical sources.

The existing discourse on regional styles also focuses on a small number of regions, primarily along the west coast, a pattern that is influenced by the work of Seán Ó Riada (1931-71), who was the first person to examine regional distinctiveness in Irish traditional music. In a radio series entitled *Our Musical Heritage* (1962) he focused on a small number of regions in the instrumental music and *sean-nós* singing traditions. To the fore, in the context of the instrumental tradition, were Sligo, Clare and West Limerick/North Kerry. While Ó Riada contributed to a greater understanding of regional difference, his radio series was somewhat limited and has been critiqued as 'unreliable' (Breathnach, 1982, cited in Taylor, 2007). Though

Sliabh Luachra was not one of the regions covered by Ó Riada, it later became one of the most prominent regional identities in Irish traditional music.

Following on from the work of Ó Riada, attention has been paid to County Roscommon (Various Performers, 2004) and East Galway (Cummins, 1999; Collins, forthcoming). A number of studies have considered Irish traditional music in the north and border areas. Particularly noteworthy are those on the Oriel region (Ní Uallacháin, 2003) and Fermanagh (Maguire, 2003; Vallely, 2004). In addition, the Counties Antrim and Derry Fiddlers Association has been active since 1943, constituted in 1953 (<http://antrimandderryfiddlers.com>). In recent years, Cavan has been the focus of much activity and attention and a good example of the process of regionalisation, influenced in no small part by CCÉ.

### **Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann**

CCÉ is the largest organisation promoting Irish traditional music. Its foundation in 1951 was against a backdrop of declining interest and participation in the music and a poor public profile. The organisation set about creating a positive context for participation in Irish traditional music, song and dance with two distinct but related elements at its core: education and competition. Seven aims and objectives are now outlined by the organisation:

1. To promote Irish Traditional Music in all its forms;
2. To restore the playing of the Harp and Uilleann Pipes in the National life of Ireland;
3. To promote Irish Traditional Dancing;
4. To promote and foster traditional singing in both Irish and English
5. To foster and promote the Irish language at all times;
6. To create a closer bond among all lovers of Irish music;
7. To co-operate with all bodies working for the restoration of Irish Culture;
8. To establish Branches throughout the country and abroad to achieve the foregoing aims and objects.

(Source: CCÉ, 2008)

As well as promoting the artforms of Irish traditional music, song and dance, CCÉ also developed an awareness of national identity and sought to create a sense of community amongst Irish traditional music aficionados. There are specific references here to the harp, uilleann pipes and Irish language in this regard. Moreover, despite the apparent success and popularity of the traditional arts at present, an attitude towards Irish culture as something that is to be 'restored' is reflected in the language of these goals. Finally, CCÉ seeks to establish branches throughout the country and abroad to achieve its aims and objectives. In many elements of these aims and objectives, CCÉ may be considered successful. The present popularity of Irish traditional music owes much to the work of the

organisation and its membership. Many of the most prominent Irish traditional musicians have achieved awards in competitions organised by CCÉ.

CCÉ is organised in a hierarchical order. At the head is Labhrás Ó Murchú, Ard Stiurtheoir or Director General who chairs the Ard Comhairle or Central Executive Council. Ó Murchú's position is, somewhat controversially, a lifetime appointment (Vallely, 1999a). There are a number of provincial committees, representing not only to the four Irish provinces but also regions elsewhere including North America and Britain, the latter a term that refers to the island of England, Scotland and Wales but not Northern Ireland. The next level of organization is the county board that, on the island of Ireland, operates by and large within the county boundaries of the thirty-two counties. At a local level, the organisation is made up of branches. Though often associated with or linked to parish identities, in many cases, the branch can draw on a larger area and some branches compete for students and membership from the same area.

The sheer size of the organisation adds to its complexity and the aspects addressed in this paper do not address the organisation in its totality. In 2007, CCÉ reports a membership of approximately 36,000 members in 400 branches spread across fifteen countries on four continents (CCÉ, 2007). Thus, the organisation may be viewed as a global organisation bound up in the processes of globalisation.

CCÉ cannot be studied independently of other narratives of Irish traditional music. Many members of CCÉ participate in activities as children and teenagers or as parents. Many of the prominent performers of Irish traditional music today, commercial and otherwise, have participated in competitions at various levels, benefitted from teaching and availed of the networking opportunities created by the organisation. In many instances the influence of CCÉ, which in itself can vary from place to place, is often evident in their approach to and presentation of Irish traditional music.

Despite the success of CCÉ over the past 60 years, it has faced much criticism related to personalities, politics and expenditure. Decisions made by the organisation have been influenced by nationalist and republican agendas, most notably when the 1971 Fleadh Cheoil was cancelled due to the introduction of internment in the North. In addition, Labhrás Ó Murchú is a Senator and member of the Fianna Fáil political party. Despite these connections, the *Bunreacht* states that CCÉ is non-political and non-denominational. The way in which the organisation has been funded has also been questioned, particularly due to strained relationships between CCÉ and the Arts Council of Ireland and the development of the *Clasach* centre in north County Dublin (Hynes and O'Shea, 2009). Another critique has related to the acknowledgement by CCÉ of regional variation in terms of musical style and the impact of the organisation's activities on the geographically delineated

soundscape of Irish traditional music. Often unintentionally, the significance of the competitions and the decisions of adjudicators constructed an impression of the organisation as favouring particular regional styles (Henry, 1989, McNamee, 1991; Larson Sky, 1997; Fleming, 2004; Kelly, 2005; Long, 2005). In many of its activities, CCÉ constructs and intertwines with regional narratives and informs a reimagination of the geography of Irish traditional music.

CCÉ is aware of its impact on the geography of and social contexts for Irish traditional music. The Bunreacht states:

Through publications, recordings, sessions, concerts, céilithe and other educational recreational projects, the movement continues to mould our music, song, dance and language as integral and potent components of community life (CCÉ, 2008).

As well as the activities outlined in this article, CCÉ has also been involved in radio programmes and published material. The magazine *Treoir* was first published in 1968 and it presents a variety of articles on the organisation itself as well as various aspects of Irish culture and identity. It is distributed through the branches to members. Other publications include *Foinn Seisiún* (Prior, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c), which creates a canonical repertoire of tunes for learners wishing to join sessions, as well as the work of David Lyth (1981; 1996) on bowing styles in Irish traditional music that reference regional traditions. Thus CCÉ are, at once, involved in the process of cultural homogenisation and regionalisation.

### **Regionalisation and change in Irish traditional music**

Irish traditional music has undergone great change over the centuries. Wallis and Malm (1984) outline five results of the process of musical change, which may be investigated in the context of regionalisation in Irish traditional music, as highlighted by Cooke (1997) and presented here in Table 1.

**Table 1 Five results of the processes of musical change (Cooke, 1997: 21).**

1. Change in the context of performance – from local, participatory (and often ritual situations) to stage shows. Such change produces a performer-audience split with the audience becoming a predominantly listening group.
2. The use of a few selected artists
3. Competitions for selection leading to the formation of supergroups
4. An increase in orchestral diversity
5. More careful musical organisation and greater discipline with a consequent reduction in spontaneity. In this respect we see a decrease in number of stylistic variations and the appearance of ‘arrangements’

These processes are not necessarily chronological and can provide a structure through which CCÉ may be examined. Some instances of change that have occurred through the twentieth century that are not related to the activities of CCÉ should also be considered.

Irish traditional music was conventionally a home based activity. People would visit houses and share in the entertainment. The 1935 Public Dance Halls Act changed this context for participation in Irish traditional music activity and led to the development of larger groups of musicians playing in halls for groups of dancers. Around the same time and later in many places, sessions in public houses became the norm. These seemingly informal gatherings of musicians may be divided between the participatory sessions and performative sessions, the latter leading the way to more developed stage shows. In some instances, CCÉ *Seisiún* groups have aspired to develop performances that are at once stage shows and participatory events, in contrast with the sharp distinction and wide performer audience gap create by *Riverdance* and other such theatrical stage shows.

In an article considering what he calls threats to Irish traditional music, Cooke states: "There is another force for change that paradoxically grows out of the feeling that one should defend and maintain a tradition by fostering it - especially by establishing formal teaching and perhaps also instituting competitions" (1997: 17). CCÉ held its first competitions in 1951 and today nearly two thousand musicians, singers and dancers compete at *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*. The principal activity of many branches is the teaching of younger members. The education programme is reinforced by the *Teastas I dTeagasc Ceolta Tíre* or Diploma course for teachers run by CCÉ and *Scoil Éigse*, a summer school for musicians that precedes *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*. These competitions and educational programmes set standards and contribute to the homogenisation of Irish traditional music culture.

### **Fleadhanna Cheoil and regional identity**

One of the most significant impacts of CCÉ on Irish traditional music was the development of competitions. *Fleadhanna Cheoil* take place in every county and region and attract large numbers of musicians, singers and dancers. *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*, hereinafter the *Fleadh*, is the culmination of these qualifying rounds and features competitors from all around the world. As Fleming notes:

Competitions contributed to the success of the *Fleadhs* in part because they encouraged musicians to gather at the festivals, where they could compete, see others compete, socialize, and share music by playing in sessions. Competitions also created a carnival atmosphere that attracted non-musicians and especially children; they lent national prestige to traditional music by establishing a concrete valuation

system and they raised the technical standards of music (Fleming, 2004: 234).

The Fleadh continues to be a significant festival event and while many agree that the competitions have contributed to improvements in standard, others provide alternative critiques of the competition and adjudication processes (Fleming, 2004). The competitions are seen by some to be a 'necessary evil', helping to raise the standard of musicianship but placing an emphasis on particular aspects of the tradition. Henry states: "Critics say that CCE is trying to standardize the music by limiting the competition to genres supposedly played all over Ireland - the jig, reel, hornpipe and slow air, and that certain genres are not admitted in competitions [...] This results in a feeling of regional discrimination" (1989: 91). In many instances, certain styles of playing are deemed to be or perceived to be inferior, based on the decisions of adjudicators. Fiddle player and radio producer Paddy Glackin has commented:

Competitions, in some ways, can bring on a certain standard; but what standard? How often have we heard very good regional players going up in competition and not getting a look-in, getting adjudicated by people who know nothing about it; and as a result, I believe that competitions in many ways have contributed to the demise of regional styles of playing in some cases. I mean, how can you adjudicate between people like Denis Murphy and John Doherty, two wonderful players from different parts of the country with their own way of expressing music? How any one individual man can get up and say that this particular man is better than the other! (in McNamee, 1991: 36).

There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest a perception of regional bias in competition. Prominent button accordion players Jackie Daly and Paudie O'Connor have both spoken of a sense of regional discrimination when reflecting on their own experiences (Long, 2005; O'Connor in Kelly, 2005). Reflecting on the evolution of his own playing style, Jackie Daly notes:

I always loved what was called the 'depress and draw' style of playing from Sliabh Luachra, Comhaltas weren't into it; they were more interested in what was called the 'B & C' style, so I was pulled in two directions, and I couldn't enter competitions with my own style. I had to learn the 'B & C' style. I won the all-Ireland in 1974, and straight after that I packed it up and went back to my own style of playing. It's one that suits slides and polkas a lot better, because it makes the music bouncier (quoted in Long 2005).

A similar attitude and sense of injustice and local identity is expressed by another box player, Paudie O'Connor:

When I was playing in Fleadhs, I found myself changing my style just to suit competition. I didn't really see why I had to play in a Tipperary, or an east Galway or whatever style just to suit competition. If I played Kerry music most of the people adjudicating wouldn't be interested in it. Now I love all the other music but I couldn't see why me from Kerry would have to play music from another part of the country. I think it has had a big impact on the local music down here in so far as most younger musicians these days can't play a lot of their own local music, the pressure is on them to play non-local music if they want to compete in competition. It demeans and downgrades the local music in their minds. I think it has definitely led to the music around Kerry and Cork not developing as it should over the last 15 to 20 years (quoted in Kelly, 2005: 48).

The importance placed on competition and the power of CCÉ over the Irish traditional music community is an important factor in the development of the tradition. However, the strength of the organisation varies from place to place. An analysis of the branch network of CCÉ highlights regional variation in the number of branches (Fig. 1). A large number of branches exist in counties Cork and Kerry and in many counties in the west but there are fewer branches in the east of the country. It should be noted that the establishment of local branches is a ground-up phenomenon based on local activity and not a structure that is imposed by the organisation. In some instances the organisation may encourage or help a branch in a particular area but there is considerable variance in the distribution of branches throughout the country.

The pattern is similar to the understanding of regional styles in Irish traditional music presented by Ó Riada. The pattern is further reinforced by the location of *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* (Fig. 2). The Fleadh has taken place most often in Listowel, in North Kerry and, though the town was considered of appropriate size in the past, it would now have difficulty providing adequate facilities and infrastructure due to the significant growth of the *Fleadh*. Significantly the *Fleadh* has never been held north of the border, though it has taken place quite regularly in the border counties of Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan. The city of Derry-Londonderry, designated UK City of Culture for 2013, will also host the Fleadh during that year. The decision to award the Fleadh to Derry led to much debate within the organisation, which reached a wider audience through various press reports. At the heart of these debates are questions related to politics, identity and the social atmosphere in the north of Ireland.



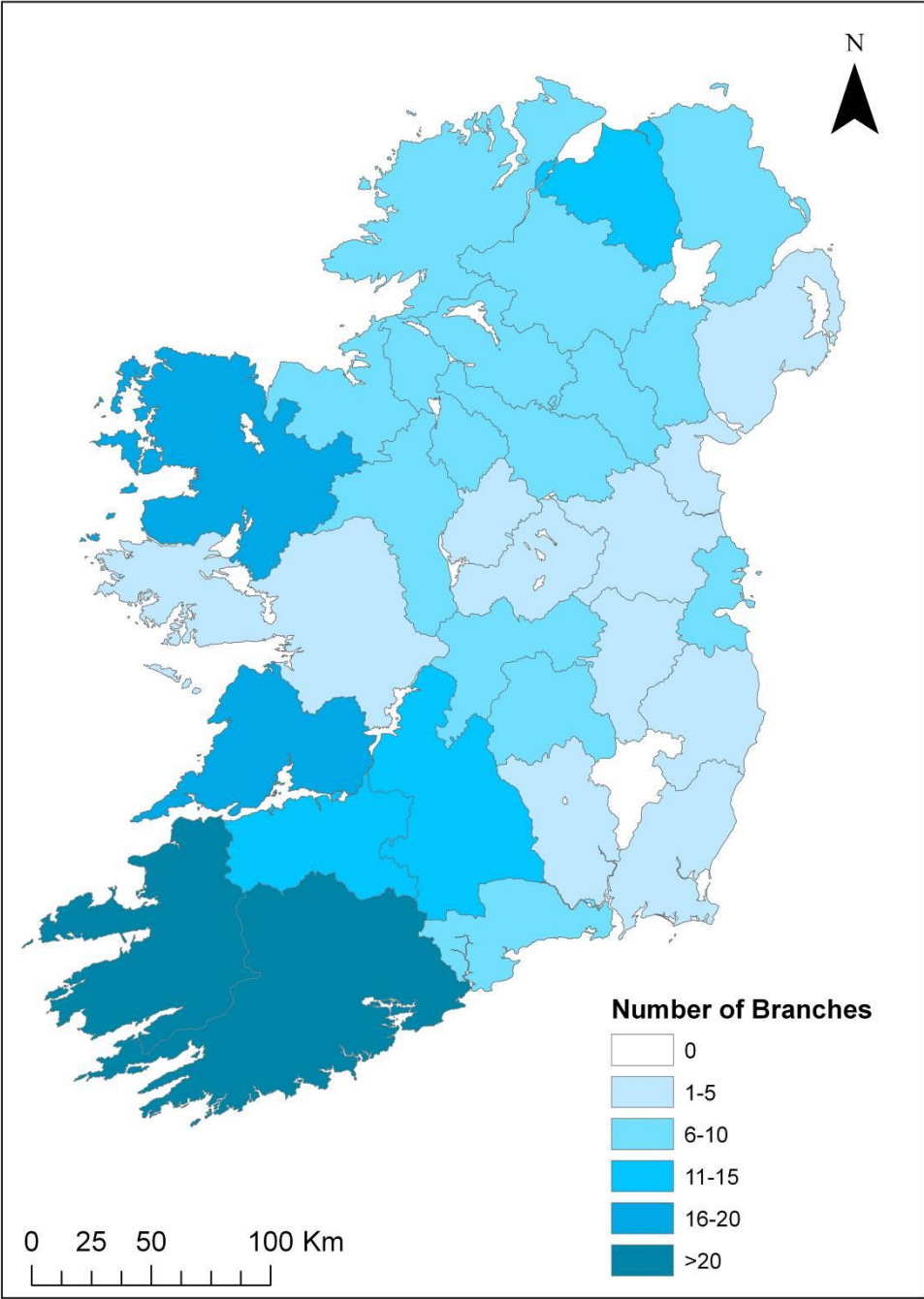


Figure 1 Distribution of branches of *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* in 2008.  
Source: Adapted from [www.comhaltas.ie](http://www.comhaltas.ie) (accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June 2008).

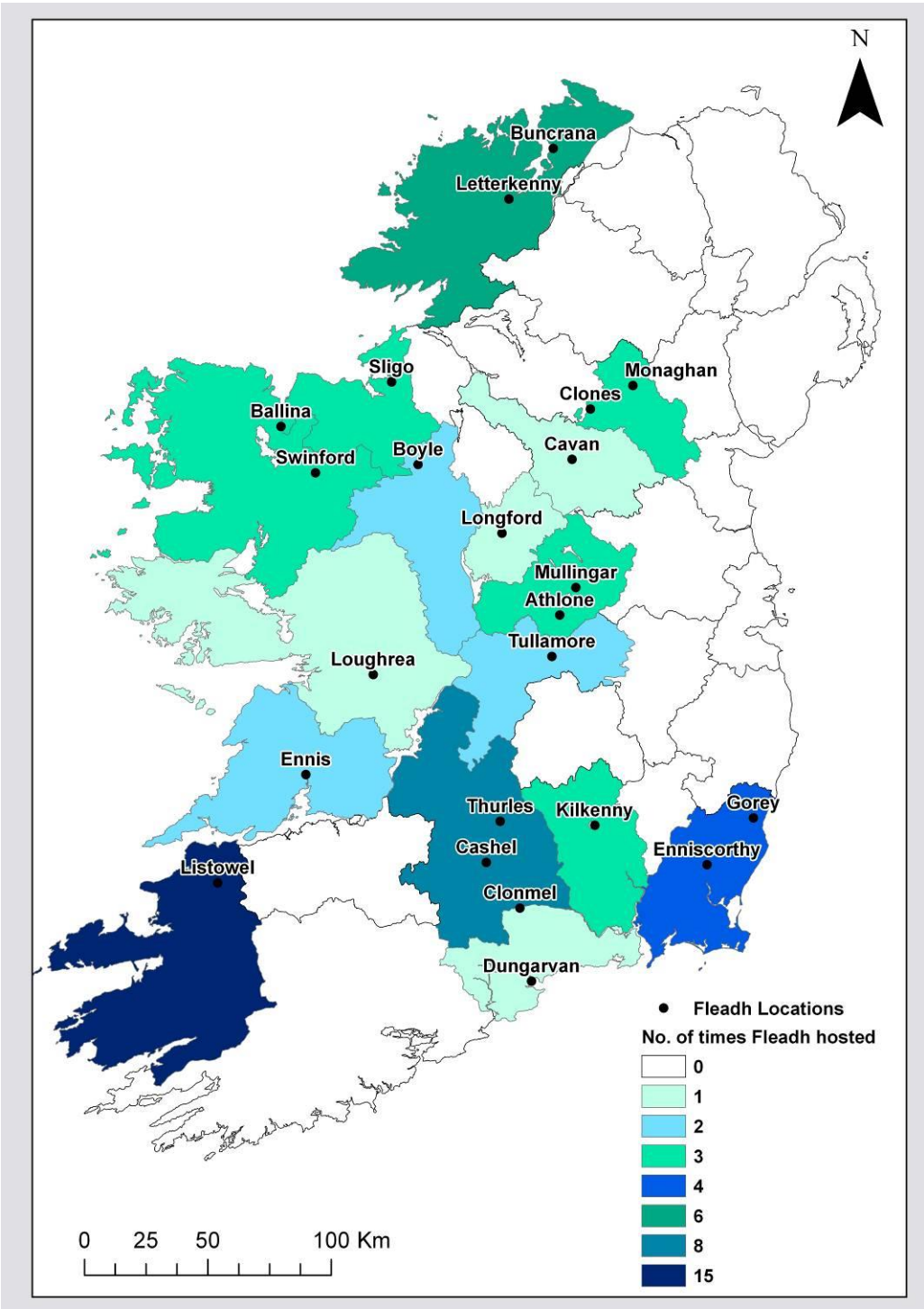
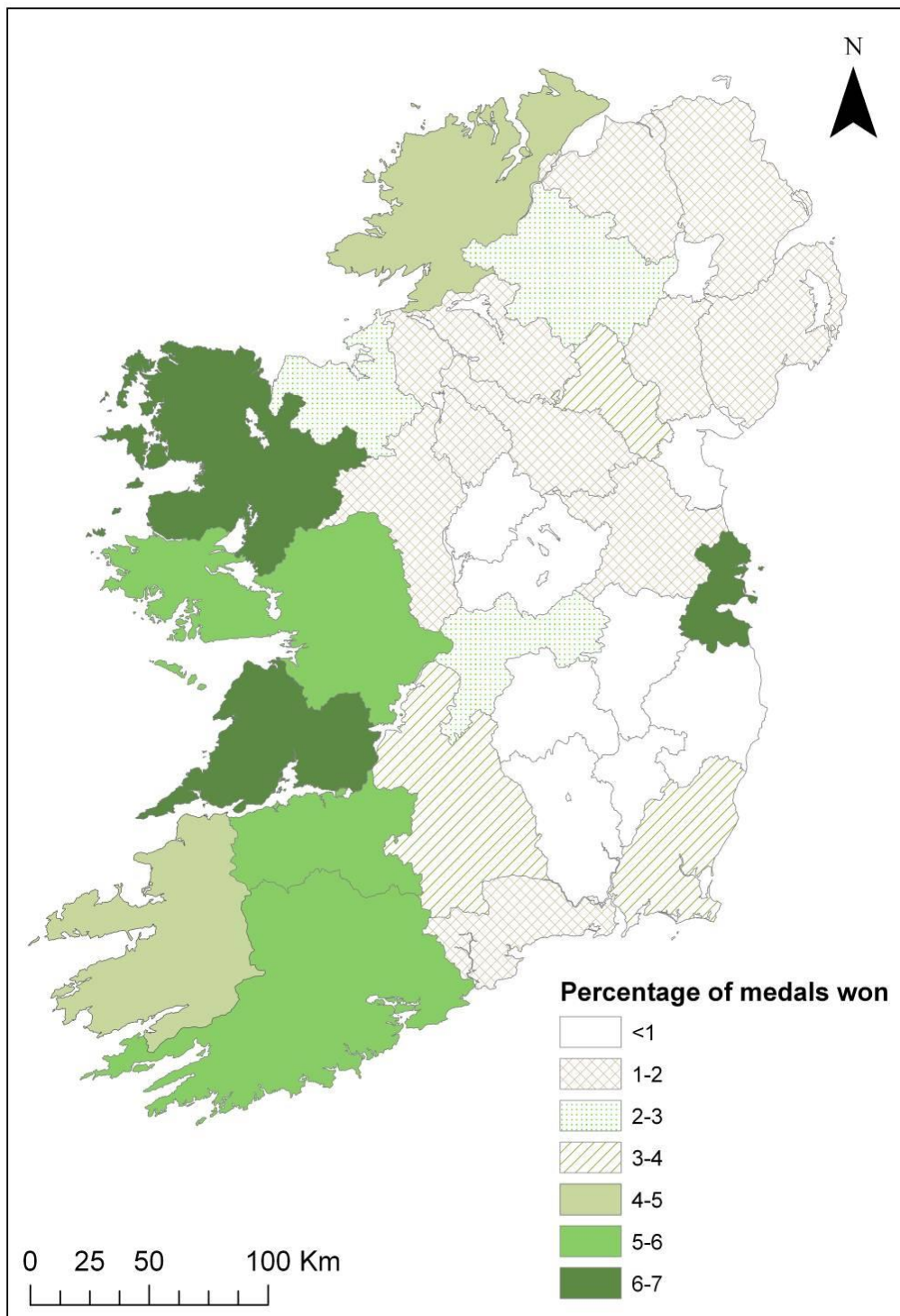


Figure 2 Map of towns that have hosted *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* (1951-2008)

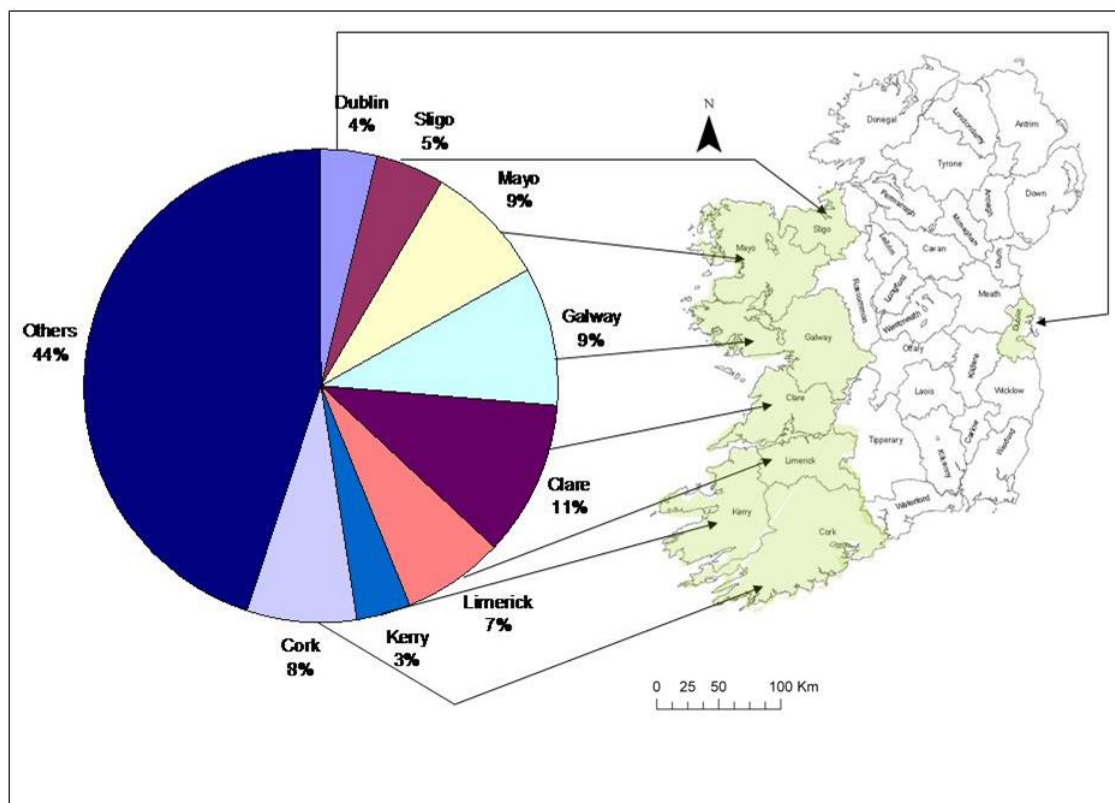
Listowel has hosted *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* more times than any other town and *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* has never been held in the six counties of Northern Ireland. Clare has not held *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* since the early 1977 but has hosted *An Fleadh Nua* annually since 1974 reinforcing the link between the county and *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*. Source: Author.

**Figure 3 . Distribution of medals won at *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* 1975-2008**



The pattern of distribution is identified through analysis of average number of medals won by each county in all competitions at *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* between 1975 and 2008. It highlights the prominence of Dublin and counties on the western seaboard.

Figure 4 Distribution of medal winners at *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* 2008



Source: Author.

An analysis of the percentage of medals awarded to each county highlights further regionalisation in Irish traditional music as affected by CCÉ. Based on averaged statistics between 1975 and 2008, Clare and Mayo are the most successful counties, alongside Dublin, the county with the greatest population (Fig. 3). Other western counties, have also done well. In 2008, counties on the western seaboard accounted for over 50% of the medals awarded (Fig. 4). These patterns reinforce the association of Irish traditional music with the west of Ireland and the regional identities that have been developed there (see also Ó Giolláin, 2000; Kearney, 2009; Ní Chonghaile, 2011).

The location of *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* in Cavan between 2010 and 2012 has raised the profile of music musicians in Cavan. Composer Ed Reavy has received much attention, a monument was erected to fiddle player Seán Maguire in the surrounding area, and Turlough O'Carolan's relationship with the county has also been noted. Accordion player Martin Donoghue has become a widely recognised face, appearing on various forms of media. He previously performed on Comhaltas tours and, along with other Cavan musicians, has increased his profile because of his association with Cavan. Driven by regional boosterism, Donoghue developed the NYAH festival in Cavan in 2004 as a celebration of all things Cavan. At the 2011 Fleadh, Martin's son Kavan Donoghue released a CD on the new NYAH label. Other Cavan musicians, including banjo player Darren Maloney, have also released albums to coincide with *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*. Furthermore, a collection of tunes from the north of Ireland compiled by Garry Lynch and Majella Bartley was published with the support of CCÉ, NYAH and the Fleadh Committee at the 2012 event. The development of awareness of music in Cavan has highlighted the potential for greater regional musical identity for the county.

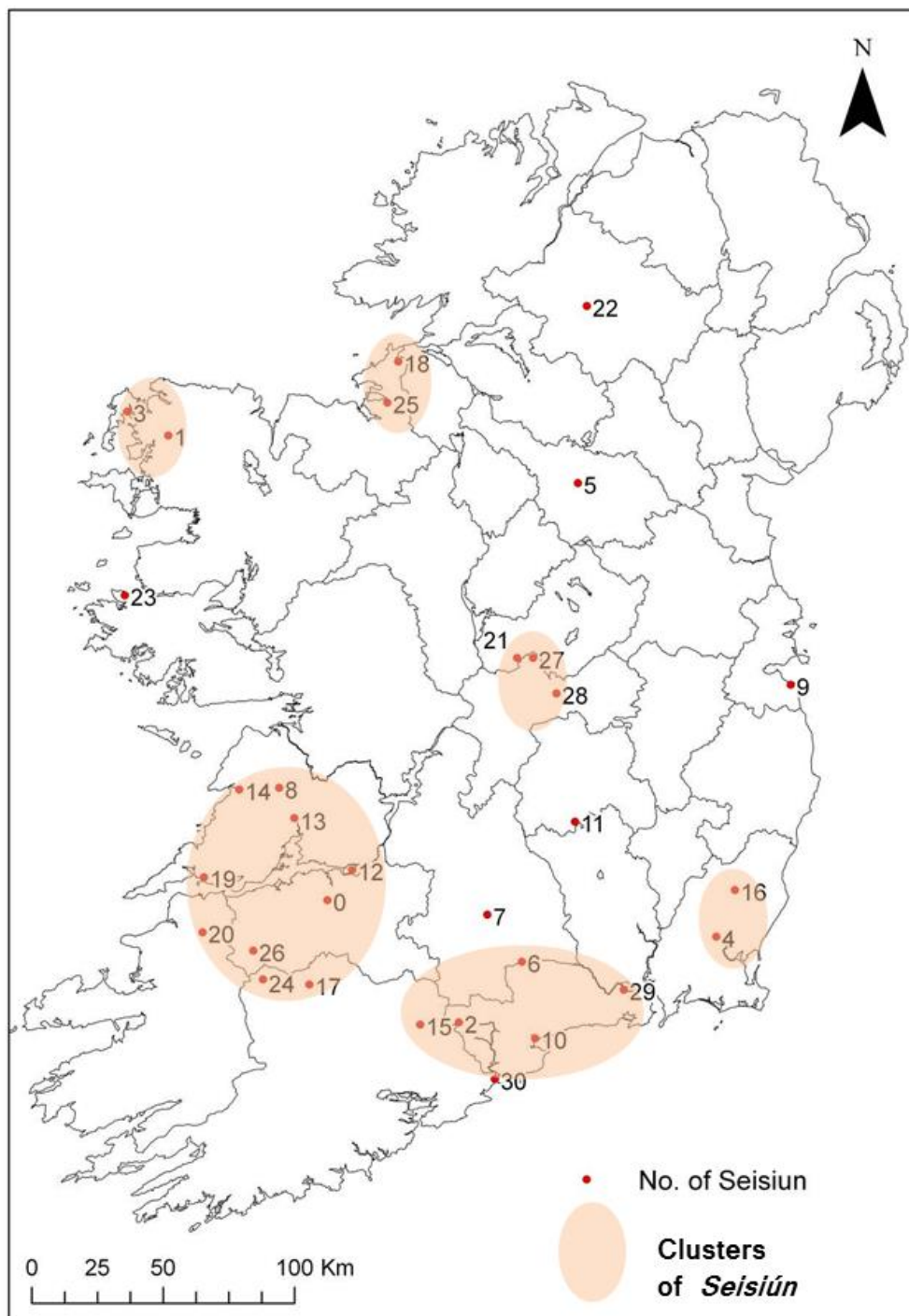
The use of the concept of the region to promote music in Cavan links to the existing geographical narrative of Irish traditional music and the region is following the pattern of processes that established the identities of other regions such as Sligo and Donegal. The extent to which this Cavan identity is born out of a strong shared sense of regional identity (regionality) or the imposition of identity related to the location of the Fleadh (regionalisation) provides an insight into the impact of CCÉ on the geography of Irish traditional music.

### **Seisiún**

Another aspect of CCÉ that has reinforced the links between music and place is the summer entertainment programme, *Seisiún*. *Seisiún* is considered very briefly by both Henry (1989) and Fleming (2004), both of whom highlight the canonical treatment of Irish traditional music in these presentations. CCÉ describes *Seisiún* as "a colourful show of music, song, dance and storytelling, [which] is produced by Comhaltas branches in the summer months in most counties" (CCÉ, 2007: 7). In my experience, there is little guidance from the hierarchical order of CCÉ, the artistic and other decisions in relation to *Seisiún* shows are made at a local level. In many ways, the local nature of the decision-making process provides an opportunity to reinforce regional identity. Upon the relaunch of *Seisiún* in 1988, Ó Murchú stated:

Emphasis in the presentations will be on local traditions and customs. This will help to instil a pride in local communities in their own heritage. In many cases also the research involved unearths many gems of traditions which might otherwise have been lost for all time (1988: 12).

*Seisiún* reinforces regional narratives in areas where a strong regional narrative exists. All too often, however, the lack of a strong regional narrative or tradition, accompanied by a desire to perform the most popular aspects of the tradition, leads to a performance of a homogenised national culture with little reference to local culture. In turn, the performance of a homogenised national culture by musicians in a locality can lead to the replacement of older regional differences by new evolutions within the local Irish traditional music community. As Henry notes in relation to government funding for the promotion of indigenous music: "Those types or styles of music selected for presentation acquire an implicit seal of official approval, and those which are not selected suffer neglect and less chance of survival" (1989: 68). In the case of regional identities, *Seisiún* can reinforce existing attitudes and practices through both inclusion and exclusion.



**Figure 5** The location of Seisiún performances in 2008.

Source: Author from publicity material.

The uneven distribution of *Seisiún* around the country suggests regional variation in the strength of the organisation and, by association, Irish traditional music (Fig. 5). In 2008 there was a particularly large cluster in the Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Clare

area of west Munster and the Cork, Waterford and Tipperary area of east Munster. Ulster has only two performance centres while many counties in Leinster, historically the most anglicised part of the country, do not have any performances. The pattern of *Seisiún* performances mirrors patterns in the tourist industry in Ireland and relates to an ancillary argument that Irish traditional music benefits greatly from and, in some places, is partly dependent on tourism revenue.

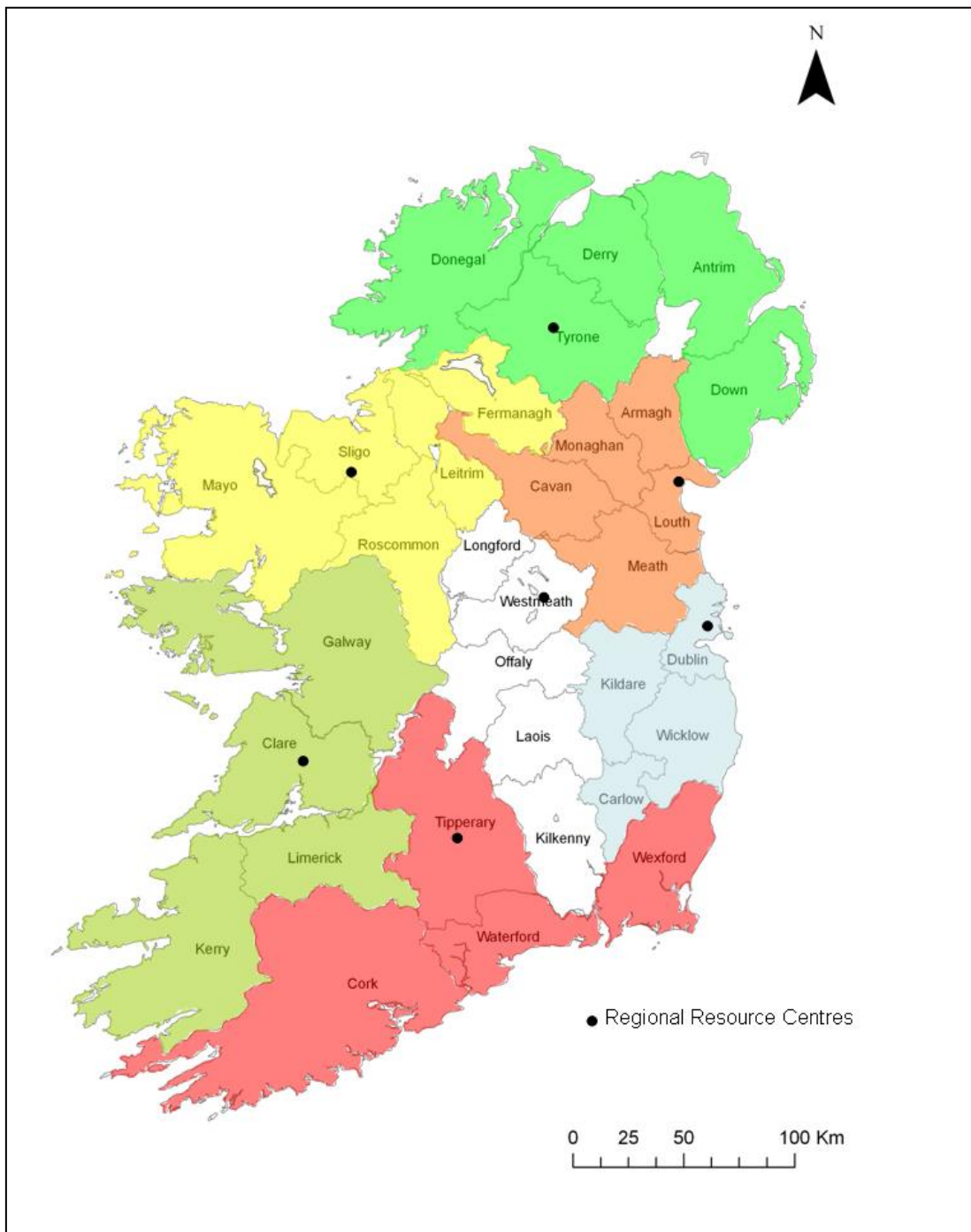
### **Athnuacan**

A final aspect of CCÉ that I wish to address in relation to a regional music-geography of Ireland is the 2001 development plan published by CCÉ. The organisation created seven regions on the island of Ireland with centres in Tipperary, Clare, Dublin, Sligo, Louth and Tyrone (Fig. 6). The regions overlap the border between the Republic and Northern Ireland. The regional identity of North Connacht, associated with Michael Coleman and his contemporaries, has been reinforced. The administrative centre is the Ceoláras Coleman in south Sligo, near Coleman's birthplace. The emerging regional musical identity of County Fermanagh has been subsumed within this region. Regional identities in Oriel and Ulster are also suggested but the region of Sliabh Luachra, associated with Pádraig O'Keeffe and traditionally conceptualised as lying in the border areas of Cork, Kerry and Limerick, is divided by the new borders of CCÉ.

The headquarters of CCÉ is *Culturlann na hÉireann* in Monkstown, Co. Dublin, purchased in the 1970s but located in an area not traditionally associated with Irish traditional music. Under the development programme the building, which includes a theatre, recording studio, accommodation, offices, an archive, tuition area and bar, was modernised and updated. The Culturlann hosts a *Seisiún* and the weeklong diploma course for teaching Irish traditional music (TTCT), as well as numerous regular classes in Irish traditional music, song and dance.



Figure 6 Meitheal Regions and Outreach Centres



Map indicating the location of regional centres of *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* and the seven regions created as part of the 2001 Development Programme. Centres are located in Tipperary, Clare, Dublin, Sligo, Louth and Tyrone. Meitheal teams based at these centres aim to link communities and support community based projects. Source: Author.

The second oldest of the centres is *Cois na hAbhna*, which is located in Ennis and originally opened on St. Patrick's Day, 1983. The centre underwent significant refurbishment and development in 2006. It houses the Comhaltas Regional Archive in its Sean Reid Library, named after a fiddler and piper from Donegal who moved to Clare in 1937 to work with Clare County Council and subsequently influenced music and musicians in the region (O'Brien-Moran and Vallely, 1999). It also has an auditorium for céilí dances and concerts, a traditional-style Irish kitchen, a bar/teach cheoil where lively weekly sessions are held and classrooms for music lessons ([www.coisnhabhna.ie](http://www.coisnhabhna.ie), accessed 20<sup>th</sup> July 2011).

*Brú Ború*, located beside the Rock of Cashel, Co. Tipperary, was built in the early 1990s and the exhibition area was extended during the scheme ([www.comhaltas.com](http://www.comhaltas.com), accessed 9<sup>th</sup> February 2011). The space, as a tourist attraction, includes a multimedia exhibition, traditional music performances and a dining area and an estimated 60,000 people attend the centre each year (Hynes and O'Shea, 2009). The *Seisiún* group comprises of musicians drawn from a wide area and many are not members of the local branch. This group, which also takes the name *Brú Ború*, is the flagship performing group of CCÉ and has performed in many locations around the world.

Located in Gurteen, Co. Sligo, *Ceoláras Coleman* is the Regional Resource Centre for Counties Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Leitrim and Fermanagh. A company, The Michael Coleman Heritage Centre Ltd., was registered in 1993 with sixteen directors drawn from the local community, Sligo County Council and local businesses. A mission statement aimed to preserve, promote and develop the south Sligo style of traditional music and generate socio-economic activity in the local area. The centre was built in 1999 with grant aid from Peace & Reconciliation, INTERREG, International Fund for Ireland, and Sligo Leader Partnership. Generous donations were also received from Sligo County Council, Green Isle, and The Kennedy Charitable Trust with the site being donated by the local farmers Co-op, the North Connacht Farmers' Co-operative Society (N.C.F.). The company also received a host of smaller grants and donations from organisations and individuals to complete the fundraising. Activities at the centre included workshops and seminars, as well as the collection of archival material. Following financial difficulties from 2004, additional funding was made available and two directors from CCÉ were appointed to the board of directors. In November 2006, CCÉ opened their Meitheal Office at the Centre ([www.colemanirishmusic.com/viscen.php](http://www.colemanirishmusic.com/viscen.php), accessed 9 February 2011).

Probably the most controversial development was that of *Clasach*, located in Clontarf, Co. Dublin. The local branch of CCÉ began planning a centre for the area in the early 1990s but in 2008, the Clontarf branch was expelled from the organisation amid very public disputes in national press and on national radio. Issues surrounding the management of finances were at the heart of this debate,

particularly the rising costs of the building, finally estimated at €9 million. Despite the dispute between local groups and the national organisation, the latter maintaining control of the building, the *Clasach* building has been finished to a high standard, identified by Hynes and O'Shea as a place that 'clearly has the potential to become, in time, an excellent home venue for the traditional music community, a significant tourist attraction and a valuable resource to the local and regional community' (2009: 31). *Clasach* represents the potential disjuncture between the local community and the national organisation that challenges the development of local or regional identities in Irish traditional music.

The regional centre in Co. Louth is housed in Dundalk Gaol. The building draws on its history, particularly that which relates to republican prisoners at the turn of the twentieth century. The centre has a semi-permanent exhibition which is aimed at informing visitors about local history and includes references to local music-making and musical heritage. It regularly hosts concerts and a summer *Seisiún* that, in 2011, drew on the story of *An Táin Bó Cuailgne* or 'The Brown Bull of Cooley'.

*Dún Uladh* in Omagh, Co. Tyrone is located in Northern Ireland. It was originally opened in October 1995 following a number of years of planning (1995: 37) and re-opened in 2008 following refurbishment under the development plan. In 1994 Francis Quinn, a research worker with the centre, requested help through *Treoir* for a project on the history of Irish folk singing and lilting (1994: 40). From the beginning, the centre acknowledged its connection to the tourism industry alongside the Ulster American Folk Park and the Ulster History Park (1995: 37). It also developed a resident group of musicians, singers and dancers that performed locally as well as travelling to various events.

The meeting that led to the foundation of CCE was held in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath in January 1951, with the first *Fleadh* held in the town the following May. *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann* was held for a second time in Mullingar in 1963. *Áras an Mhuillinn* was opened in July 2010 and officially opened on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2011 and like the old Gaol in Dundalk, the building was leased by the local County Council. Press releases related to the official opening highlighted the importance of the centre in supporting the Irish language in the midlands and the presence of a radio link to *Radió na Gaeltachta*.

Other buildings are listed at Kilrush and Ennistymon – both formerly churches in Co. Clare – Riverstown, Co. Sligo, Youghal and Rockchapel, Co. Cork, Moate, Co. Westmeath, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, Lixnaw, Co. Kerry, Dunloy, Co. Antrim, and Corofin, Co. Clare. The development programme has raised a number of legal, financial and taxation issues, as well as issues pertaining to the constitution of CCE itself (Hynes and O'Shea, 2009). However, these spaces provide an invaluable network of classrooms, archives and venues that have focused public money into an

infrastructure that can enable continued participation in the traditional arts following the economic downturn. These centres also contribute to an awareness of local heritage and culture and provide a focal point for teaching, performing and competing.

### Conclusion

The establishment of CCÉ is an integral part of the institutionalisation of Irish traditional music. Cooke (1997) highlights the process of institutionalisation in relation to the preservation of culture. CCÉ was founded out of a desire and perceived need to preserve Irish traditional music at a time when the tradition held very little status in Irish traditional music. The development of CCÉ may be perceived as a threat to the existence of that which it was developed to preserve. CCÉ changes Irish traditional music through the very processes of institutionalisation outlined by Cooke. CCÉ has established formal teaching, an examination cycle (*Scrudú Cheoil Tíre*), published various tune books (*Foinn Seisiún*), and established competitions (*Fleadhanna Cheoil*). CCÉ are to the fore in the institutionalisation of Irish traditional music. The ways and contexts in which Irish traditional music is played and consumed have changed. The conceptualisation of regions has also changed becoming an institutionalised historical narrative of 'the way things were' and newly imagined administrative regions in an institutionalised culture.

Criticisms of the organisations should be considered with an understanding of how organisations operate. The maps here provide analytical data that can reinforce and inform an understanding of the expression of regional identity and the processes of regionalisation in Irish traditional music. The prominence of CCÉ, its role in the transmission of the tradition and extent of its membership within the Irish traditional music community present a need to consider the role of the organisation in the various processes that affect Irish traditional music. CCÉ are also part of the process of institutionalising Irish traditional music and the development of narratives of the tradition that become points of reference for those involved. Despite the success of the organisation over the past sixty years there are many areas of the country that have not developed branches of CCÉ, where Irish traditional music is not an overtly strong part of everyday local culture and from where few young musicians go forward to success in competitions. There are also many people and groups involved in Irish traditional music throughout Ireland and the world who are not involved with or affiliated to CCÉ.

CCÉ has undoubtedly played an important role in the development of Irish traditional music and has impacted greatly on the geography and location of Irish traditional music. Through an examination of the infrastructure and branch network of CCÉ, the impact of competition and the soundscape that CCÉ presents, the

diffusion of Irish traditional music and its connection with place can be better understood.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Bartley, Majella and Gary Lynch (2012) *Tunes from the North: A collection of tunes from the Irish and Ulster Scots traditions*, No publication details.
- Collins, Tim, (forthcoming) *Beyond the local: redefining regionalism in the traditional music of Sliabh Aughty and its diaspora*, Unpublished Thesis, NUI Galway.
- Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (2007) *An Ród Seo Romham / Annual Report* Dublin: CCÉ.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (2008) *An Bunreacht* Dublin: CCÉ.
- Cooke, Peter (1997) 'Cultural greyout or survival of the species? - "The Threat"' M. Ó Suilleabháin and T. Smith *Selected Proceedings from Blas: The Local Accent in Irish Traditional Music* Limerick: Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick / Dublin: Folk Music Society of Ireland.
- Cummins, Verena (1999) 'Galway, East' in F. Valley (ed.), *The Companion to Irish traditional music*, Cork: Cork University Press, pp. 146-149.
- Fleming, Rachel C. (2004) 'Resisting Cultural Standardization: Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and the Revitalization of Traditional Music in Ireland.' *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 41, No. 2/3, Special Double Issue: Advocacy Issues in Folklore (May - Dec., 2004), pp. 227-257.
- Henry, Edward O. (1989) 'Institutions for the Promotion of Indigenous Music: The Case for Ireland's Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann' *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Winter, 1989), pp. 67-95.
- Hynes, J. and O'Shea, E. (2009) *Funding Review of the Development Programme of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*, Report to The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs  
<http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/CistenaGaeilge/file,9952,en.pdf>.
- Kearney, Daithí (2009) 'Towards a regional understanding of Irish traditional music' *Musicology Review* 5 (2009) pp. 19-44.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (2010) *Towards a regional understanding of Irish traditional music* Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University College Cork, Ireland.
- Keegan, Niall (1997) 'The Verbal Context of style in traditional Irish music.' in M. Ó Suilleabháin and T. Smith *Selected Proceedings from Blas: The Local Accent in Irish*

*Traditional Music Limerick*: Irish World Music Centre, University of Limerick / Dublin: Folk Music Society of Ireland.

Kelly, Ita (2005) "Up and coming: A Sliabh Luachra state of mind" in *Irish Music Magazine* August, pp. 48-49.

Larson Sky, Cathy (1997) 'A Lot of Notes but Little Music: Competition and the Changing Character of Performance.' *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 156-167.

Long, Siobhán (2005) "The Kings of Trad," *The Irish Times* 24th September 2005.

Lyth, David (1981) *Bowling Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing Vol. 1*, Dublin: Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

\_\_\_\_\_, (1996) *Bowling Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing Vol. 2*, Dublin: Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

Maguire, Cyril (2003) *Hidden Fermanagh: Traditional music and song from County Fermanagh* Monea, Fermanagh: Fermanagh Traditional Music Society.

McNamee, Peter (ed.) (1991,) *Traditional Music: Whose Music?* The Institute of Irish Studies: Queens University Belfast.

Ní Chonghaile Deirdre (2011) *Irish traditional music and the Aran Islands: Identity, Dissemination and Aesthetics* Unpublished PhD Thesis, University College Cork.

Ní Uallacháin, Pádraigín (2003) *A Hidden Ulster: People, songs and traditions of Oriel* Four Courts Press, Dublin.

Ó Giolláin, Diarmuid (2000) *Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity* Cork: Cork University Press.

Ó Murchú, Labhrás (1988) 'Seisiún is back!' *Treoir* Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 12.

Ó Riada, Seán (1962; 1982) Thomas Kinsella and Tomás Ó Canainn (eds.), *Our Musical Heritage*, Fundúireacht an Riadaigh I gcomhar le The Dolmen Press, Mountrath, Portlaoise, Ireland. (This book was compiled from the programme series, *Our Musical Heritage*, presented by Seán Ó Riada on Radio Éireann, 7<sup>th</sup> July to 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1962.).

O'Brien-Moran, Jimmy and Vallely, Fintan (1999) 'Seán Reid', in F. Vallely (ed.), *The Companion to Irish traditional music*, Cork: Cork University Press, pp. 311-312.

Prior, Brian, (2007a) *Foinn seisiún 1. 116 favourite traditional Irish tunes arranged in 39 session sets* Monkstown, Co. Dublin : Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

\_\_\_\_\_, (2007b) *Foinn seisiún 2. 104 favourite Irish traditional tunes arranged in 35 session sets* Dublin : CCE, 2007.

- \_\_\_\_\_, (2007c) *Foinn seisiún 3. 108 favourite traditional Irish tunes arranged in 38 session sets* Dublin : Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann. Quinn, Francis, 1994, 'History of Irish folk singing and lilting', letter published in *Treoir* Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 40.
- Taylor, Barry, (2007) 'A problem for the public – Seán Ó Riada and Irish traditional music' in Clune, Anne (ed.) *Essays in Honour of Tom Munnally* Milltown Malbay, Co. Clare: The Old Kilfarboy Society. Pp. 331-360.
- Urry, John, (1995) *Consuming Places* London: Routledge.
- Vallely, Fintan, (1999a) 'Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ)' in F. Vallely (ed.), *The Companion to Irish traditional music* Cork: Cork University Press, pp. 77-81.
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1999b) 'Regional Style' in F. Vallely (ed.), *The Companion to Irish traditional music*, Cork: Cork University Press, pp. 308-309.
- \_\_\_\_\_, (2004) 'Opening up Hidden Fermanagh' in *The Journal of Music in Ireland*, Vol. 4, No. 4.
- Wallis, Roger and Krister Malm, (1984) *Big Sounds from Small Peoples – the Music Industry in Small Countries* London: Constable.
- Williams, Stephen, (1998) *Tourism Geography* London: Routledge.

### Discography

- Kavan Donohue 2011, *Kavan from Cavan* Cavan : Nyah, 2NYAH CD No2
- Darren Maloney, *n.d.*, *Complicated* Darren Maloney: No catalogue number
- Various Performers, 2004, *The flute players of Roscommon. Volume one* Roscommon : Feadóg Mór Music, no catalogue number.