CHAPTER 13

Come Enjoy the Craic: Locating an Irish Traditional Music Festival in Drogheda

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Introduction

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann (hereinafter 'the Fleadh') is a festival of Irish traditional music, begun in 1951 by the organisation Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ), to promote Irish traditional music, song and dance that they believed were in danger of dying out. The Fleadh is an integral element of a revival in these traditions and has been held since in many parts of the country often located in a town for two or three consecutive years at a time (Kearney 2013). It was held in the town of Drogheda on the east coast of Ireland for the first time in 2018. The Fleadh has a very significant economic impact on the host town or city, and audiences have grown substantially from earlier events to reach reported crowds of 500,000 (CCÉ 2019a) and 750,000 for the two years the event was held in Drogheda. An estimated €50 million was generated in the host region (CCÉ 2019b). Although the competitions held on the concluding weekend of the event provide the major foci for the organisers, the Fleadh typically runs for eight days with visitors lingering for a day or two afterwards and continuing to engage in musical activity. The early part of the week involves

How to cite this book chapter:
Kearney, D. and Burns, K. 2022. Come Enjoy the Craic: Locating an Irish Traditional Music Festival in Drogheda. In: Smith, A., Osborn, G. and Quinn, B. (Eds.) *Festivals and the City: The Contested Geographies of Urban Events*. London: University of Westminster Press. Pp. 231–247. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16997/book64.m.

workshops in various instruments and formal events including dinners and gatherings that honour people involved in the promotion of Irish culture and traditions. The post-Fleadh activity primarily involves musicians and is evident in the ongoing sessions of Irish traditional music in public houses and some public spaces.

The Fleadh is a multi-faceted festival and this chapter focuses on the use and reconfiguration of public spaces rather than the music, workshops, competitions, or ticketed concerts. The importance of music in public spaces at the Fleadh is significant as, despite the very large numbers attending the Fleadh, ticket sales for formal events are typically low. This leads to greater engagement with public spaces and 'free' entertainment, with large numbers of people busking or engaging in 'live music' sessions in public houses or other available spaces. One of the key challenges for any town hosting the Fleadh or a similar music festival is to adapt the use of public spaces to facilitate a large number of people and music-making on the streets. Fundamental to overcoming this challenge is the engagement of all stakeholders; and management is often complex due to relationships with, and amongst, stakeholders.

The research for this project involved interviews with representatives of the local authority and festivals organisers and is also informed by ethnographic reflections. The individuals quoted in this chapter represent one group of decision makers, and were chosen to reflect official attitudes to and plans for the reconfiguration of public spaces in the town. The researchers provide emic (within social group) and etic (observer) perspectives. One of the authors (Daithí) is an Irish traditional musician and was involved in the organisation of some of the events at the Fleadh and attended events at each of the three spaces examined during both years of the festival. He had particular responsibility for the programming of the Gig Rig, on which he also performed and acted in the role of MC (in rotation with others). As a member of the organising team for the event, he has a particular insider perspective. The second researcher (Kevin) is not involved in Irish traditional music and did not have an active role in the event but engaged with the festival as a participant from the area who is active in research and teaching. The research collaboration sought to balance emic and etic perspectives of the event. Both authors visited the town together during the summer of 2020, observing changes or remaining evidence of the presence of the Fleadh in the streetscape (see Figure 13.1).

In this chapter, the study focuses on three reconfigured spaces: the Fleadh Gig Rig in Bolton Square, St Laurence's Gate, and the Main Street including St Peter's Plaza. These spaces were chosen as they are the main spaces for free public engagement, contrasting with paid venues or competition spaces. They were reconstructed to allow for elements of the Fleadh to be superimposed on a host town to allow for very large crowds to experience the festival. These temporarily created performance spaces demonstrate potential alternative uses of these public spaces. The survival and success of events similar to the Fleadh

Figure 13.1: Evidence of the efforts to enliven derelict buildings for the Fleadh that have been neglected since. Photograph: Daithí Kearney.

are dependent on those 'primary' stakeholders who are most involved and engaged (Reid 2007). This chapter primarily documents the views of the local authority with subsequent studies required to engage with other stakeholders.

The Fleadh and Drogheda

Being granted the opportunity to host the Fleadh is a very competitive process, reflecting increasing inter-urban competition for large-scale events that are not always located in the same place (see also MacLeod 2006). The Fleadh is a partnership between CCÉ and the local authority and a Drogheda Fleadh Bid Committee that first met in the D Hotel, Drogheda, on 24 January 2012 (Robinson 2020). Drogheda applied for five successive years before being selected by CCÉ, losing out to Sligo and Ennis before being selected ahead of a bid from Cork City. The bid was led by the volunteer chairperson of the

local branch of CCÉ, Lolo Robinson, and the Chief Executive of Louth County Council, Joan Martin. Martin was Town Clerk for Drogheda Borough Council at the time of the first bid but, with changes to the structures of local government in Ireland, became Chief Executive of Louth County Council during the period. Martin took a keen personal interest in the bid and ensured support from the council, including the assignment of one of her management team, Paddy Donnelly,[1] to the Fleadh Executive Committee (FEC).

The Local Authority emphasised creating an economic impact, in contrast with the cultural aspirations of CCÉ who aspired to promote the traditional arts. The location of Drogheda between the major cities of Dublin and Belfast and the existence of a large town centre that could be adapted (and pedestrianised) for an event such as the Fleadh were significant in planning for the event. It is noteworthy that Drogheda is Ireland's largest town by population but located in the smallest county by area (Louth, 827km^2), although the town is partially located in the neighbouring county of Meath. There are conflicting messages within the Fleadh promotional material that describes Drogheda as 'a small town with lots to offer' (CCÉ 2018a: 7) but also 'the biggest town in Ireland, a vibrant cosmopolitan town with two of the largest shopping centres in the country nestled among countless artisan retailers' (CCÉ 2018b: 5). Between 2017 and 2019 there were several unsuccessful representations from local groups to the national government to declare Drogheda a city.

The Fleadh committee in Drogheda recognised that many attendees of the Fleadh go for the live music, the street entertainment and to consume alcohol and do not attend competitions or ticketed performances. Thus, there was a need to give considerable attention to the use and accessibility of public spaces and the provision of free entertainment, some of which is provided by the attendees themselves who require suitable spaces for performance. Preparations included the renovation, repurposing and painting of derelict buildings, while a massive street cleaning effort was undertaken each night by the local authority.

Reconfiguring Public Spaces

Unlike cities such as Oslo (Smith and von Krogh Strand 2011) or Bilbao (Ockman 2004), where music and art centres have become emblematic of the cities and play a key role in their regeneration, or in cities that have hosted major events such as World Expo or the Olympic Games and for which large buildings were constructed that remain part of the city's landscape (Smith and von Krogh Strand 2011), no new building was constructed in Drogheda for the Fleadh. However, existing structures and public spaces were utilised both as performance spaces and in imagery. Thus, the Fleadh festival space was socially constructed. Space was created, co-constructed and subverted by participants and attendees as a result of their engagement and participation in the music

event. Drawing on the classification of space put forward by Lefebvre (1991), this chapter evaluates how the Fleadh embodied the triad of space – conceived, perceived and representational space – and explores how the social landscape of the Fleadh was formed.

The Fleadh is a multi-faceted event that requires a significant number of spaces to cater for different types of activities including performances, competitions, workshops, radio broadcasts and television recordings. Many activities take place in public spaces and Donnelly noted: 'there was an exercise done initially about identifying a number of the public spaces and open spaces that could be utilised to address the elements of the Fleadh' (7 July 2020). The main spaces initially considered included the location of a large Dome for ticketed performances and competitions, a Gig Rig for free open-air performances, and smaller stages for Fleadh TV, live broadcasts from the event. There was also a need to have other spaces where 'events could take place in a public street and that would be safe for pedestrians and participants' (Donnelly 2020). There was competition between various stakeholders for the use of spaces. There was a need to facilitate the crowds, large stages for performances and broadcasts, and for visitors who wished to perform on the street. Fleadh TV was a major stakeholder and they sought, early in the planning process, to use an open space near the river that might otherwise have been utilised for the Gig Rig. Instead, the Gig Rig was located in Bolton Square, with porous barriers erected to aid the delineation of space and management of people.

For the Fleadh, one key perceived space is that of the fences, the physical setting and security at the various events. These elements or 'architectures' give the sense of an inaccessible space that is rooted in the festival. Narrative mapping uncovers a more porous, produced space, what Lefebvre calls 'representational' space, that extends beyond the space and time of the Fleadh; thus the Fleadh has a legacy for the destination. The representational space created by the Fleadh conceptualises how participants alter, change and construct space through actions. Lefebvre's triad of space implies that each element informs the other; thus the lived experience at one stage in the Fleadh inspires the representational spaces which is co-constructed with and by those that are active in the space – be it impromptu performances or traditional music buskers creating their subverted space.

The ever-increasing control and regulation of festival spaces leads to what Lefebvre (1991) terms commodified or conceived space, which is structurally and socially controlled. Such a process began with the movement from free elements of the festival to the commercialisation of music festivals, and with which came an increase in health and safety regulations, codes and guidelines. This was evident during the Fleadh and due to an increase in health and safety regulation, codes and guidelines, the space in front of St Laurence's Gate was not used during the second year of the Fleadh. Lefebvre (1991) notes that architecture shapes the conceived space. In this way increased barriers and gatekeepers all act as architecture that informs the conceived space of the festival

shaping how it is experienced. The parameters of the festival are heavily policed and this takes place in two ways. First by those seeking to keep people out, stopping the movement of people without tickets into the space. Secondly by security staff and barriers, and sometimes the police, that attempt to control the movement of contraband, or in this case performers, into the space.

This chapter identifies these elements of Lefebvre's triad of spaces, be it the sense of control portrayed by the Fleadh organisers and authorities or the space which is subverted by attendees and performers; or the conceived space which is structurally and socially controlled. The different spaces reflect differing social, cultural and political agendas and the interests of different groups of stakeholders. The streetscape outside St Peter's Church, which had been divided by a railing signifying the separation of Church and Public Property until the early 2000s, was utilised for broadcasts and by visiting performers. The Crescent Concert Hall was renovated and opened in time for the 2018 event. Furthermore, St Laurence's Gate, which had been recently pedestrianised and opened to the public for tours, was a significant presence in marketing. Bolton Square, location of the Gig Rig, was a car park and the location of a market since the fourteenth century.

Gig Rig, Bolton Square

The potential of Bolton Square as a location for events was identified in the 2013 Urban Design Framework (Louth County Council 2013). It is a large public space in the centre of the town that is easily accessible from several points. Its role in the Fleadh was significant as it was a space that provided live music free of charge for very large numbers of people. The acts included a mix of local artists and community arts groups and leading professional musicians. As Gibson and Connell (2005, 255–256) note, the importance of entertainment and the opportunity to hear good live music is often overlooked. The Gig Rig at Bolton Square provided access to free entertainment professionally presented, even when performed by community groups, which caught the attention of a lot of local people who may not otherwise have engaged in the Fleadh. It provides a snapshot of the diversity of the Fleadh, encapsulating both the community focus and the wider reach of the event (i.e. national radio broadcast and international performers).

For the stage in Bolton Square, Martin (2020) highlights the significant investment in a professional and high spec Gig Rig, which created a very positive impression and attracted people. It was the first aspect of the Fleadh that many people encountered for the opening of the Fleadh on Sunday 12 August 2018. For the Fleadh the location of Bolton Square was significant. Donnelly (2020) noted that:

> *Bolton Square then quickly became the preference for the Gig Rig as it was referred to because it was town centre, within the centre of that Fleadh*

Figure 13.2a: Bolton Square Car Park. Photograph: Daithí Kearney (2020).

Figure 13.2b: The view from backstage on the Gig Rig during the Fleadh. Photograph: Robin Barnes (2019).

> *village type approach that we were taking and it was an area that could be easily managed. The challenges around it were the residents that surrounded it and the traders that face onto to site. So we engaged very early on with the residents on that.*

Donnelly engaged in individual correspondence with the residents as the Runaí of the Fleadh committee, informed by his role with the Local Authority. He remembers that there was some concern from residents about the impact of activities in Bolton Square but they were reassured by the plan for managing activities and the benefits it would bring to the area. Their cooperation 'evolved in the months and particularly the last few weeks coming up to it when all of the houses surrounding it decked their houses out in flags and bunting for the Fleadh' (Donnelly 2020). Donnelly noted that there was a greater challenge with the businesses as, in some cases, there was reduced access to their normal customers, particularly at weekends, but the Council facilitated deliveries and worked 'to convince them that the benefits … they would get from people attending the Gig Rig would outweigh any shortcoming there was from the closure of traffic through traffic for the duration of the Fleadh'.

The Official Fleadh Opening each year was held on the Gig Rig Stage in Bolton Square and presided over by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins. The attendance of the President, favourable weather and curiosity surrounding the opening event contributed to a large crowd estimated at 15,000 in the square. In advance of the President's arrival in 2018, music, song and dance was performed by staff, students and graduates from Dundalk Institute of Technology and members of Nós Nua – the Louth Youth Folk Orchestra. In 2019, the entertainment was provided by resident musicians in the Oriel Centre, Dundalk Gaol, a regional centre for CCÉ. The Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar also visited Drogheda both years and began a public walkabout from the Gig Rig. The Gig Rig provided a focal point for thousands of Fleadh visitors and was a popular attraction for locals with 80 performances and 59 hours of programming throughout eight days of the Fleadh.

There was an effort to encourage participatory activities at the Gig Rig. Dancing featured prominently in Bolton Square and local dance schools featured each day. The large square also made it possible to incorporate participatory dancing and a céilí[2] was held on a Wednesday night each year. Singing was also encouraged and, in 2018, the Monday night featured Cas Amhrán,[3] the culmination of a project whereby schoolchildren in Louth were taught several Irish-language songs in preparation for the Fleadh. The audience at the Gig Rig were encouraged to sing along. Although the schools' project did not take place in 2019, the event at the Gig Rig took place again. As well as Irish traditional music groups, two of the local brass bands and the Royal Meath Accordion Orchestra performed and included some Irish traditional music in their repertoire for the occasion. Groups from Korea and Turkey also added an international flavour with music from their respective traditions. Other international

groups included Irish traditional music ensembles 'Ceoltóirí Óg na Breataine' and 'Feith an Cheoil' from Britain and the 'Centre for Irish Music Minnesota' from America.

While the Gig Rig did not feature on television broadcasts from the Fleadh, it did facilitate a live radio broadcast of RTÉ's *Céilí House* on the Saturday night each year, continuing a longstanding tradition. The official end of the Fleadh, a performance by the newly crowned All-Ireland Céilí Band Champions, also took place as the last event on a Sunday night at the Gig Rig. In 2019, this included a formal act of 'handing over' the Fleadh to the town of Mullingar for 2020. The focus on the Gig Rig for the opening and closing events of the Fleadh underlined its significance and, reinforced by the large numbers in attendance, ensured that it dominated many peoples' memories of the event.

'Music at the Gate', St Laurence's Gate

St Laurence's Gate is one of the most striking architectural structures in Drogheda and an important part of the tourism infrastructure. Smith notes 'the relationship between monuments, capital city status and tourism marketing' stating 'Monuments have always been useful promotional tools for cities; employed both in traditional advertising literature and as a more subtle form of place marketing' (Smith 2007, 79). St Laurence's Gate was utilised when CCÉ sent their selection panel to the town. Laurence Street became 'Fleadh Street', where a mini-Fleadh was presented for a day to the adjudicators. Martin (2020) stated: 'We used the spectacle of the street leading to the gate as part of our bid that year.' The Gate itself had been open to traffic until recently and this presented challenges for the utilisation of the space and the preservation of the building. Commenting on the potential to have music activities located at this space during the Fleadh, Donnelly noted that the pedestrianisation of St Laurence's Gate was 'ongoing before the Fleadh but the Fleadh was seen as something that was hopefully going to come to Drogheda'. Before and during the 2018 Fleadh, an event entitled 'Music at the Gate' took place.

Established independently of the FEC by local uilleann piper Darragh Ó Héiligh in September 2017 in anticipation of the Fleadh in Drogheda, 'Music at the Gate' took place on the pedestrianised area in front of St Laurence's Gate. Ó Héiligh noted that the first event was in response to the closure of the gate to traffic in the preceding weeks and was an effort to involve the local community in Irish traditional music and promote cooperation amongst stakeholders (interview, 27 August 2020). Despite the success of the event in attracting an audience, as well as performers who gave their time voluntarily, Ó Héiligh did not consider the space particularly suitable and organisers and performers had to negotiate several challenges. Nevertheless, Ó Héiligh believes that space was ideally located for people attending the Fleadh.

Figure 13.3: 'Music at the Gate'. Photograph: Robin Barnes (2018).

Figure 13.4: View of St Laurence's Gate. Photograph: Daithí Kearney.

This monument built in the twelfth century is a prominent emblem of Drogheda's heritage and provided a striking backdrop for musicians from Drogheda, other parts of Louth, Meath, Monaghan, Dublin and other areas of Ireland to share music in an open-air space on a Saturday morning. As a voluntary and family-friendly event, the website lists several aims including increasing the visibility and accessibility of traditional Irish music to everyone in Drogheda with emphasis on young families. Although not affiliated to CCÉ, there was significant representation from people also involved in the organisation of the Fleadh and members of the local branch.

'Music at the Gate' events were held every day during the Fleadh in 2018, but did not take place during the 2019 event due to difficulties complying with Health and Safety requirements set out by the Event Management company (Ó Héiligh 2020) and the location of spaces for televised recordings nearby (Drogheda Life 2019). While 'Music at the Gate' reflected a grassroots music desire to initiate change, it did so outside of the structures of the Fleadh and challenges relating to the use of public space, including issues of insurance and public safety, access to the tower for 'Visits to the Gate' and plans for filming in the area. While in many instances, efforts to 'professionalise' the Fleadh brought about benefits for performers and audiences, in this instance, it created challenges for those involved. This echoes the work of anthropologist Adam Kaul (2014) who has critiqued the tension between buskers and the local authority at the Cliffs of Moher. The politics of music festivals, including regulation and conflict, as well as identity construction in terms of authenticity, identity and performativity are key themes in Gibson and Connell's (2005) discussion of music festivals within the context of music tourism. Gibson and Connell note a shift in music festivals from a community orientation to commercial motives since the 1960s (2005, 211). However, it is notable that, at the Fleadh, many of the musicians, singers and dancers participate for the pleasure of the experience rather than for financial gain and the festival is also dependent on a very significant team of volunteers.

A statement from 'Music at the Gate' published in local newspapers prior to the 2019 Fleadh noted support for the initiative from Louth County Council, Drogheda Comhaltas, the Fleadh Executive Committee, Laurence Street residents and the commercial traders in Laurence Street and the surrounding area but acknowledged that 'Music at the Gate' was never a formal activity of the Fleadh programme in 2018. It states:

> *There was an approach to the Fleadh Executive Committee early in 2019 to run 'Music at the Gate' during Fleadh 2019 on a more structured basis than it had been in 2018. The Fleadh Executive Committee (FEC) agreed that the event could be listed as a Fringe Event, but that the FEC, which is a small voluntary committee, did not have the resources to include it as a formal Fleadh event.* (Drogheda Life, 2019, 1)

The FEC and their agents including Safe Events (the Fleadh Event Management Contractor) engaged with the organisers of 'Music at the Gate'. The ambitious plans for 'Music at the Gate' during Fleadh 2019 would have been accompanied by significant financial and production costs for the organisers that included stage and production management, sound, health and safety controls, security and medical cover to list a few. Despite the cancellation of some Fleadh activities, the efforts of Ó Héilligh and the 'Music at the Gate' team were otherwise recognised, including Ó Héiligh receiving a Local Hero award in August 2019 and Ó Héiligh and other regular contributors to 'Music at the Gate' engaged in other performances and music-making opportunities during the Fleadh.

It is arguable that unlike the Guggenheim in Bilbao (see Plaza, Tironi and Haarich 2009; Ockman 2004), St Laurence's Gate has not become a destination icon but, to some extent, it has developed a synecdochal role for Drogheda, being a part of the town but representing it as a whole (see also Smith 2005). The Council did do some minor works surrounding the Gate and, in conjunction with the Office of Public Works, the Gate was open for a small number of visits during the Fleadh. It was the backdrop for a lot of the television and video crews who wished to record artists playing in Drogheda and the success of it at the Fleadh has underlined the council's long-term plans is to improve that as a plaza area.

West Street and St Peter's Plaza

Drogheda retains aspects of the old medieval street layout. West Street provides a long but quite narrow street, which became the hub of the festival. The space in front of the church became an important space and was utilised for flash mobs and other broadcasts on Fleadh TV. Beyond the Fleadh, when the weather is fine the steps are a space that attracts people to sit and relax. St Peter's Parish Church is a Roman Catholic church in the French Gothic style built with local limestone ashlar in 1884. A popular tourist destination in the town, it contains the shrine of St. Oliver Plunkett, a local saint. The steps to the front of the building create a natural performance space that was popular during the Fleadh. Donnelly (2020) noted that when St Peter's Church was refurbished, it was agreed to take down the railings and create this open space in the centre of Drogheda that would be more inviting and more user friendly for people with access issues.

Like St Laurence's Gate, the church provided an iconic backdrop for some of the televised footage of the Fleadh. However, a large portion of this space remains the property of the church and there was close cooperation between the church authorities, the County Council, and CCÉ to ensure the safe use of this space, with agreements on issues such as insurance (Robinson 2020).[4]

One of the challenges for the FEC related to how the steps and plaza in front of St Peter's Church would be cleaned and how space would be managed. With

the aid of the Garda Síochána, the steps were closed during the second year, with barriers each night from approximately 8.30 pm allowing capacity for them to be cleaned. It was a recognition that, beyond this time in the evening, the nature of the crowd and activities changed, affected by the consumption of alcohol. While there was never a significant issue, a changed approach was taken in the second year that was considered more successful.

It is clear from some of the printed material distributed by CCÉ that busking, the performance of music on the street in the expectation of receiving money from passers-by, is frowned upon. Nevertheless, there is a desire to have musicians play on the street and this has become a prominent feature of Fleadhanna Cheoil. Representatives of the County Council who were involved in the committee and who had visited the previous Fleadhanna in Clare and Cavan recognised the interest people had in artists performing on the street and sought to accommodate that, without engaging in a debate about the expectation of financial remuneration. Such a debate is beyond the remit of this chapter but it was noticeable that many musicians, particularly children and young people, performed with a receptacle, often an open instrument case, and received the money. Others, including some well-known older musicians, also performed on the street but with no visual means to collect money.

Opportunities and Challenges

The Fleadh seeks to promote a family-friendly atmosphere and many events facilitate inter-generational engagement. Activities such as Scoil Éigse, the weeklong workshops in Irish traditional music, song and dance, held in conjunction with the Fleadh, attracts large numbers of participants. However, the Fleadh has also been associated with the consumption of alcohol and has, since the 1950s, attracted a significant number of people who 'come for the craic' and engage in socialising without having a strong interest in the music or other involvement in CCÉ. The use and reconstitution of public spaces are critical to the success of the event.

Lefebvre (1991) acknowledges the constructed nature of the space, whilst also considering how it is simultaneously porous. The constructed and physical segregation of space at a Fleadh promotes, creates and changes the lived experience of festival attendees within it. The chapter identified how the Fleadh was spatially formed, segregating the contained spaces, before considering how they are being subverted and socially reconsidered. This division is important as it encourages a way of seeing space and conceptualising it. Space is segregated by using fencing, creating an inside and outside; these distinct areas have different production and consumption behaviours. For example at the Gig Rig, Bolton Square, the outside quickly becomes 'the real world', synonymous with everyday social, cultural norms and experiences of the normal production of labour, patterns and routines; while 'inside'

becomes home with new forms of social and spatial phenomena and narratives, and where alternative production and consumption practices take place. The Gig Rig and 'Music at the Gate' have an almost invisible boundary between one socially controlled space and the emergence of a new form of space inside, one informed by a different set of norms and practices. The boundary of a Fleadh, the entry points and gates present a picture of social control. The gate and entry point between the two spaces is policed. This marshalling signifies how the authorities enforces social control – purposely making a statement about zero tolerance – which, within the fence, cannot and is not enforced to a successful degree.

Moving away from fencing there are other elements to the Fleadh that are unique in the space. Stages are erected to look out over the audience zone, and within the sites, there are designated areas for staff, performers, children, families, VIP campers and traders. 'Music at the Gate' utilised such space with different parameters– an elaborately constructed space, changing open streets into segmented spaces with their own sets of rules and regulations. As the space is segmented, objects take on new meanings, the lanyard takes on new importance by giving access to areas, allowing the owner freedom of movement or not. The ethnographic approach in the study identified a more porous construction of the Fleadh music festivals by their attendees and of what Lefebvre (1991) calls representational space, one that extends beyond the space and time of a festival. There is a longer-lasting effect and mentality that transcends the festival time and moves into attendee's everyday lives.

The success of the Fleadh in Drogheda can be measured on several levels but interviewees noted the engagement of the community as one aspect, in addition to the economic gains for business and the boost in marketing the town to a wider audience. The attendances at 'Music at the Gate' and the increased enrolment in Irish traditional music classes were also connected with the success of the Fleadh in promoting participation in Irish traditional arts.

Conclusion

The 'use and reconfiguration' of space in event contexts presents opportunities and challenges for stakeholders. Local authorities may make plans for these spaces and festival organisers may identify specific spaces for particular activities but it is critical to engage with other stakeholders for the event to be successful. Stakeholders may subvert or colonise spaces not intended as performance spaces, spaces for the consumption of alcohol or other activities that are engaged in during the Fleadh. Both the planned and unplanned activities highlight the potential of these spaces for future use and adaptation. There is an interrelationship between the social processes and the construction of space, with each influencing, shaping and transforming the other. Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) classification of space, the chapter evaluated

how the Fleadh context embodied the triad of space: conceived, perceived and representational space. The Fleadh attendees and performers appropriated and altered the space within the festival, producing space that allowed people to engage and play music in public spaces that were previously unused for such activities.

Drogheda demonstrated its success in terms of Fleadh attendance (750,000 people) and economic benefit (€50 million each year, Fáilte Ireland) but it is the reimagination of space in the town that may be the long-lasting legacy. The Fleadh was a flagship event that led to a reimagining of spaces in Drogheda and played an important role in the recognition of Drogheda as a 'Destination Town' by Fáilte Ireland. Joan Martin (2020) noted that a significant legacy for the town was the realisation that 'Drogheda can do festivals' and the enhanced confidence of local communities and businesses. Drogheda had the capacity both in terms of crowds and organisational resources and was well located to attract large crowds. The support and confidence of Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourist Development Authority in the town to deliver on future projects was also important. The successful use of public spaces highlighted how these spaces could be used differently, such as the part or temporary pedestrianisation of West Street for events – or in response to Covid-19 – as well as bringing Dominic's Park, the site of the Fleadh Dome, into public consciousness as a space that could be utilised more.

Notes

[1] At the time of the first Fleadh in 2018, Paddy Donnelly was Director of Services with Louth County Council with responsibility for operations and local services. He was seconded as a special project lead to facilitate the delivery of the Fleadh in 2018 and then subsequently reassigned again in 2019. He served as secretary to the Fleadh Executive Committee and was the Council liaison, providing an overarching awareness of council services as well as engaging with stakeholders on behalf of the Council around the Fleadh. He led a team that provided a secretariat to the Fleadh committee in Drogheda.

[2] While the word can refer to a social gathering in Irish or Scottish Gaelic, in this context it refers to a form of dancing, usually in sets of eight people.

[3] 'Cas Amhrán' involved primary school students learning six chosen Irish language songs in school before the Fleadh. The event was aimed at increasing children's awareness of Irish culture and tradition and encouraging them to immerse themselves in this year's Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

[4] Concerns around security and a desire on the part of some to reinstate the railings were highlighted in local newspapers in July and December 2018, despite recognising the benefits of using the space during the Fleadh. (*Drogheda Independent* 2018; *Drogheda Life*, 2018).

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