



***Return to Fingal: The heritage and practice of
Irish traditional music in North County Dublin***

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In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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August 2022

Declaration

We, the undersigned declare that this thesis entitled *Return to Fingal: The heritage and practice of Irish traditional music in North County Dublin* is entirely the author's own work and has not been taken from the work of others, except as cited and acknowledged within the text.

The thesis has been prepared according to the regulations of Dundalk Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in this or any other institution.

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a great many people who have helped me in the course of my research and preparation of this dissertation. In the first instance, I wish to express a very sincere thanks to all the interviewees who shared their knowledge and time in assisting me in completing the research. These are in alphabetical order: Victor Byrne, Mary Capplis, Denis Carolan, Denis Collins, Sally Corr, Liam Curran, Joanne Cusack, Breda Dockrell, Grace Dowling, Naoise Drohan, Joe Foley, Michael Gavin, Jim Grant, Bill Haneman, Joe Hughes, Mairead Hughes, Jim Jackman, Carol Keane, Mary Keane, Dave Kennerney, Fiona King, Terry Kirk, Ray Lawlor, Antóin Mac Gabhann, Seán MacPhilíbin, Jacqui Martin, Mossie Martin, Mags Maxwell, Paula Murray, Aisling Ní Ghiobéin, Jerry Nulty, Martin Nulty, John O'Brien, Dave O'Connor, Mick O'Connor, Eithne O'Donnell, Kevin O'Keeffe, James O'Mahony, Donal O'Sullivan, Una Redmond, Sarah May Roberts, Christy Sheridan, Niall Walsh, and Pdraig Walsh.

Thanks are due to Rory O'Byrne of the Arts Office in Fingal County Council; Deirdre Roche and Shane Power of the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre; Emer McGowan of the Draíocht Centre in Blanchardstown; Brian Kavanagh of Fingal Local Studies and Archives; Paul Flynn and Catherine Boothman of the Arts Council of Ireland; Kathleen Hannigan of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; and Treasa Harkin of the Irish Traditional Music Archive. I also acknowledge the assistance of Music Generation and various music schools, branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and other organisations associated with the transmission or performance of Irish traditional music in Fingal. I appreciate the expressions of goodwill and encouragement I received from the many musicians and others interested in traditional music whom I met at music sessions and other events while pursuing my research enquiries.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance I received from Dundalk Institute of Technology under its Postgraduate Scholarship Programme and its COVID-19 Relief Fund as well as the support and help provided by the Institute's Postgraduate Research Office and Centre for the Creative Arts. They provided vital training, advice and guidance throughout my research programme and I also benefited from the comradeship and scholarship of fellow postgraduate students and staff in the Institute. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Irish Research Council through the Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship Programme.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my supervisors Dr Daithí Kearney and Dr Helen Lawlor for their advice, guidance, patience, goodwill and encouragement and not least for their enormous scholarship and friendship throughout my research and preparation of this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their on-going support in helping me bring the project to fruition. Regular enthusiastic words of encouragement from my children, Aoife, Maria and Eamon served to reinforce my determination. The project could not have been undertaken in the first instance without the incredible help of my wife Mary - lifting spirits when enthusiasm was flagging, talking through the intricacies of navigating the research programme, providing a sounding board to critically challenge research conclusions and accepting without hesitation the thousands of hours I was obliged to spend at my reading and writing endeavours. During the period of the research Mary and I welcomed the birth of four beautiful granddaughters: Hayley, Georgina, Sophia and Isabelle who, together with our grandson Jack, are a gift beyond compare.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandchildren Jack, Hayley, Georgina, Sophia and Isabelle.
May they also enjoy the many pleasures of playing Irish traditional music throughout their lives.

Abstract

This dissertation presents a critical examination of the heritage and practice of Irish traditional music today in North County Dublin, a local government administrative county also known as Fingal. The area has experienced much population growth and demographic change in recent years. This research critically examines the practice of the music within local community settings with a focus on recreational musicians and how they engage with the music, including learning and performing. An ecosystem approach is adopted in the examination, involving the application of a five-domain analytical framework developed by Schippers and Grant (2016), to comprehend an array of actors, physical and social factors, wider community and commercial influences and, not least, official actions at national and local levels that impact now on the practice of Irish traditional music in Fingal.

The research identifies an increase in interest in playing Irish traditional music in Fingal between circa 1980 and 2010. The increase was associated with particular locations within the county, while in many other areas the music continued to have limited visibility and that remains the position today. Engagement with the music has also weakened in some areas over the past decade. To understand why that should be so despite public investment and plans supporting traditional music being in place, the research examines national and local policies and actions to foster the music at county level. The methodology included undertaking interviews with 52 individuals drawn from across the community demographic. The dissertation presents detailed accounts of how ten individuals personally engage with traditional music and recognises a need for the development of a new vision and official measures to encourage and support recreational musicians engaging in participatory performance in their communities.

Keywords: Irish traditional music, traditional music, recreational musician, music ecosystem, analytical framework, participatory performance, Fingal, North County Dublin.

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Acronyms

ACI	Arts Council of Ireland (national agency for funding the arts in Ireland)
CCÉ	Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (organisation that promotes Irish traditional music)
FCC	Fingal County Council (local authority responsible for Fingal admin. Area)
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association (organisation that promotes Gaelic games)
SEAC	Séamus Ennis Arts Centre (arts centre located in Naul, Fingal)
RTE	Raidió Teilifís Éireann (national television broadcasting network)
TG4	Teilifís na Gaeilge (national Irish language television network)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Project Overview

This research critically examines the heritage and practice of Irish traditional music in community life today in North County Dublin, a geographic area and designated local government administrative county known as Fingal (Figure 1, page 2, locates Fingal In Ireland and Figure 3, page 59 identifies the main towns in the county).¹ Similar to elsewhere in Ireland, playing Irish traditional music and engaging in other traditional customs, such as mumming at Christmas time, were once strong features of community life in Fingal but weakened as the twentieth century progressed.² Increasing interest in and performance of traditional music was experienced in Fingal from the closing decades of the twentieth century, again reflecting developments nationally. However, this re-engagement with traditional music was associated with particular locations within the county while in other areas the music continued to have limited visibility, and that remains the position today. Understanding why that should be so, at a time when official strategies and plans, public funding and structures are now in place to support the development of Irish traditional music, is an important issue in relation to the on-going development of the music as an art form and to the practice of the music today within local communities. Focusing the research on Fingal, a county that has experienced much social and demographic change in recent decades, provides a valuable exemplar from which to understand the circumstances of traditional music in modern society and to draw lessons for application further afield. A central conclusion of the research is the need for a new vision for

¹ The focus of this research is on the performance of Irish traditional instrumental music. Section 1.3 addresses definitions of Irish traditional music. Unless otherwise stated, the use of terms 'Irish traditional music', 'traditional music', the 'music' and the 'tradition' anywhere in the text should be construed as having the same meaning, i.e. they all relate to Irish traditional music.

² Scholarship on this decline includes O'Shea (2008, Chapters 1 and 2).



Figure 1 Map of Ireland locating Fingal

Source: www.fingalcoco.ie

recreational playing of Irish traditional music in Fingal supported by measures to promote wider interest in the art form to secure the sustainability of the music as a valued community tradition.

This opening chapter explains the project, what motivated me to undertake it and the processes I followed to complete the work.

The research includes an examination of how traditional music is engaged with and organised in Fingal, what

processes of transmission and performance arrangements are evident, and what type of environments, physical spaces and networks exist that help to actualise involvement in music. Public and private support initiatives in place to broaden its appeal are also examined. An important focus of the project is on the involvement of the recreational player to the presence of the music in communities across the county, who the people are and how they engage with the music.

Section 1.2 sets out the research questions, motivation for the project and the challenges involved. The research process itself has been a living one, requiring periodic review to confirm progress towards achieving the research objectives and the continuing validity of the research questions, including as a result of the introduction of urgent public measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research methodologies pursued, entailing a mix of desk research

with in-depth fieldwork, are explained in section 1.4. To provide an appropriate analytical framework for the research, I have utilised an ecosystem approach posited by Schippers and Grant (2106), which is introduced in section 1.5, while greater detail of the model adopted, and its application, is provided in chapter two. Section 1.6 presents definitions of selected terminology used in the research, section 1.7 addresses the association of traditional music with the Irish language and an outline of the structure of the dissertation is provided in section 1.8. The urgent measures introduced by Government in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic included restrictions on movement and on meeting people more generally. In line with these measures, Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) instructed researchers not to undertake face-to-face meetings or interviews. At the time the measures were introduced a programme of fieldwork for this research that included face-to-face meetings and surveys was in hand. The fieldwork programme was adjusted to comply with official instructions, explained in chapter two. The COVID-19 restrictions involved the closure of all venues where traditional music is taught and performed. Thus, information gathered and reported in this research on engagement with activities normally associated with traditional music, such as attending sessions in public houses, relates to pre COVID-19 pandemic activities.

1.2 Aims and Motivation for the research

Three research questions framed the project:

1. What is the physical and social infrastructure for traditional music in North County Dublin?
2. Who are the stakeholders in the networks that support music making in the area?
3. How can funding and other supports be best used to consolidate and develop music making and participation in traditional music in the area?

The research questions are individually important but exploring the status and practice of traditional music through probing the interconnectivity and interplay of the questions to gain a deeper understanding, in effect constituting a fourth research question, is also central to this

project. Pursuing such an integrative approach enables a music system wide perspective to be developed and critiqued. At the outset of the project an additional research question had been included to review the socio-economic divisions that exist in traditional music making in Fingal. However, early research indicated that while some socio-economic divisions exist in the study area, the impact of these to an understanding of music-making in Fingal was not sufficiently significant to justify an extensive and methodologically challenging research process. I concluded that a more appropriate focus would be to critically consider a socio-spatial approach that is more closely aligned with the preceding research questions to provide greater depth rather than breadth in the overarching research.

To meet the objectives of the research, a multifaceted approach that engaged both the tangible and intangible heritage was necessary. While primarily an ethnomusicological study engaging both quantitative and ethnographic elements, the research also draws upon cultural geography, sociology, and recent scholarship from music ecology and community music to frame and inform the project. To engage with the complexity of music-making and participation at community level, the study draws on both international and national sources. Important among these are Finnegan (1989) who provided an in-depth exploration of the practice of music within an English community and Kearney (2009) who highlighted the need to develop an understanding of traditional music that moves away from a focus on regional styles to comprehending the role of networks and socio-economic factors on transmission and performance. The research also draws on Turino's (2008) categorisations of participatory and performative music, while Sommers Smith (2001) on how music has adapted to survive in the modern world is also among the perspectives explored. So too is Titon (1992, 2009) on the importance of community-based, ground-up efforts over top-down 'heritage' type organisations to underpin music sustainability and Rice (2014) and Titon (2020) on music ecosystems. Kaul (2009) provided insights on the impacts of radical social change and shifting musical traditions in Doolin, Co Clare. Turino (2008), Higgins (2012) and Kenny (2016) on understanding music

practices within community and social interactions and McCarthy (1999) and Cawley (2013a) in terms of transmission are also significant. Literature on public funding for the arts is largely international in its perspectives; studies on Ireland include Quinn (1998), O’Flynn (2009), Mullen (2016), Kavanagh (2019) and Talty (2020). This research, firmly grounded in fieldwork, generally reflects Finnegan’s (1989) emphasis: ‘on musical practices (what people do) ... Looking at practice rather than formalised texts or mental structures, at processes rather than products, at informal grass-roots activities’ (2007 edition, p.8). Account is taken of formal and informal structures present. Like Finnegan, no effort is made to establish the ‘best’ or ‘highest’, or what people ‘ought’ to do (p.6). The focus is on what they actually do.

My successful completion of an MA in Traditional Music Studies in DkIT in 2016, coupled with being a traditional musician performing regularly in Fingal and in Dublin City as well as being involved for over 25 years in running a community organisation teaching traditional music, animated my interest to further explore traditional music making and its place today in Irish society. This, following a career as a senior manager in the Irish Civil Service engaged in national policy formulation and implementation in disparate financial and social spheres, pointed to positioning my enquiries formally in the context of a research-based PhD project that examined the relationship between policy and music making as a lived experience.³ Even before returning to full-time education to undertake the MA study I had become increasingly

³ I have substantial experience in governmental business planning and services delivery. I served at Assistant Secretary General level, including as Director General of Maritime Affairs for Ireland, during my career as a senior manager in the Irish Civil Service. I gained significant personal experience in the formulation and delivery of public policies in several social and economic spheres, including the preparation of primary and secondary legislation. I interacted on an on-going basis with Government Ministers, public representatives, managerial leadership in local authorities and a wide range of public and private sector bodies. I have substantial experience in working within EU policy formulation processes and sectoral management committees, including serving as chairman on working groups. My experience includes leading teams in the preparation and delivery of national plans for the development of forestry, maritime safety (shipping and leisure craft), sustainable transport and travel, and national ports development, as well as serving on top-level governmental teams promoting cross-sectoral planning and development. My academic and professional qualifications in the business field include a B. Commerce degree from University College Dublin, an MSc. in Strategic Planning and Management from Trinity College Dublin and a Certificate in Strategic Management jointly awarded by the Irish Institute of Public Administration and The Kennedy School of Business in Harvard, Massachusetts, US.

concerned about aspects of the practice of traditional music in communities or, more precisely, the lack of it. Three issues in particular were notable. Firstly, I perceived a wide divergence between national narratives about the increasing strength of the music and what I felt was a decreasing visibility of the music within the community. I did not dispute that there could well be more professional and semi-professional traditional music artists than ever performing on television, in concerts and in other public performance formats, or that attendances at festivals featuring Irish traditional music remained on an upward trajectory. My concern was that there was less traditional music being played or being heard in local community settings. Secondly, consequent to my long-term involvement in transmission activities, I observed that fewer and fewer young people were continuing to play traditional music after childhood lessons, in particular they did not engage in social music making despite the relative ease with which this is possible in Irish traditional music sessions generally in comparison to other music genres. Spitzer (2021, pp.14 and 15) notes that childhood engagement in playing Western music usually ceases in adulthood: '[A] marker, perhaps the very signature of Western music compared to the rest of the world, is a trajectory from active musical participation to passive listening . . . By adulthood, Western people's experience of music is usually entirely passive'. While continued playing into adulthood in Irish traditional music will inevitably reflect to some degree the wider Western norm highlighted by Spitzer, participating in session playing in social music making contexts can provide an attractive and convenient option to enable continued playing into and throughout adulthood.

Thirdly, I noted an important change in the language used to identify traditional musicians. It seemed to me that the term 'the arts community' and, on occasion, 'the creative community' had progressively been adopted at national and official levels to identify those involved in the arts, with both the print and broadcast media amplifying and validating the use of these terms in reporting on arts issues. Vested interests promoting traditional arts as an industry, including professional artists themselves and industry stakeholders, could be expected to pursue their own

agendas and separate identity. The adoption by official bodies and political representatives of that terminology without, it seemed to me, any parallel recognition of the world of recreational playing was concerning. It begged such questions as: Is this ‘arts community’ a bounded group? Where does the wider community sit in such categorisations? Is engagement with the arts and creativity to be mainly perceived now in commodification terms? Is anybody asking questions about the health of traditional music playing within communities more generally, similar to the manner in which issues relating to the health of the arts industry (including the traditional arts industry) are aired? Thus, for example, I wondered if challenges to recreational playing were being identified (see chapter four) and addressed by any party? I suspected not, but either way it was clear to me that without investigation it would not be possible to provide a definitive view on the practice today of Irish traditional music in Fingal.

My MA research tracked the delivery and impact of four projects funded by the Arts Council of Ireland under their DEIS small grants scheme for the development of the traditional arts. Traditional music competes alongside other music genres for performance spaces, public engagement and state support. The knowledge and understanding gleaned during this research informed my initial steps in doctoral research. Social and economic changes in Ireland, particularly over the past forty years, coupled with the impacts of globalisation forces and advances in communications technologies, influence how people engage with music. Population drift from rural to urban areas continues, with Fingal significantly affected, a key driver being its proximity to Dublin City.⁴ This presents both challenges and opportunities for the practice and promotion of traditional music in the county today and raises the exigency of

⁴ The Central Statistics Office report *Urban and Rural Life in Ireland* published in 2019 shows that just over three in ten people in Ireland (31.4%) now live in a rural area, 4% above the EU average of 27.3%. It shows the decline in rural living is continuing. Between 2011 and 2016 there was a fall of 0.6% in the number of people living in ‘Highly rural/remote areas’. CSO website: [Introduction - CSO - Central Statistics Office \(accessed 27/10/2021\)](#)

better understanding how people engage with the musical heritage in what are significant changing demographic, cultural, economic and social circumstances.

Living and playing music in Fingal provided opportunities for me to employ autoethnographic memory, highlighted by Higgins (2012, p.9), in addition to participation observation described by Shelemay (2008, p.141), Finnegan (2007, pp. 342-344) and others, raising emic–etic issues, and consideration has been given to these in chapter two. I sought to avoid unintentionally straying into the arena of applied ethnomusicology, described by Harrison, Mackinlay and Pettan (2010). I wanted to avoid adopting an advocacy role in favour of remaining as neutral observer. There is substantial literature addressing Irish traditional music in such contexts as regional style, canon, musical influences and performance. This research considers personal and social factors, networks and processes, institutional arrangements and other issues that shape local engagement with the music, with a focus on the recreational player. These are aspects of the music that have not received the same degree of examination as other elements and, in that regard, adds to scholarship on Irish traditional music. The research is also intended to inform Irish traditional music practitioners and stakeholders in Fingal and contribute to national and local arts policy formulation relating to music practice in community settings.

1.3 Irish Traditional Music

The focus of this research is on the performance of Irish traditional instrumental music. Providing a definition of Irish traditional music is widely recognised as difficult. Carolan (1991), then Director of the Irish Traditional Music Archive, says it: ‘is best understood as a very broad term that includes many types of singing and instrumental music, music of many periods ... essentially ‘oral’ in character’. Vallely (2011, pp.687-690), drawing on Carolan, highlights that the music: (1) is known and associated with particular sets of sounds, (2) has a large number of melodic and lyric constructions, and (3) has a comprehensive body of validating lore. Carolan and Vallely stress important characteristics associated with the music, including: it is handed down from generation to generation; it is essentially oral in nature with

greater fluidity than notation-based music; certain instruments are widely associated with playing the music—including tin whistle, fiddle, wooden concert flute, uilleann pipes, button accordion, harp, concertina and banjo; the bulk of the music played is fast isometric dance music such as jigs, reels and hornpipes; and tunes (and songs) are changed over time by successive performers, becoming the production of a community of artists. Valley also notes that there is today a significant non-Irish-national practice and consumption of the music but that: ‘the over-riding quality is the music’s aural nature, its ‘sound’, which is why Ireland and Irish communities remain at the centre of this music’s practice’ (p.690).

Ó Canainn (1978, p.1) critiques the use of the adjective ‘traditional’, which implies that something in the music is passed down: ‘some of the best-known pieces in the traditional musician’s repertoire are of fairly recent origin. They are accepted because they conform in some way to the performers concept of what is traditional – they sound right!’. Ó hAllmhuráin (2017, p.8) suggests the music is ‘best understood as a broad-based system which accommodates a complex process of musical convergence, coalescence and innovation over time’, while Hamilton (1996, p.82) posits that it is the music community that acts in a gatekeeping fashion in deciding the ‘traditionality’ of a piece of music or song.

1.4 Methodologies

1.4.1 Personal preparation for the project

A critical review of literature formed an essential process throughout the research effort, serving both to inform the research and my personal learning. Relevant literature addressed in chapter two covered such matters as readings in the theory and practice of ethnomusicology, music in communities, public policy making in the arts, music ecology, concepts from sociology and geography and on research best practice, methodologies and analysis. To prepare myself to successfully undertake the research challenge through personal learning and engagement with the academic community, I attended a series of postgraduate researcher training modules provided by the Research Office of DkIT in the first year of the programme, listed at Appendix

1.2, to equip myself with key skills to design, manage and deliver in full all aspects of my intended research project. I also participated in several postgraduate discussion / exchange initiatives in the Institute to gain learning from the work of others in research fields. Throughout the research period I delivered papers at 11 academic conferences, listed at Appendix 1.3, in each instance presenting on aspects of my evolving research.

1.4.2 Gathering data

The project involved a mix of desk-based research and in-depth fieldwork through engaging in quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Barz and Cooley (2008) and Nettl (2015) were principal sources in guiding the practicalities of fieldwork (see chapter two), while Finnegan's (1989) notes on method and presentation guided the approach to data collection in the project (2007 edition, pp.342-347). Various hard and soft data sets were assembled in pursuance of the research, the former generally quantitative in nature and the latter primarily qualitative. Hard data included information on stakeholders; musicians; activities associated with the promotion, transmission and performance of the music; physical structures linked to the tradition; demographic, geographic, social and historic data relating to Fingal; and details of policies and financial support programmes in place to promote and support the music. Much of the hard data was gleaned through research processes involving mapping and tracking traditional music activities, web searches, targeted investigation and correspondence with stakeholders. Interviews with key informants, attendance at activities such as sessions and festivals were also important conduits for collection. Websites of official bodies or relevant national organisations were key sources too.⁵ These websites facilitated securing geographic, historic and demographic information, while helpful information was also obtained from disparate local sources such as published texts and newspapers, the Fingal County archive, local historical

⁵ Examples include the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Central Statistics Office, Fingal County Council, the Arts Council of Ireland, the Folklore Department in University College Dublin, the Irish Traditional Music Archive and the Draíocht and Séamus Ennis arts centres.

societies and individuals with relevant knowledge of places, activities and events. Soft information includes evidence of networks and social arrangements, local customs and knowledge and stakeholders' views, interests and perspectives. This form of information constituted a significant portion of the overall data available to the research. Ethnography was particularly important in accessing this information involving interviewing key members of the Irish traditional music community, providing much of the material presented in chapter four on Irish traditional musicking in Fingal and in chapter five on the lived experience of individuals associated with traditional music in the county.

A total of 52 individuals were interviewed in the course of the research, listed in Appendix 1.1, including a brief biography for each one. In addition, discussions were held, and email correspondence exchanged, with officials from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Arts Council of Ireland and Fingal County Council. While the personal stories of ten interviewees are reported on in detail in chapter five—exploring their lived experience of the music from first engaging with it to how it impacts on their lives today—information gathered from all interviewees informed the research. The interviewees comprised musicians, event organisers, teachers, performers or other influential roles such as policy makers and people with valuable knowledge about traditional music more generally, past and present, in the county. They were selected from across the community demographic and were representative of key elements of the traditional music ecosystem in Fingal. Account was also taken in so far as possible of gender and age representation, resulting in 31 males and 21 females being interviewed. The ten stories presented in chapter five provide a deeper exploration of personal involvement with traditional music collectively affording a fuller picture of the practice of the music tradition in the community today. Interviews were undertaken on a semi-structured basis to facilitate exploration of issues surfacing during the discussions. An information note was supplied in advance to interviewees, combining a consent form and an indication of questions to be addressed, an example of which is at Appendix 1.4. The indicative

list of questions was varied to target the circumstances or interests of interviewees. Pursuing the interviews on a semi-structured basis was important in helping to explore the interconnectivity and interplay of the research questions and also between the different domains of the ecosystem analytical model chosen—section 1.5 below. In the case of many interviewees who are musicians, the formal interview was followed by the author and interviewee playing tunes together. While the playing of tunes enhanced my relationship with the interviewees and reinforced my identity and personality, the repertoire played provided little additional insight into or information about the actual repertoire of the Fingal music community beyond confirming the fact that the repertoire is not locally distinctive. Interviews during the course of fieldwork indicated a wide variety of sources for and influences on repertoire, challenging the formation of an identifiable local musical repertoire or style, although the presence of some locally composed tunes is acknowledged (section 4.6.8) with the publication of a collection of tunes by local organisation Rinceoil Fingal in 2022. See also section 4.4.4 regarding repertoire played in Fingal.

As a result of COVID-19 restrictions (see section 1.1 above), both face-to-face and online interviews were conducted, the former mainly completed before the introduction of the restrictions. Almost all of the face-to-face interviews were conducted in the homes of the interviewees. Appendix 1.1, identifying all interviewees, provides the dates of interviews and indicates whether it was conducted on a face-to-face or an online basis. Interviews with nine of the ten individuals reported on in chapter five took place in their homes. A copy of the consent form utilised is at Appendix 1.4. Interviews were recorded. Copies of interview transcripts and recordings are stored electronically on a password protected computer in possession of the researcher in accordance with the Institute's research data storage and ethics guidelines and in compliance with EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules, enabling further analysis and interrogation by me in the future, again subject to GDPR rules. Unless otherwise

stated, in this dissertation direct quotations attributed to interviewees are taken verbatim from the recorded transcripts of interviews.

Information was also acquired through engaging in processes of participant observation (see section 2.3.3). In this regard, I attended local events, sessions in pubs and private houses, and performances during which I engaged with participants on topics prompted by reference to the analytical framework, to further amplify the ecosystem jigsaw. I undertook an online survey seeking information on public interest and engagement with traditional music. Respondents who played traditional music were additionally asked about their involvement with the music. Although it had been planned from the outset to undertake a detailed face-to-face survey based on targeted populations, travel and movement restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic limited the form of surveying possible. Nevertheless, it was important to undertake a survey since this research had established that little hard information on the practice of traditional music by recreational musicians in Fingal exists. The survey elicited over 500 responses, including from 176 musicians, providing valuable information in relation to public interest in the music and learning, family involvement and session playing habits of musicians. The survey is addressed in chapter four.

1.5 Ecosystem Approach

Although reports such as those of annually increasing attendances at Ireland's largest traditional music festival, Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, now claimed to be over 500,000 people, may be viewed as attesting to the strength of Irish traditional music in the country today, they cannot be seen as representative of what is happening in the tradition at individual and community levels.⁶ Schippers and Grant (2016, para. 1) assert that to analyse the status of a local music

⁶ Claims by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, the main organisation in Ireland teaching Irish traditional music, for attendances at its annual Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. These are regularly published in *Treoir*, the quarterly magazine distributed to members of the organisation.

tradition, where significant and ongoing demographic, technological and socioeconomic forces for change are present, requires a sufficiently complex analytical framework that enables probing beyond the more obvious manifestations of a music tradition such as the numbers of players, the performances and transmission processes. These manifestations offer important empirical evidence but including a more comprehensive contextualisation facilitates better informed responses to the suite of big ‘w’ questions—which, what, where, when, and why. To take such a holistic view, Titon (1992, 2009, 2020) and Schippers (2014, 2015) are leading advocates for adopting an ecology approach, of which the ecosystem is the dominant paradigm. I draw on Schippers and Grant’s (2016) five-domain assessment framework to assist in the analysis of Fingal’s traditional music ecosystem. Schippers and Grant describe the framework as a means ‘of organising and analyzing (sic) data to generate insights and their impact[s]’ (p.11). The five domains in the framework are, respectively, (1) systems of learning, (2) musicians and communities, (3) contexts and constructs, (4) infrastructure and regulations, and (5) media and the music industry. Chapter two (section 2.4) provides greater detail on the concept and application of the model, including principles underpinning music sustainability posited by Titon (2009).

1.6 Terminology

Because of the importance of reflecting the range of interests associated with playing Irish traditional music in the community today, I draw on Small’s (1998, p.9) concept of ‘musicking’ to provide a method of conceptualising engagement with the music in the widest sense by the community, including providing helpful vocabulary to describe and define such engagement: *‘To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composition), or by dancing’* (italics in original). It should be noted too that, as emphasised by Small, the use of the verb ‘to music’ or ‘to musick’ is not concerned with valuation: ‘It is descriptive, not prescriptive. It covers all participation in a musical performance’ (p.9).

Likewise, the value or interpretation participants place on an event or performance is not, for the most part, of immediate concern in this research given that it is an endeavour to take an ecosystem view of the practice of the art form. However, in certain instances it has some relevance, such as in understanding the lived experience of musicians (chapter five) or relating to policy making in support of the Irish traditional music sector (chapter six) and is addressed in those circumstances in the relevant chapters.

Throughout the text, references to Irish traditional music ‘sessions’ reflect the definition provided in Vallely (2011, p.610): ‘A loose association of musicians who meet, generally, but not always, in a pub to play an unpredetermined selection, mainly of dance music, but sometimes with solo pieces such as slow airs or songs’. The use of the term ‘transmission’ refers to any form of process, informal or formal, of passing on the music to another individual or group of individuals. McCarthy (1999) and Veblen (1994) provide extensive reviews of transmission of Irish traditional music. More recently, on-line transmission has advanced, expedited lately by restrictions on face-to-face meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the term ‘community’ is used in the context of describing specific group formations constructed for the purposes of transmission or performance, as in ‘Communities of Musical Practice’ described in chapter two, section 2.5, the term ‘community’ is also used more generally in this dissertation as a catch all term for those playing or engaging with Irish traditional music at any level, construct or context. It can be seen to mirror Small’s definition of musicking as a means of identifying any person or party involved in any aspect of performance of the music. In the review of literature in chapter two, perspectives on the nature of community in relation to traditional music in Ireland, advanced by McCarthy (1999), O’Shea (2008), Weintraub Stoebe (2013) and others are referenced for relevance in Fingal. Section 4.6.6 will show that the notion of a single traditional music community in Fingal does not exist, at least not in the form of a homogenous group known to each other and sharing common aspirations. Instead, there are a variety of smaller groups, engaged in several aspects of the

tradition, the majority in performance and transmission. While horizontal links between the disparate groups are absent or weak, stronger vertical connections to the broader traditional music community are evident.

The term ‘recreational player’ is used in this dissertation to describe musicians who engage in Irish traditional music playing as a pleasurable leisure pursuit not generally associated with, and separate from, income generation activities. Engagement is associated with relaxation rather than as a career or work-related activity. Terms such as ‘professional’, ‘semi-professional’ and ‘amateur’ player can be problematic in the world of Irish traditional music as, for example, many performers paid for their services may also hold down part-time or full-time jobs outside of their music business, while amateur players often perform in structured community performance and reward contexts on a regular basis. While in many instances recreational playing may be seen as synonymous with the amateur category, the term ‘recreational player’ is adopted here as a more comprehensive and inclusive term comprehending all musicians playing regularly in contexts of leisure pursuit within Turino’s (2008, p.26) model of ‘participatory performance’ in contrast to ‘presentational performance’, described in section 2.5.

In this dissertation, two naming conventions are followed in regard to identifying individuals. Firstly, individuals associated with literature of any type referenced in the text are identified by their surname. Secondly, reflecting greater familiarity with the people concerned, interviewees and others who contributed to the research are identified initially by their first name and surname and then, except where there is a need to avoid confusion, by their first name only in any immediately following text.

1.7 Association of traditional music with the Irish language

Few interviewees directly linked their interest in Irish traditional music to a more general interest in the Irish language and other Irish cultural activities. Only Mags Maxwell (section 5.2.8) and Seán MacPhilbín (5.2.10) made any such direct reference. As will be noted in section

4.6.5 below, the Constitution of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) includes in its aims and objects the promotion of the Irish language, but again interviewees associated with that organisation did not specifically draw links between traditional music and the Irish language. However, that such a link was not explicitly identified by most interviewees cannot be interpreted that for them no such link exists. I am aware that a number of those interviewed are proficient in the Irish language and use it on a regular basis. The establishment in recent years of a branch of CCÉ in Balbriggan was driven in the main by individuals associated with the local Gaelscoil [Irish language-medium school]. In addition, Mags Maxwell made the point that an original objective of those seeking to develop the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre (SEAC) in Naul was the promotion of the traditional arts in general, including the Irish language, a scenario confirmed by Seán MacPhilibín. An explanation for this position may be that the focus of this study as presented to interviewees was primarily in relation to Irish traditional music with no reference to the Irish language being made. It is also likely that many traditional musicians see complementarity rather than direct association or dependency between playing traditional music and the Irish language as a more accurate description of the relationship between them. However, exploring this aspect is beyond the scope of the current study.

1.8 Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of seven chapters, including this one, that provide a scholarly exploration and application of relevant ethnomusicological and related concepts, an investigation of Fingal as a place and details of traditional music making activities, an exploration of the lived experience of local people engaged with the music, a critical review of the impact of official policy and funding in support of the music and a chapter providing conclusions and suggesting further research steps. The contents of the chapters are as follows: Chapter One: *Introduction*: presents the dissertation, sets out the aims and motivation for the research, the methodologies employed and introduces the main analytical framework adopted based on an ecosystem model.

Chapter two: *Key concepts and literature review*: introduces concepts and literature relevant to the research topic. It includes perspectives relating to the principles and practice of ethnomusicology and identifies issues particularly relevant to this research. The chapter addresses the concept of an ecosystem approach and its application to this project. Models in relation to music communities, including communities of music practice and like arrangements, are examined and scholarship relevant to the research topic is identified.

Chapter Three: *Fingal the place*: presents contextual and background information on Fingal. Details are provided about the study area relating to geographic, demographic, social and economic elements. It also includes historical information to provide context to the presence and sustainability of local traditional music playing.

Chapter Four: *Irish traditional musicking in Fingal*: examines how the music is practised today in the county. It sets the contexts in which the music and the music community or, more accurately, communities, have developed. The primary focus is on events over the past four decades as this period represents a time of significant advancement in engagement with the music. The chapter explores how the music manifests itself and is sustained, the activities, the people and stakeholders involved. Information on transmission arrangements is provided and physical and social infrastructure associated with the music is identified.

Chapter Five: *The lived experience*: examines traditional music through the lives of ten individuals, either born or living in Fingal, playing or associated with the music. The chapter explores their introduction to, and how they learned to play, traditional music, the influences that determined the trajectory they took in the music and the part it plays in their lives today. Interviewees tell their stories in a manner best suited to themselves to understand the person and their actions rather than simply reporting the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of circumstances, activities or events.

Chapter Six: *Public Policy and Irish traditional music*: examines official policy and actions in relation to supporting and promoting the performance of Irish traditional music. The review

first considers relevant concepts in policy making, many of which are drawn from the field of business management. Key decision makers within the policy framework and current legislation are identified. Official policies and strategies relating to the music are critically reviewed having regard to issues identified in this research from interviewees' observations, an online survey and personal observation that impact (positively or negatively) on the advancement of traditional music in the community.

Chapter Seven: *Conclusion*: summarises the research project and key conclusions.

Chapter 2: Key Concepts and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces concepts and literature relevant to this research topic and methodology. It commences with a brief exploration of the field of ethnomusicology and current practice within the discipline. The centrality of fieldwork to ethnomusicological research is reviewed, including consideration of factors bearing on the conduct of this research in relation to the positionality of the researcher, the role of interviewees or consultants and the fieldwork process itself. The chapter examines the idea of an ecosystem approach in analysing local music systems, including its relevance to this research. The notion of an ecosystem as a means of understanding the multitude of actors, physical and social elements, interdependencies and influences that have an impact or bearing on a habitat, activity or event, is drawn from the natural world. The ecosystem model described in this research is primarily informed by Titon (2008, 2020). Principles underpinning a music ecosystem are examined as well as processes of cultural heritage management, currently a widely used approach by official authorities in arts management, introduced here for comparison with an ecosystem approach. This section concludes with discussion on the form and composition of an ecosystem analytical framework posited by Schippers and Grant (2016) adopted here.

Several concepts associated with use of the term ‘community’ from the perspective of the practice of music, such as ‘community music’ and ‘music in the community’, are considered for application to traditional music in Fingal. Commencing with how community is perceived in the Irish tradition, the chapter identifies community music constructs identified by Higgins (2012), Kenny (2016), and Veblen (2013) as having applicability in Fingal. A section identifying scholarship relevant to this research, including that associated with traditional music more generally, is provided to complete the chapter.

2.2 Ethnomusicology: An evolving discipline

Rice (2014, p.1) defines ethnomusicology as ‘the study of why, and how, human beings are musical’, but the road from the initial recognition of the field to this definition was protracted, contested and complex. What constitutes ethnomusicology now differs radically from that perceived of when the discipline was first recognised in the 1880s. Titon (2008, p.29) has described the evolution of ethnomusicology in terms of four phases, each in turn characterised by a redefinition of the field and advances in research methodologies. Initially conceived of as a scientifically orientated discipline called comparative musicology, the focus was on comparing what was considered primitive musics with European art music. An early objective, highlighted by Nettl, was ‘the collection of artefacts ... with the intention of preserving and recording a total musical corpus’ (2015, p.148), primarily in the belief that traditional songs and melodies were being lost because of factors such as rural decline and the increasing urbanisation of society. The collecting and publishing of Francis O’Neill (1848–1936), Patrick Weston Joyce (1827–1914) and Francis Roche (1866–1961) are notable examples of music collectors in Irish traditional music during this period. Fresh thinking in the 1950s and a change in discipline name to ‘ethnomusicology’ heralded a major transformation in how ethnomusicologists viewed their work and prepared the ground for contemporary practice. The new thinking from Merriam (1960), Blacking (1973) and others recognised the primacy of studying music in social and cultural contexts, the significance of links to other disciplines such as anthropology and musicology and the centrality of fieldwork to the process.

Titon (2008) characterises ethnomusicological fieldwork today as entailing reflexivity and sharing authorship with teachers who are no longer regarded as simply informants, with Nettl (2015, p.16) asserting: ‘direct confrontation with musical creation and performance, with the people who conceive of, produce, and consume music, is essential . . . without fieldwork there would be no ethnomusicology’. The business of ethnomusicology has also been influenced significantly by increasing globalisation and advances in technology in recent decades that have

brought changes in people's lifestyles and perspectives on music, including how societies define and experience music, shifts in roles of musicians, an increasing influence by mass media and impacts of new academic scholarship processes. Post (2006, 2018) sees such transformations as providing fertile soil for ethnomusicologists, citing as examples of recent scholarship the commodification and consumption of music; cultural and heritage tourism; media, technology and techno culture; intellectual property rights and cultural rights; the significance of knowledge and agency; and community, sound and social space. These changes equally apply to Fingal, itself much changed demographically over the past 40 years (see chapter three). This research project aligns with Post's examples and is timely as Fingal continues to experience considerable social and cultural change.

Technology, particularly sound recording, according to Ivey (2009, p.23), has brought profound benefits to ethnomusicology. However, the use of the internet and email to assist in undertaking research, pointed out by Barz and Cooley (2008, p.14), is also profound and has even been adopted in developing ethnography. Cooley, Meizel and Syed argue that technologies today are redefining how communication and information dissemination is leading ethnomusicologists to 'reshape our understanding of fieldwork in theory and practice' (2008, p.90). They use the term virtual fieldwork, where the locus of the field is no longer a physical location or community visited for a defined period, to now include working at a computer screen on which new information collection techniques and ways of learning about and experiencing music are pursued. The exigency of utilising online methodologies because of the unexpected introduction of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions provided an opportunity during this research to experience elements of a virtual approach.

Concerned with how ethnomusicology can maintain its relevance in a transformed digital age, Ivey (2009) proposes that research should deliver practical goals, objectives that go beyond the boundaries of academia, citing prioritisation of education at primary and secondary level in relation to applied music, developing curatorial expertise in young people (p.27) and engaging

with public policy in general in relation to technology impacts on music (p.30). Post (2006, p.11) too says that the goals and roles played by ethnomusicologists now stretch beyond traditional boundaries, an approach encapsulated by the term ‘applied ethnomusicology’. Roles adopted in the pursuit of advocacy and in public policy formulation are examples. Applied ethnomusicology introduced principles of social responsibility and working with groups to solve concrete problems. (Harrison, Mackinlay and Pettan, 2010, p.1) and is considered in section 2.3.2 below.

Although acknowledging that ethnomusicological literature in the early decades had much to say about fieldwork in relation to research design, the use of recording and other equipment and general principles of intercultural relations, Nettl (2015, p.144) states that the literature ‘at least until the period after around 1990 – actually had very little to say about the day-to-day personal relationships that are at the heart of research’. Nettl (2008, p.v) described the publication of Barz and Cooley’s *Shadows in the Field* in 1997 as the first comprehensive book about fieldwork in ethnomusicology. Post (2018, p.2) also commends that publication as a seminal work: ‘the dialogues in Barz and Cooley . . . occur in the context of a wide range of social interactions found in contemporary ethnographic work’. For both Nettl and Post the issues involved are more than about topics covered, research methodologies, how data is gathered or issues of transparency, although these remain relevant. For them, core issues include the nature of relationships between researchers and communities involved and the position of the researcher within and outside the study. These new concerns also resonate with the parallel development of applied ethnomusicology in which questions such as the researcher’s neutrality and the value of scholarship and implications of ethnomusicologists performing advocacy roles or working in non-academic environments surface. Fieldwork constitutes a very significant component of this research, the direction of which has been informed by Nettl’s and Post’s remarks above and by Barz and Cooley more generally.

2.3 Fieldwork: three issues relevant to this project

2.3.1 The emic–etic dyad

Comparative musicology conceived of the researcher as an independent outsider to the community dispassionately reviewing an ‘other’ music. It involved an outsider living among what was perceived to be an exotic community, studying, learning and analysing its customs and music. Coupled with this, for many decades was the practice that ethnomusicologists did not study Western art music cultures whence they came. By the 1970s, ethnomusicology had broken away from focusing on non-European and so-called simple and self-contained societies and began to work in Western urban areas and in more complex societies generally (Reyes 2009, p.9). Merriam’s (1960, 1964) music in culture concept introduced additional challenges for the researcher and brought new fieldwork concepts and methodologies within the purview of ethnomusicology, one of which was the dyad ‘emic-etic’. Derived from the concepts of ‘phonemic’ and ‘phonetic’ in linguistics in the 1950s, they were, respectively, generally equated with insider and outsider perspectives in the research process, although not congruent (Nettl 2015, p.265). Commentators today like Rice (2008) and Titon (2008) associate an etic approach with focusing on description and explanation rather than on understanding, with Nettl (2015, p.103) observing that ‘the history of ethnomusicology moved in a gradual and gingerly fashion from the universal or etic to emic, and to problem-specific approaches’.

Etic facilitates consideration of a musical culture in the context of other musics, useful among other things for theorising and comparison, while emic gave a voice to those within the culture, often not heard in an otherwise outside mediated, European ethnocentric model that had once included fieldwork practices with more than a hint of colonial overtones and an asymmetry in power relationships. Hood’s (1960) insistence on bi-musicality, students learning to play the instrument(s) of the culture being researched, as well as learning the language, might be perceived as a step towards an insider understanding, but it still did not allow the perceptions and voices of the insiders to be truly heard, although no doubt it helped to better inform and

sharpen the outsider's perspective. Emic and etic should not be viewed as mutually exclusive concepts. Rice (2008), on his journey learning the Bulgarian bagpipe and becoming a gaidar, points to his insider consultant transforming himself and expanding his horizons in his encounter with Rice and his world. He describes this respective crossing of boundaries, so to speak, as leading to a deeper understanding and a more equal and engaged relationship between him and his teacher, and thus to better research. Citing the views of Marcia Hendron who, writing in 1993 on her experience of the emic-etic dichotomy, stated that she was 'neither fully insider nor outsider, neither fully emic nor fully etic', Rice asserts that he himself had reached this position in his Bulgarian experience. Striving for researcher and teacher both comprehending and straddling the outsider and insider perspectives has gained traction. Nettl (2015) sees emic and etic as occupying opposite ends of a continuum (p.265) and cautions against focusing on differences between the analyst's and local culture's interpretations (p.266). Stock (2008, p.113) advocates avoiding attaching labels such as emic, etic, insider or outsider to individual perspectives: 'they risk reducing the often shifting and multiple identities a researcher carries during fieldwork to a single valency or position'.

I live and play traditional music in the geographic region in which I was pursuing the research, such that making a conscious decision to adopt either an insider or outsider role was neither feasible nor desirable. I wanted to adopt both emic and etic perspectives to optimise my research outcomes. An important challenge, therefore, was to ensure I could develop an outsider view to balance and complement my insider knowledge and understanding of the local traditional music scene. Experience I gained early in the ethnographic process confirmed the value of incorporating reflexivity in the relationship between researcher and consultant. I used my insider knowledge to contribute to the formation of common agendas and to help deepen the exploration of issues being discussed with interviewees, even where perspectives differed in relation to their resolution and interpretation. However, I recognised the importance of the researcher maintaining perspective on which role was being performed at any specific time or

circumstance, including on how emerging issues in the interviews were impacting the overall direction of the research. An important objective in managing such circumstances is, therefore, managing objectivity.

2.3.2 Managing objectivity

Approaching this project, the concept of applied ethnomusicology was of interest because of my personal involvement in the local traditional music scene and being known to many stakeholders and musicians who contributed in this research. The importance of maintaining a neutral stance goes without saying, but what are the implications for the inclusion of the third research question in this study, viz. ‘How can funding and other supports be best used to consolidate and develop music making in traditional music in the area?’ Does responding to this research question involve entering the realm of what could be considered applied research? If so, what should my response be? Nettl (2015, p.423) credits John Blacking (1973) with introducing the concept of applied ethnomusicology, describing him as a political and social activist. Applied ethnomusicology introduced principles of social responsibility and working with groups to solve concrete problems. Both the Society of Ethnomusicology and the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) have established structures to address applied practices and have provided definitions. The ICTM has defined applied ethnomusicology as: ‘[t]he approach guided by principles of social responsibility, which extends the usual academic goal of broadening and deepening knowledge and understanding towards solving concrete problems and towards working both inside and beyond typical academic contexts’ (cited in Harrison, Mackinlay and Pettan 2010, p.1).

Anthony Seeger’s work with the Suyá in Brazil provides insights into the ethnomusicologist being both an advocate and neutral observer, Seeger describing his efforts as ‘research and collaboration’ (2008, p.287). The application of applied ethnomusicological research may carry with it several potential pitfalls, such as accusations of lack of objectivity in the research process, concerns about neutrality regarding the subject matter, or the risk of accusations of

bias where the researcher is exercising an advocacy roll. Hofman (2010, p.23) reminds us that applied work is generally directed at marginalised communities to give them a voice, which some critics view as a repayment method for their collaboration in the research. She also flags additional ethical challenges posed by such scenarios as well as the danger of hidden agendas being unintentionally incorporated into scholarly practice (p.27). Nettl (2015, p.428) highlights criticism that applied research being undertaken at the behest of Governments, non-governmental organisations or other agents can have specific agendas attached.

Beaudry (2008, p.245) emphasises close human relationships as being an essential ingredient in achieving quality research outcomes and in making fieldwork ‘a meaningful experience’ and this theme is repeated in several contributions in Barz and Cooley. The importance of close human relationships is common to all forms of research, whether applied or more traditional in nature. A study involving quantitative and qualitative analyses requires objectivity and neutrality. The rules governing ethical behaviour in research are important here too. That the literature on fieldwork today is replete with commendations in favour of close working relationships is unsurprising but achieving and maintaining such relationships does not oblige dispensing with perspective in any form. For example, payback can only be comprehended in terms of achieving a research output that stands up to independent critique, otherwise it will be of little value as a foundation for developing conclusions, whether in the form of a purely academic context, targeted at addressing concrete actions or supporting an advocacy role. A desired outcome of this research is to inform interested parties on the practice of traditional music in Fingal. Research question 3 of this study, involving how funding and other supports can be best used to consolidate and develop music making and participation in traditional music, does not infer the need to adopt an applied approach. On the contrary, an open-ended inquiry process that takes a holistic view of traditional music in the county can most effectively assist in meeting the challenges of supporting and developing the music through providing critical information and identifying priorities that can assist in fostering dialogue among stakeholders

as a means of gaining traction around agreed goals and actions, including policy and funding interests.

2.3.3 Experiencing Music

A defining characteristic of ethnomusicology today for Titon (2008) relates to people making or experiencing music in more intimate relationship with informants, where understanding rather than explaining the lived experience is important. Titon places the researcher in a position of ‘being-in-the-world’ by playing and experiencing music with others to acquire musical knowledge and understanding, arguing this process affords: ‘a reflexive opportunity and an on-going dialogue with my friends which ... continually reworks ‘my’ work as ‘our’ work’ (p.32). I have already alluded to me exercising roles of insider and outsider to gain a deeper understanding of both sides of this dyad, usefully described by Nettl (2015, p.264) in his coin model example. Utilising my knowledge and position as a player to gain access and insights proved to be important. Reflecting Titon (2008), it also required demonstrating respect and reciprocity through willingly sharing information on personal experience and understanding gained from my own music playing and in promoting the art form. Titon’s position on the importance of experiencing music to gain insights represented a significant advance on earlier views within ethnomusicology in relation to how music should be understood. Kerman (1985, p.165), for example, argues that Hood’s advocacy of bi-musicality for researchers was primarily about understanding the music, that he: ‘pointedly puts music *qua* music (italics in original) in the first position, insists on the qualification ‘studied in itself’ ... and [substitutes] the word ‘society’ for Merriam’s ‘culture’’. Kerman also rejected the prevailing view from the 1960s that providing contextual material to the music would constitute a sufficient augmentation to account for links between the music and society:

the ethnomusicologists’ point goes further than what might be called the musical context of music (though it is more usually—and most imprecisely—called the ‘historical’ context). In question is the entire matrix of extra-musical social and cultural factors which to some extent form music and to some extent are formed by it (p.168).

While Titon's perspective of 'being-in-the-world' extends beyond Kerman in terms of the positionality of the researcher, an interesting aspect of Kerman's view, recalling that it was expressed in 1985, is that in processual terms the gamut of 'the entire matrix of extra-musical social and cultural factors' forming, or being influenced by, music chimes well with reasoning advocating for, and forms an important subset of, an ecosystem approach today—see next section.

There is strong support among leading ethnomusicologists for an approach involving experiencing music, (*Shadows in the Field* (2008) abounds with examples) but, crucially, different standpoints and experiences are evident. Reconciling experiencing music while maintaining sufficient detachment also invites diverse practices and perspectives. Shelemay (2008, p.152) refers to it as the ethnomusicologist's bifurcated identity. Her own concept of participatory participant-observation in relation to her work with the Syrian Jewish community in New York illustrates the development of very intimate relationships over a long period: 'More than twenty years after the inception of the Syrian music project, I remain in close contact with the members of the Syrian Jewish community . . . The human relationships built in the course of this project have moved beyond the domain of research to become part of the fabric of my life' (pp.153 and 154). To assist the researcher / informant relationship, Shelemay has developed a check-list, informed by practice, to guide and manage the shared and negotiated interaction (p.152). Tedlock (1991) confronts traditional views on the nature of 'participant observation' processes, advocating instead 'observation of participation' to acknowledge and take account of the influential role of the researcher as well as the informant in the ethnographic process, leading to what she terms as the emergence of 'narrative ethnography':

The world, in a narrative ethnography, is re-presented as perceived by a situated narrator, who is also present as a character that reveals his own personality. This enables the reader to identify the consciousness which has selected and shaped the experiences within the text. (1991, p.77 and 78)

In narrative ethnography there is an explicit recognition of the impact of the perspectives of both parties, rather than a concentration on the Other in the pursuit of a perceived objectivity, in which researcher reflection is also integral in the narrative. To take account of both the depth of engagement and understanding of the Other aspired to by researchers, commensurate with best delivery of the ethnographic role, Tedlock (1991, p.70) offers the term ‘bicultural’ to describe simultaneously embracing both roles. Stoeltje’s (1999, p.166) description of the position of the researcher is also helpful:

The paradigm of the omnipotent researcher, whereby scholarly works were written and received without attention to the researcher’s identity, perspective or world view, has since given way to models that take account of the role of the researcher . . . Such matters as whether one is female or male, a student or professor, married or single, a native or stranger, has children or not, and many more will affect the relationship between the researcher and the researched and, consequently, the results of the study.

As each research experience is unique, affected by the specific circumstances and people involved, Nettl stresses that each project remains vulnerable to ‘the ethical and emotional aspects of the researchers own personality and character’ (2015, p.152). Heeding Nettl, I endeavoured to use my experience as a traditional musician to promote confidence in me and gain greater access within the research target community. I also was mindful of Kippen’s (2008, pp.125-140) advice to stretch beyond the ‘master’ players or those who were perceived within the wider community of musicians to have most knowledge, to engage widely with ‘ordinary’ players in their roles as local performers, teachers or whatever. I found that openly drawing on insider information—including material gathered in the course of this research—and relaying personal perspectives on relevant aspects of community based traditional music performance and transmission in the course of interviews facilitated two-way dialogue with consultants and made it easier for me to challenge responses and opinions offered. This was particularly the case with interviewees where face-to-face meetings were involved but was less effective in online interviews. In exchanges with official bodies, the informality of a shared discussion was

more often absent—notable exceptions were the interviews with the directors of the two arts centres in Fingal, the SEAC and the Draíocht, and with the representative of the Department of Arts (see section 6.3.2). In most cases, requests by me for the supply of information and responses received to my enquiries took place formally using email and hardcopy letter, effectively situating the exchanges outside the realm of ethnography.

I believe the interviews provided opportunities for recreational musicians to comment on the music where otherwise it is usually left to musicians with national profiles to do so, particularly in the media. I hope the issues raised in the conversations and in this dissertation provide a catalyst for reflection by the interviewees and, for some, may spark a renewed interest in taking concrete steps to help strengthen performance of the music in their communities. The adoption of an informed and objective stance throughout the research process, including in relation to data collection and analysis and formulation of conclusions, underpinned by my working experience in policy analysis and formulation, provides a strong basis to encourage fresh consideration by official bodies of relevant traditional music policies and support arrangements, as detailed in chapters six and seven.

2.4. Music ecosystem

2.4.1 An ecosystem approach

This section introduces the concept of a music ecosystem, used as a means of conceptualising a music culture through viewing it from a holistic, ecological perspective. The genesis of an ecological approach, including its basis in sustainability narratives and its application to a music culture, is modelled on concepts drawn from the natural world as a means of understanding and linking together all the interdependences and influences that have an impact or bear on a habitat, an activity, event or system, in this case a music system. To gain the necessary holistic view of a music culture within a society, Titon (1992, 2009), Schippers (2014, 2015) and others advocate adopting an ecology approach, of which the ecosystem is the dominant paradigm (1992, p.122).

Schippers and Grant (2016, para. 1) articulate the analysis challenge in relation to the status of a local music tradition where significant and ongoing demographic, technological and socioeconomic forces for change are present. They make the point that a sufficiently complex analytical framework is required to enable probing beyond obvious manifestations of a local music tradition like the number of players, the performances and transmission processes. These elements, individually and collectively, offer important empirical evidence but local music making is also part of, and influenced by, the wider community in which it resides and by forces further afield. The actions, values and aspirations within the broader community help define and create the environment in which traditional music exists. Other influences such as official arts policies, business interests, and national and local media also influence the standing and practice of the music. These, too, must be embraced within the analysis process. Identifying them and how they interact and influence each other enables a more meaningful picture to be constructed and sets the art form in the necessary broader context. Seeger, in his forward to Schippers and Grant, encapsulates the overall challenge:

The important thing to study to understand how musical cultures are sustained is not primarily the structures of the sounds but rather the way the traditions are part of a larger conceptual, physical, and mediated environment of actions and values, resources and regulations, individuals and communities, power and hegemony, and markets, and media. (2016, p.ix)

In this research, the concepts and analytical framework being adopted to critically assess Irish traditional music within the matrix of community arts and social activities, draws on the work of Titon (2009), and on Schippers and Grant (2016), see section 2.4.3 below.

2.4.2 Linking music to sustainability

Titon explains the broad context in which Seeger's challenge can be addressed, through associating music with wider social narratives on sustainability:

The word 'sustainable' has been . . . aligned with food, development, packaging, future, forestry, education, energy . . . water, technology, conservation, tourism ... Websites guide individuals and communities towards responsible, sustainable living, chiefly in response to

threats posed by growing world population, diminishing natural resources, and now global warming. What about sustainable music? . . . Sustainability is directed, today, at resources thought to be endangered, on the road to extinction, and music is no exception. (2009, pp.119-120)

Titon points to the concept of ecosystem being initially defined in 1935 by Arthur Tansley (1935, p.229) who described it as: ‘including not only the organism-complex, but also the whole complex of physical factors forming what we call the environment biome – the habitat factors in the widest sense [and which] (Titon’s bracketed inclusion) range from the universe as a whole down to the atom’. Titon also cites Brewer’s elaboration of Tansley’s ‘organism-complex’ concept as:

consist[ing] of individual organisms, populations of organisms (species) and communities (one or more populations). Organism, population and community represent three hierarchical levels. The community and its surrounding habitat comprise an interacting unit or ecosystem. (1994, p.11)

By asserting that music cultures are: ‘at once social and ecological . . . that correspond to organisation, population, and community levels in ecological thought’ (p.122), Titon creates the necessary bridge in defining a music culture as an ecosystem. He elaborated on the concept as follows:

The musical habitat includes both physical and cultural factors of the musical environment such as ideas about music, sound and sound-producing instruments, recording studios, media, venues, musical education and transmission, and the economies of music – indeed music as cultural production and a cultural domain – which relate to the health of musical individuals, populations and communities (p.123).

Addressing music culture as an ecosystem framed within a sustainability paradigm enables the exploration of the constituent elements and associated dynamic interactions spoken of by Seeger and Titon to be critically assessed having regard to accepted ecological principles. To this end, Titon posits four such principles as being applicable to music ecosystems: (1) the *adaptational advantage of diversity*: the greater the level of diversity across the ecosystem, the greater the chance of it continuing as it aids adaptability for survival; (2) *there are limits to*

growth as resources are finite: continuous growth of a music culture is unsustainable; (3) *the principle of interconnectivity*: a change in one part of the ecosystem affects the rest. On this third principle, Titon (2009, p.123) stresses that while earlier interpretations of the operation of an ecosystem underscored a general tendency towards equilibrium, the belief today is that: ‘change and disturbance is the normal situation, to the point that flow and flux appears to describe the behaviour of the natural world better than does equilibrium or balance’. This third principle is important when, for example, in considering official interventions to support an art form, the interconnectivity between individuals, populations and communities must be well understood to avoid unintended consequences. (4) *the principle of stewardship*: emphasising the necessity to manage, using a natural cultivation analogy, the very soil in which the music culture is being fostered and maintained through: ‘partnering with the musical culture-bearers and community scholars to help them care for their musical traditions in their community contexts’ (p.124).

The four principles influence how the culture will develop and how the sustainability of the ecosystem will be perceived by the disparate actors associated with it. Understanding the impact of the principles should, therefore, have a significant bearing on how a music culture can be supported particularly where it, or aspects of it, is endangered. In this regard, Titon (2009 p.119) argues that cultural policy towards music should be informed by principles underpinning conservation ecology, specifically the four mentioned above, rather than the more common governmental / official agency policies found today that are generally based on cultural heritage management. Titon identifies three kinds of public policy practices that characterise cultural heritage management regarding music, formulated: ‘to protect and preserve outstanding musical (and other cultural) traditions considered to be threatened’ (p.120). These can be summarised as: (1) the ‘proclamation’ that a particular tradition requires special treatment, for example the UNESCO designations of cultural heritage masterpieces or arts councils’ awards; (2) the creation of heritage spaces and sanctuaries, such as festivals, interpretative centres and

living history museums where music is mediated, i.e. explained to, and performed for the audience. This policy is the most favoured today by arts promoters and practitioners; and (3) positioning culture workers within communities to work collaboratively both as students of community scholars and music practitioners, and simultaneously as teachers who share their skills and networking capabilities to help the local musical community, the approach favoured by Titon (p.120). Policies promoted under cultural heritage management are generally supported by a wide range of interested stakeholders, including artists and the music industry, cultural organisations, and community concerns. Titon makes the point that often these policies are employed whether or not the music culture is considered endangered (p.120). The application of cultural heritage management practice, very common in public intervention approaches in Ireland, is addressed in chapter six.

2.4.3 Analytical framework

To give practical expression to an ecosystem approach, an appropriate recognised analytical framework or model is required that both guides the collation of data involving mixed methodologies and facilitates critical assessment. Titon's early thinking on the development of such a model was to propose 'a music-culture model that is grounded or centred in music through performance' (1988, pp.7-10). To marry what Merriam identified as the musical 'what' element with the cultural 'why' aspect in understanding music in society, Titon (2009b, pp.14-19) incorporated a component model of a music-culture to complement his performance model. His component model is divided into four parts: (1) ideas about music, addressing music and the belief system, and aesthetics, contexts and history of the music; (2) activities involving music; (3) repertoires of music, addressing style, genres, texts, composition, transmission and movement; and (4) the material culture of music.

Although Titon has played a seminal role in defining an ecosystem approach, in this research I chose to draw on the five-domains assessment framework posited by Schippers and Grant (2016) to assist in analysing Fingal's traditional music ecosystem. They describe the framework

as a means: ‘of organising and analyzing (sic) data to generate insights and their impact[s]’ (p.11). Schippers and Grant present their framework in the context of an analysis of nine diverse music practices from different parts of the world, including providing guidelines in the form of 200 questions to support the application of the framework (p.14). There is significant cross-over between Titon and Schippers and Grant, but I consider the latter model a fuller and more explicit structure with which to account for the various facets of the Fingal traditional music ecosystem. The format and composition of each of the five domains provides a more convenient and administratively rational way of grouping and analysing the data sets while, collectively, the domains better integrate the music and non-music components—including addressing the elements identified by Titon in his approach—enabling a more rational understanding of the ecosystem.

The five domains described by Schippers and Grant (2016, pp.12,13) in their framework include: (1) *systems of learning*, involving an assessment of all transmission processes; (2) *musicians and communities*, involving an examination of the positions, roles and interactions of musicians within their communities, and the social basis for their traditions in that context; (3) *contexts and constructs*, involving an assessment of the social and cultural contexts of the music tradition, including the underlying values and attitudes (constructs) steering musical directions; (4) *infrastructure and regulations*, relating to the ‘hardware’ of music, such as performances places, and the regulatory and legal environments and public policy and support; and (5) *media and the music industry*, involving an assessment of the impact of the music industry and media in the widest sense. Schippers and Grant (2016, p.342) caution against treating the model as a one-size-fits-all system, stating: ‘each case study remains alert to specific and unique circumstances, including those that are not explicitly captured by the five-domain model’. While the five-domain structure has generally been retained in this research, the content of each domain has been adopted to best reflect the music ecosystem discerned in

Fingal. In this regard, elements of Grant's (2014, chapter four) Musicality Vitality and Endangerment Framework also informed the application of the five-domain framework.

Schippers and Grant (2016, p.341) provide a graphic of their framework comprising generic elements of a music ecosystem clustered by domain. The elements represent the various actors and forces that impact on the performance of music, itself at the centre of the diagram, i.e. at the heart and *raison d'être* of the ecosystem. They incorporate a wide array of elements in their graphic than might otherwise be expected in a particular music genre, location or circumstance.

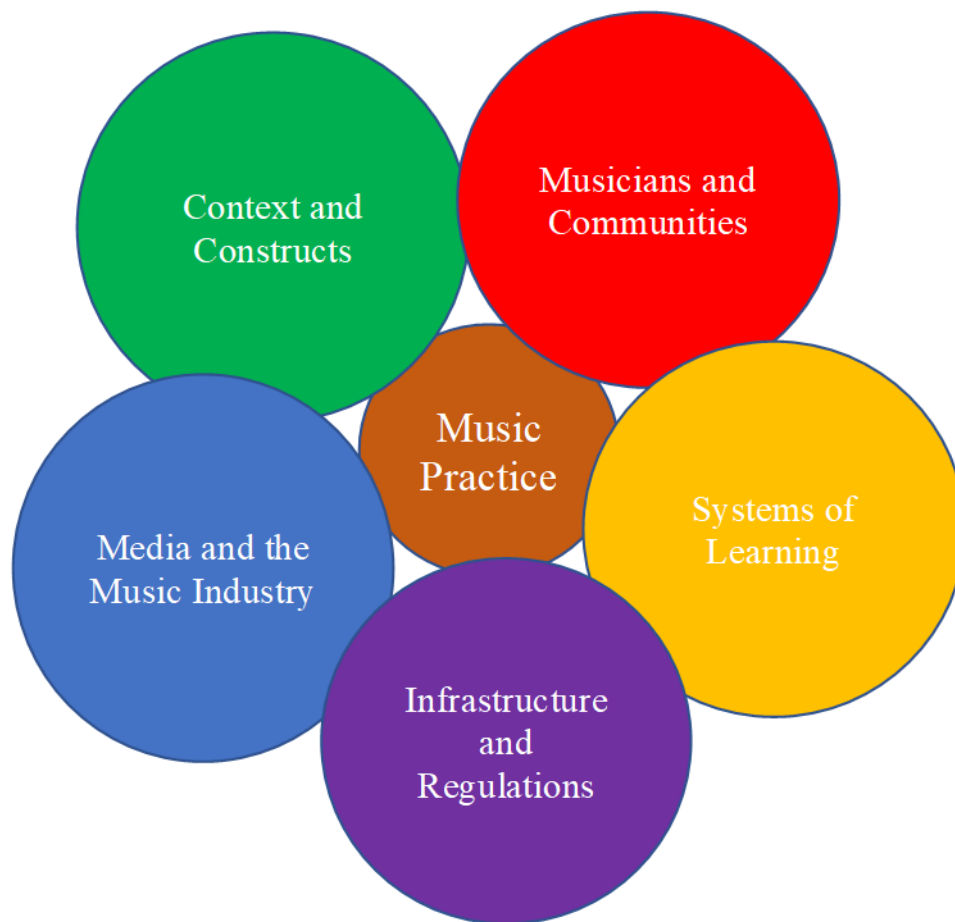


Figure 2 Modified graphic of Schippers and Grant's Music Ecosystem Model

Source: Author

Section 4.6.9 in chapter four addressing Irish traditional musicking in Fingal concludes by identifying, among other things, the key elements and forces of the traditional music ecosystem in the county. For completeness, elements of the ecosystem emerging in chapters five and six,

in particular in relation to public policy and matters comprehended within the domain on Infrastructure and Regulations, are included as well. Section 4.6.9 presents the elements in list format for clearer articulation, clustered by domain—see Figure 39. Figure 2 above presents Schippers and Grant’s framework in a modified format to emphasise, through the overlapping of domains and the centre (music performance) section, that each of the elements (actors or forces) and related domains within the ecosystem interact across the whole system, reflecting Titon’s principle of interconnectivity within a music ecosystem.

2.5 Communities of music

The literature addresses several concepts relating to communities involved in playing and transmitting music, some of which are relevant to this study. While a refocusing of ethnomusicology from music in culture to music as culture in the 1970s advanced concepts relating to the role of music in the formation of communities and the creation of collective identities, exploration of these issues is beyond the scope of this research, where the focus on communities relates to music. I indicated in chapter one that the term community is also being used in this dissertation as a general term to categorise as a group those playing or engaging with Irish traditional music at any level, construct or context. It is notable that Finnegan (1989) eschews the use of the term ‘community’ on the basis that it does not fit the practice of music she found in her study, preferring instead to use ‘socially recognised pathways’ as a more meaningful construct for how individuals engage with music in a large urban context (Milton Keynes) (2007 edition, pp.304, 305). Finnegan found a great variety of groupings, some with close ties between members and others much less so. She noted the general absence of urban village structures in the city (unlike Fingal where even the more heavily urbanised areas have village centre identities), a limited number of local community group settings for music associated with particular areas of the city, and people often preferring to travel to join with others in the practice of music (p.301). Finnegan also reported elements of anonymity within musical groups that: ‘actively fitted with the impersonal model of city life’ (p.303). Instead of

relying on, or being connected to, concrete or bounded structures such as particular bands, clubs or communities, Finnegan concluded that many people followed a series of known or regular but flexible routes, partly shaped by their own lives, in settings: ‘in which relationships could be forged, interests shared, and a continuity of meaning achieved in the context of urban living’ (p.306).

Sommers Smith (2001, p.122) makes the point in relation to Irish traditional music that definitions of music community differ, citing one offered by Ó Súilleabháin (1999) which she believes is one of the most all-encompassing: ‘a music community is a group of interested participants who agree on the form and content of the music and its social context’. To this definition, Sommers Smith links Hamilton’s observation (referred to in section 1.3) regarding the community determining traditionality given the living nature of the tradition. As a generic construct, Ó Súilleabháin’s definition can have wide application, but it is devoid of context that defines the nature and role of different collectives, or that a person can be a member of overlapping communities. McCarthy (1999), O’Shea (2008), Weintraub Stoebe (2013) and Cotter (2006) also provide useful perspectives on the nature of community in relation to traditional music playing in Ireland today. Other recognised constructs relating to the performance and transmission of music, drawing on international and national experience, that have relevance to traditional music in Fingal include ‘participatory performance’ posited by Turino (2008), ‘communities of music practice’ described by Kenny (2016) and community music formations postulated by Higgins (2012).

McCarthy (1999, pp.186,187) positions the transmission of music within the context of a community that provides meaning and identity for the music learner: ‘[m]usic learning in traditional contexts was decentralised, an integral part of social development, and it connected the young generation to its cultural heritage through validating traditions and passing on a repertoire that could be shared in social settings’. O’Shea (2008, p.99) alludes to community when describing a process of reinvigoration and retreat for exponents of Irish traditional music

while attending the annual Willie Clancy week-long summer school in Co. Clare. She makes the point that: ‘foreigners [foreign musicians] share with Irish musicians and listeners a sense of community [that serves as a place for] a renewal of vows, a reunion, and a revival of memories’. The question of whether the annual Skerries Traditional Music Weekend could be described in similar terms is considered in section 4.4.2 below. Weintraub Stoebe (2013, p.96) considers the concept of community in traditional music in an urban Dublin context, concluding that: ‘[b]oth the Cobblestone and the Comhaltas [Ceoltóirí Éireann] branches give musicians and others a sense of connection—a sense of place and community that is connected to the geography of the city but not bounded by it. In other words, these musical communities facilitate the performance and development of collective selfhood’.⁷ Joe May’s Pub in Skerries (section 4.4.2) serves as one of the locations in Fingal that provides a connection point similar to the Cobblestone Bar, albeit on a smaller scale, at which traditional music, people and place coalesce. Fairbairn (1994, p.569) also links place and activity in identifying community: ‘musicians in fleadh sessions, coming from all walks of life, express their communality through the activity of playing together’. However, Lavengood (2008, pp.47-62) espouses the term ‘community of practice’ over forms of imagined communities, such as the examples just provided, in her description of transnational Celtic music communities, see next paragraph. Turino’s participatory performance model has application in relation to recreational traditional musicians playing together in sessions. He describes participatory performance as:

a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artistic audience distinctions, only participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role. Participatory performance stands in contrast to

⁷ The Cobblestone Bar in Smithfield, Dublin is a well-known location for the performance of traditional music. The successful appeal in November 2021 against planning permission granted that would have threatened the continued operation of the Cobblestone Bar, among other things, relied strongly on the argument that the location served as a critical hub for Dublin’s traditional music community to meet, perform and learn together.

presentational performance where one group of people, the artists, perform for another, the audience. (2008, p.26)

The application of the concept communities of musical practice (CoMPs) which Kenny (2016, p.11) says ‘extends the notion of communities of practice (CoPs) created from the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998, 2006, 2002, 2000, 2009) (sic) to musical communities’ is pertinent to the description of many of the small communities associated with traditional music in Fingal. Kenny (2016, p.11) highlights Wenger’s (2015) definition of CoP as ‘groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly’. She attributes to Wenger the importance within the CoP concept of the link between learning and participation, using three foundational dimensions: ‘mutual engagement (domain), joint enterprise (process/community) and shared repertoire (practice) ([Wenger] 1998, pp70-3)’. Kenny also brings to our attention Wenger’s definition of community as: ‘a group of people who interact, learn together, build relationships and in the process develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment’ (2002, p.38). Kenny elaborates: ‘[Wenger’s] definition sits alongside a conceptualisation of learning as ‘situated’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991); where knowledge is context-specific, occurring through one’s environment and lived experiences. In this sense, music-making and musical learning cannot be divorced from context’ (p.11). The application of the CoMP model described by Kenny to traditional music collectives in Fingal is addressed in section 4.6.7. Cotter (2016, p.7), also drawing on Wenger (1998), highlights that people can simultaneously be members of more than one group, differentiating between membership of a local traditional music community and that of a community of practice by way of illustration.

Higgins (2012, p.3) identifies 3 broad concepts relating to the practice of music-making in community contexts: (1) music of the community, (2) communal music making and (3) an active intervention between a music leader or facilitator and participants. Higgins explains: ‘[p]erspectives 1 and 2 describe music that is made by any community at any time. Both of

them point towards an expression, through music, of a community's local identities, traditions, aspirations, and social interactions' (p.4). In the case of Fingal, like elsewhere in Ireland, perspective 2 has a particular relevance to traditional music in the form of local session playing, a point acknowledged by Higgins (p.4). His main interest is in perspective 3, explaining that this option:

suggests that community music may be understood as an approach to active music making and musical knowing *outside* (italics in original) of formal teaching and learning situations. By *formal* (italics in original) I mean music that is delivered by professionals in schools, colleges, and other statutory organizations (sic) through formalized (sic) curricula. From this third perspective, community music is an intentional intervention, involving skilled music leaders, who facilitate group music-making experiences in environments that do not have a set curricula . . . there is an emphasis on people, participation, context, equality of opportunity, and diversity (2012, p.4).

Much transmission in Irish traditional music takes place outside of formal structures, generally within the context of community organisations and individual teachers and in the absence of formal curricula. As such, Higgin's third perspective might be seen as encompassing the operation of branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ), other transmission service providers and Music Generation (see section 6.4.2) in providing classes and music performance opportunities for students. Higgins (2012, p.5) also provides a list of identifiable traits or characteristics he considers captures the significant principles that constitute the community of music practitioners. The list is also useful when considering the practice of music in a community from a 'life-cycle' perspective. The characteristics include, among other things, (1) learning to play the music, (2) engaging with other local traditional musicians and (3) being able to experience opportunities to play that are attractive and engaging. Chapter six considers the relevance of adopting such a perspective when policy on the development of music within communities is being formulated and promulgated.

2.6 Defining the increased interest in traditional music playing

Many narratives of Irish traditional music, such as O'Shea (2008), point to a revival from the 1970s. This term may be an oversimplification and generalisation. Selecting an appropriate term such as 'revival', 'reawakening', 'renewal', or 'transformation' to describe the process that resulted in an increased level of interest in playing traditional music in Fingal from the 1980s is important. Adopting a particular term may depend on whether an art form is being introduced *ab initio* or whether it is being reintroduced to a locality, the latter case also depending on the length of time engagement with the original tradition had ceased. The terms can be regarded as overlapping and complementary, for example, the use of 'revival' and 'transformation' in indicating a process of change or uplift to an existing, albeit weak, tradition. Revival is popularly used as a catchall concept, but Feintuch draws attention to complications in its application:

The term *revival* (italics in original) implies resuscitation, reactivation, and rekindling, and many revivalist musicians assert that they are bolstering a declining musical tradition. But rather than encourage continuity, musical revivals recast the music—and culture—they refer to. They are actually musical transformations, kind of reinvention. (1993, p.184)

In terms of the ubiquity of use, O'Shea (2008) employs the term revival generally to describe various periods of revitalisation in interest in traditional music evident from the seventeenth century onwards, including that experienced nationally in the final decades of the twentieth century, which also had an impact in Fingal. Post (2004, p.63) also uses revival in a similar vein in her study of music in rural New England. Illustrating the early adoption of the term, Rosenberg (1993, p.17) noted Cecil Sharp's (1907, p.140) advocacy for a 'revival' in folksong and music but he (Rosenberg) points out the word had been used earlier in other contexts from the late seventeenth century, including in relation to drama, literature, and architecture. Sharp sought to revive folksongs and music of an earlier Britain, but Brocken (2003, p.5) highlighted a parallel objective of Sharp and his supporters, that of inducing societal improvement: 'By the adoption of an older, more authentic form of music ... [Sharp believed] society could

experience a musical, cultural and spiritual reawakening'. Brocken succinctly described Sharp's twin objectives of cultural and societal improvement as 'a restoration and a tonic'. Brocken also highlighted the role played by the middle classes in Sharp's revival, a feature of revivals universally (p.5). O'Shea reported regarding Ireland: 'the revival of traditional music, like other revivals of European 'folk' music, was largely an urban, middle-class reassertion of national cultural values through the promotion of a national musical repertoire' (2008, p.53). But O'Shea also stressed important differences between the revival of traditional music in Ireland and other revivals such as in Britain, one being the high level of the population still living in a rural setting (2008, p.167). Both features, the involvement of the middle class and musicians from outside Dublin, including from rural areas, settling in the county were evident in the upsurge in interest in traditional music in Fingal, and it remains the case today. Winter and Keegan Phipps (2013, p.10) offer the term 'resurgence' to describe the most recent increase in interest in English folk arts on the basis that it reflects a growth in popularity rather than traditions in the process of being rescued.

Rosenberg highlights a connection between 'revival' and 'movement', as in a literary movement and he cites W.P. Ryan's (1894) *Irish Literary Revival* as an example (1993, p.18). Rosenberg points out that the term revival 'achieved currency among students of folk culture during the years after 1950'. Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ), founded in 1951, included the term 'movement' in its Bunreacht (Constitution) to describe the nature and work of the organisation and continues to use it.⁸ Its Bunreacht does not use or allude to 'revive' or 'revival', instead adopting the following terms: 'To promote', 'To restore', 'To foster', and 'To create' in its Aims and Objects.⁹ Informed by his experience and research focused on Co. Clare, Ó hAllmhuráin (2017, p.137) utilises the term 'a tradition restored' to capture the impact over 50

⁸ Bunreacht CCÉ, p. ii, 1996 ed.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp.3 and 5

years of the many contributors to the resurgence of the music, from Séamus Ennis, through Seán Ó Riada and the *fleadh cheoil* movement. The benefit of this term is that it encompasses a broad spectrum of circumstances, including geographic and aesthetic, bolstering the tradition in those areas where it had remained and reintroducing the music to areas where it had ostensibly died out, while simultaneously introducing processes of retrospection and innovation in the development of canons of repertoire, style and understandings of authenticity much along the lines envisaged by Feintuch (1993).

As well as choosing an appropriate description to describe the rise in playing traditional music, understanding the context—including the interplay of social, economic and political factors and commercial and other developments in the music—driving or facilitating the uplift is also important. Such an awareness is also fundamental to comprehending an ecosystem approach. In this regard, Livingston (1999, p.66) in the context of developing a general theory of music revivals, defined revivals as: ‘social movements which strive to “restore” a musical system believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past for the benefit of contemporary society’. She also makes the points that revivals do not happen randomly (p.68) and are primarily middle-class phenomena (p.77). Importantly, Livingston proposed a model of music revivals that incorporates six basic elements (p.69):

1. an individual or small group of ‘core revivalists’
2. revival informants and/or original sources (e.g. historical sound recordings)
3. a revivalist ideology and discourse
4. a group of followers which form the basis of a revivalist community
5. revivalist activities (organisations, festivals, competitions)
6. non-profit and/or commercial enterprises catering to the revivalist market.

Livingston emphasised that her model is descriptive rather than prescriptive in which some elements are more important than others depending on the unique circumstances in question—it is a framework for understanding revivals rather than a fixed structure, much as Schippers and Grant’s five-domain model is an analytical frame for understanding a music ecosystem. While

O'Shea (2008) and Dowling (2014), for example, provide general context in relation to a revival in traditional music playing nationally from the mid-twentieth century, Lawlor's (2012, chapter three) in-depth critical analysis of the revival in harp playing from the 1950s, not only explains and maps the transformation in harping in the succeeding decades, but also illustrates the interplay of key factors driving that revival, including the emergence of a positive cultural environment more receptive to traditional Irish arts; a growing middle-class engagement with traditional music; new directions in playing style, repertoire and performance; and the emerging role and power of media and publicity. Commercial drivers were also central to the revival, including the use of the harp by the drinks company, Guinness, to promote its products in a manner that had wide public appeal. The Irish tourist board organised a festival (*An Tostal*), involving selected female harpists, while simultaneously using the image of the instrument as a symbol of Ireland to celebrate and promote Irishness, from which Lawlor concluded: 'Thus began the popular association of the harp with singing 'colleens' in long dresses. The employment of singers and harpists transformed the use of the harp from symbolic to commodification' (2012, p.46). The harp revival critiqued by Lawlor encompasses most, if not all, of the six elements in Livingston's model, including in regard to commercial enterprises (element no. 6). Nevertheless, the harp revival occasioned much reflection and criticism from within traditional music itself, including from Seán Ó Riada (p.52), until the instrument's gradual integration into mainstream traditional music:

The harp music of this era has much to offer musicians and scholars alike and deserves ... a more positive approach with a full consideration of the prevailing new popularity and audiences to the Irish harp on a global scale. Subsequent developments in harping would most likely not have taken the same format were it not for the harpists of the 1950s. Their performance and broadcasts brought the harp into the public mindset as a living instrument (Lawlor, 2012, p.63)

Whether the term 'revival' or other terms like Feintuch's 'transformation' is used to describe the changed circumstances in Fingal is, as is evident from Lawlor's harp critique, less important

than understanding the change process and its impact. The revival process experienced in Fingal from the 1980s, described in chapter four, will be seen to have been multi-faceted, that required an interplay of key drivers to create the upsurge in interest in traditional music. It will also be noted from that chapter that key elements of Livingston's model were also evident in the traditional music revival in Fingal, such as the presence of core revivalists (no.1), a revivalist ideology and discourse (no.3), a traditional music community (no.4) and activities taking place such as workshops and festivals (no.5)—see section 4.4.2 for a comparison between Ballyboughal and Skerries. By the 1980s, urbanisation was a significant feature of demographic change in Fingal and middle-class engagement was an important aspect in driving the development of the arts. Today, those areas of the county where traditional music is strongest, including where branches of CCE are located (section 4.6.5), are all mainly middle-class areas. In the case of Skerries, where up to the 1980s there was little visible presence of the music evident, the revival process could be seen as essentially a process of introduction by incoming musicians and a small number of local people who were motivated by the revival in the music being experienced nationally at the time. The revival process in Ballyboughal, on the other hand, also contains elements of renewal and regeneration in which a local input was important.¹⁰ Chapter four addresses in detail the revival in Fingal.

2.7 Scholarship in Irish traditional music

This research has benefited from the availability of a broad range of scholarship relating to the development of Irish traditional music and to the practice of ethnomusicology more generally serving both to support and guide the project and to enhance my personal learning. In relation to Irish traditional music, early influential publications include those of Tomás Ó Canainn (1978) and Seán Ó Riada (1982), the latter based on an earlier radio series first broadcast in

¹⁰ The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary, 1976 ed. defined renewal as a process which encompasses 'restor[ing] to original state; make (as good as) new; regenerate; patch, fill up, reinforce, replace'.

1962. It is notable that Ó Riada had a significant influence on Ó Canainn and many later scholars, particularly in relation to the conceptualisation of regional styles and differences in Irish traditional music performance. Ó Canainn's publication in 1978 served as an important explanation of the art form to a rapidly growing audience new to traditional music. Breandán Breathnach (1996) introduces his publication as: 'This short account of the folk music and dances of Ireland is offered as an introduction to the subject' (p.vii). It joins with Ó Canainn (1978) as a useful early publication in providing an outline account and perspective on the development and modern practice of traditional music to audiences then new to the tradition. The *Companion to Irish Traditional Music* edited by Vallely (2011) served as an important general reference during the research and the collected proceedings from conferences relating to Irish traditional music provided a broad range of insights into both the practice of, and topical issues relevant to, the music today.

Developed from the first edition published in 1998, Ó hAllmhuráin (2017) provides a critical link bridging the development and practice of traditional music and significant social changes and events taking place at key periods in Irish history. It is interesting to note, for example, that in the revised edition Ó hAllmhuráin addresses issues like gender. While the slimness of the volume and the long time period covered (from early and Medieval Ireland) inevitably means the focus throughout is on breadth rather than depth, the publication, nevertheless, illustrates the complexity of the position of Irish music in society and was useful initial reading for this research. Martin Dowling (2014) provides selected in-depth historical perspectives on the development of Irish traditional music to modern times, a tradition that he considers: 'has been propelled through history by the dynamism of modernity' (p.12). The bifurcation of music in Ireland between vernacular and art music, unresolved through the period known as the Irish Revival (c.1880-1920), was followed by a period when: '[a]ll this musical energy [evident during the Revival period] appeared to dissipate in the 1920s' (p.206). It would take several decades before the revival in traditional music from the 1970s would emerge to have an

enormous influence on the standing and practice of the music and on Irish identity. Critiquing vital historical, political and social frameworks in which to understand the modernisation of Ireland and the part played by music as an agent of social change, Harry White (1998) provides an important companion to Dowling's historical perspectives. Irishness and identity is a recurring theme for both Dowling and White. By examining Irish traditional music in relation to other music activity in Ireland since the late eighteenth century, White states that the: 'function of music in Irish literature as symbol, as political and cultural signifier and perhaps above all as metaphor of the imagination, has been considerable' (1998, p.159). He posits the thesis that: 'narrative, poetic and dramatic modes of literary discourse reanimated the idea of 'Irish music' throughout the nineteenth century, so that the metaphorical power of music imaginatively eclipsed any real concern with the cultivation of [art] music *per se* (italics in original)' (p.152). The impact of traditional music on the advancement of an Irish identity, particularly post Seán Ó Riada's much publicised encounter with it, animated a middle-class response and engagement with the music, ultimately evident not just in long established rural communities but in evolving urban conglomerations as well, including in Fingal.

In contrast with the fin de siècle focus of Dowling and White, Tes Slominski, (2020) addresses the impacts of gender, sexuality and race stereotyping in Irish traditional music, seeking a more inclusive, fairer and respectful engagement in the music by all and for all. She outlines a desire for: 'a future where today's pleasures of trad (sic) make space for "new and better pleasures" – the joys of a postnationalist (sic) genre built upon community and the shared love of the sounds we will probably always call "Irish", but without the limitations of static, essentialized (sic) identity, whether that is ethnic, gendered, sexed, or otherwise' (p.174). Understanding Slominski's viewpoints are, among other things, essential in tackling lack of engagement in traditional music in new and expanding urbanised multicultural communities in Fingal (and elsewhere in the country). Resonating in some respects with Slominski, Virva Basegmez (2005) addresses identity, authenticity and transnationality in Irish music. Basegmez's chapter 4 titled

‘Music Performances: Sessions, Gigs and Audiences’ describes the often-chaotic nature of informal pub sessions caught in a tug-of-war between the desires of traditional musicians to sit in a circle playing tunes together and audiences (clients in the pub) seeking a more eclectic mix of material including more songs, leading publicans: ‘to arrange more audience-orientated staged sessions with popular ballads or tunes’. The point is also made that ‘the Irish diaspora, foreigners and visitors’ are more interested in listening to the session than local Irish’ (2005, p.166).

Both Helen O’Shea (2008) and Adam Kaul (2009) provide ‘outsider’ perspectives steeped in ethnographic fieldwork on traditional music in Ireland. In critiquing the music, O’Shea brings together threads from many aspects of the practice of the art form, including the music itself, historical perspectives, concepts of Irish identity, revival in the mid-twentieth century, and concepts of authenticity and commodification of the art form. As a traditional musician and participant herself, O’Shea provides valuable critique on the conduct of session playing in pubs, regional styles, the experience of non-Irish musicians playing the music and how gender bears on engaging in participatory performance. While much that she describes resonates with practice of the music in Fingal today, there are important differences. For example, negative experiences she recounts of there being a less than warm welcome to visiting musicians, particularly from abroad, to participating in pub sessions in Co. Clare (chapter 6) are, in my experience, not generally mirrored in sessions in Fingal. Kaul (2009), through extensive ethnography, examined social and economic changes in Doolin, Co Clare, including in relation to the practice of traditional music, on foot of the development of music tourism in the village following a significant numbers of outsider musicians settling there. Kaul described the impact on Doolin as follows:

The social structure of the village has been transformed as a direct result of the revival of traditional Irish (sic) music, the burgeoning tourism industry, and immigration in Doolin. Blow-ins are now the driving force in village affairs, and indeed, they have appropriated and been absorbed into the local traditional music scene. While tensions can arise in many areas

of village life . . . the appropriation of local music does not arouse such tensions (2009, p.156)

Kaul asserted his research showed the inclusive and adoptable nature of traditional music: '[t]oo often we conflate "traditions" with "people" . . . what all this shows is that the notion of tradition is a much more pliable and adaptable concept than is typically thought' (p.157). However, Kaul's description of a very low level of engagement with traditional music in the village before the development of music tourism leaves open the question of whether some form of commodification of the music is necessary for its sustainability in local contexts.

Studies that address particular regions in Ireland include Fintan Vallely (2008) addressing traditional music and identity in Northern Ireland, including the impact of the Troubles in terms of perceived ownership of the music. Vallely places a particular focus on the Protestant community and gives consideration to Irish traditional musicians and places that may not 'fit' within narratives influenced by cultural nationalism, that emphasised the Irish language, the west of Ireland, and a Roman Catholic faith. Barry Taylor (2013) and Geraldine Cotter (2016) mirror the focus on Co. Clare evident in O'Shea (2008) and Kaul (2009). Taylor (2013) examined traditional dance music in west Clare between 1870 and 1970. The period selected is important as it presents the practice of the music before its general revival towards the end of the twentieth century, the onset of globalisation and the increasing commodification of the art form (p.1). The stories of many different musicians are presented in their social and playing contexts, the latter being mainly house dances, enabling Taylor to provide some critique of participatory performance and playing styles. His presentational style, based in large part on ethnography, was a useful guide to the presentation of my research. Cotter (2016) provides an account of the regeneration of traditional music playing in Ennis, Co. Clare in the late 1950s and early 1960s due to the combined efforts of a number of individuals, CCE and Clare Vocational Educational Committee. A number of issues she reports on are relevant to this

research and are addressed in later chapters. She also makes an important general point regarding how people perceived the status of the music before its transformation:

I maintain that while the perception might be there that Ennis has always been a bastion of traditional music practice, such a simplistic understanding belies the complex dynamics at play. It is also an example *par excellence* (italics in original) of how history is reinterpreted or reimagined through the lens of authenticity . . . In reality, the limited traditional music practice that there was present was maintained largely due to the fact that Ennis was a market town and host to visiting musicians (2016, p.3)

This conclusion resonates with this research; perceptions of continuing strength in the practice of the music in Fingal based on experiences of two or more decades ago or of occasional presentational performances by visiting musicians were prevalent despite significant changes in the fortunes of the music in more recent years.

A significant focus of scholarship on Irish traditional music has been the discourse related to tradition and innovation, which was the impetus for the 1996 Crossroads Conference (Vallely et al. 1996) that engages with differing perspectives on tradition and change. In relation to the survival of traditional music in the modern world, Sommers Smith (2001, p.111) asks: ‘how much change can traditional music absorb without compromising its ability to encapsulate a time, a place, a national identity?’ She recognises the importance of the organic nature of the tradition and provides relevant examples of the practice of the music adapting to changed circumstances. The institutionalisation of traditional music reflects one of these changes, most evident in the development of CCÉ. Daithí Kearney (2013) examined the impact of the work of CCÉ through its transmission, competition and summer performance programmes and location of organisational structures on regional playing styles and repertoire and on regionalisation more generally within Irish traditional music – see also section 4.3.2 below. His conclusion: ‘The ways and contexts in which Irish traditional music is played and consumed have changed’ has wide implications for how the future development of traditional music at community level is practiced and supported (see chapter six). Kearney also concluded: ‘The

conceptualisation of regions has also changed becoming an institutionalised historical narrative of ‘the way things were’ and newly imagined administration regions in an institutionalised culture’ (2013, p.91).

A number of studies address the concept of regions in Irish traditional music, beginning with *BLAS: The Local Accent conference* (Smith et al. 1997). Further scholarship questioning the importance of identifying boundaries and regional identities can contrast with my focus on the unit of the county identified in this dissertation (Sommers Smith 2001; Kearney 2013; Keegan 2010). Niall Keegan posits a series of technical parameters of performance practice as a systematic tool to describe playing style in traditional music but cautions that ‘it is important that the use of such systematic tools for musicological analysis should remain reflexive and open-ended’ (2010, p.92). Keegan also highlights the language used by traditional musicians to describe their practice. While the language can be subjective in nature and application, Keegan argues that: ‘as a tool to develop our individual performance practice it can be invaluable’ (2010, p.94). The influx of musicians settling in Fingal described in chapter four provided an eclectic mix of playing style and repertoire, none of the nationally recognised styles being perceived as dominant.

Included in the literature are more focused studies engaging with education; (McCarthy, 1999; Cawley, 2013a); tourism (Kaul, 2009) already referred to above; harping (Lawlor, 2012); and gender (Slominski, 2020). In her history of music education in Irish culture, Marie McCarthy (1999) provides a valuable contribution to understanding the transmission of music in the country particularly from the late Victorian period. She maps the intersections of teaching processes with prevailing political ideologies and institutional engagement, underpinned throughout by critique and evaluation, see also section 2.5 and section 4.3.2 in this text.

Important conclusions by McCarthy, applicable to music transmission in Fingal, are:

The strongest and most successful traditions of music education have developed outside of the formal system in community settings, private and semi-private music schools, and in

certain universities. . . The primary weaknesses in Irish music education are rooted in the cultural fragmentation caused by colonialism; lack of official support for the arts . . . ; a weak economy that could not support the kinds of infrastructure necessary for the artistic development . . . ; an over-reliance on Ireland's past reputation as a musical nation . . . ; and the dominance of political ideologies as the *raison d'être* (italics in original) for music in education' (1999, p.193).

Grounded in more recent fieldwork and extensive engagement with interlocutors, Jessica Cawley (2013a) examines processes of learning Irish traditional music in multiple settings and contexts. She concluded: '[e]ngaging in a multiplicity of learning and performance contexts is one of the most significant patterns of musical enculturation' (p.326). This conclusion was borne out in regard to Fingal in an online survey undertaken during this research—see chapter four. She also asserted that traditional music enculturation requires long term participation in playing and learning, a perspective highlighted by several of my informants (pp.323, 324). The 2003 Crossroads Conference (Vallely et al. 2003) with a focus on education and transmission, presents a number of perspectives from both within and beyond Irish traditional music, highlighting the different forms and contexts for music in education that impact on engagement and the development of communities of music practice.

Lawlor's (2012) holistic exploration of the history and development of Irish harping from 1900 provides valuable insights into several issues relevant not only to the harp but to the development of Irish traditional music more generally—see for example section 2.6 above on concepts related to revival. Her linking of instrument specific information, repertoire, socio-cultural and economic influences, and personal biographies through critical analysis provides a valuable exemplar of an ecosystem approach and appraisal, serving to influence the ecosystem methodology adopted in this study (section 2.4).

Doctoral dissertations by Kearney (2009), McElwain (2014), Talty (2019) and Kavanagh (2019) also provided valuable models for engaging in doctoral studies of Irish traditional music in specific places and contexts. Through an analysis of regional styles in traditional music, with a focus on people, place and music, Daithí Kearney (2009, p.393) highlights, among other

things, the role of social relationships and an awareness of the importance of understanding the context in which music is created, performed and transmitted. Seán McElwain's (2014) research on the music of the Sliabh Beagh region of Monaghan and Fermanagh demonstrated the richness of a hidden tradition and importance of looking deeper into the music of a locality before concluding on the nature and strength of a local music tradition. Jack Talty (2019) explores the institutionalisation of Irish traditional music pedagogy in Irish higher education. Informal community perspectives on the institutionalisation of traditional music in his chapter five provided insights into this research and, mirroring Talty's conclusion of how to: 'integrate community commentary into academic and contextualisations (sic) of Irish traditional music' (p.222), prompts a parallel question as to how to integrate community commentary into political and official contextualisation's of the music. Not restricted by genre, Aoife Kavanagh's (2019) research seeks to develop approaches to mapping musical practice in small Irish towns, which also influenced my own methodology.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted concepts and literature which this research relies upon. This project primarily falls within the field of ethnomusicology, and the chapter addresses best practice in relation to undertaking this research. The research adopts an ecosystem approach to comprehend the array of actors, physical and social factors, interdependencies and influences that impact the practice of Irish traditional music in the county. To guide data collection and analysis, a five-domain analytical framework posited by Schippers and Grant (2016) has been utilised in this research project. Literature on concepts associated with community in relation to Irish traditional music are examined for potential application to music structures and groupings in Fingal. Significant among these are structures associated with transmission and, to a lesser degree, performance, where the concentration is on community fostered, ground-up arrangements rather than on formal institutional collectives. A focus of the research is on the recreational performer within local community contexts.

The next chapter describes the study area relating to geographic, demographic, social and economic elements as well as providing relevant historical information to contextualise the current practice of traditional music in Fingal.

Chapter 3: Fingal the Place

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes aspects of the study area relating to geographic, demographic, social and economic elements, and provides historical information to help contextualise the presence and sustainability of traditional music playing in Fingal. The practice of traditional music, past and present, is addressed separately in chapter four. The geo-political status of the county as a separate administrative unit or county, what constitutes the geographic boundaries of Fingal, the topography of the area as well as habitation patterns are described. Infrastructure that serves transportation, social and economic needs of the county, such as employment hubs and fishing, are identified.

To provide context to understanding the modern Fingal, aspects of its historical past are explained, including elements that set it apart. The chapter also examines the contribution of the growth of Irish nationalism and the promotion of ‘Irish Ireland’ ideals in the first two decades of the twentieth century as factors contributing to the development and continuity in playing traditional music in parts of Fingal in subsequent decades. The chapter concludes by providing data on the population from the 2016 national census, on the significance of the business and employment sectors in the county, and on socio-economic aspects relating to the population and how people live their lives today.

3.2 County Fingal

The name Fingal has been linked for more than 1,000 years with the geographic area of North County Dublin, an area associated from antiquity with conquering groups vying for domination and occupation of some of the most fertile lands in the country. Even the name ‘Fingal’ translates from the Irish language as ‘tribe of strangers’. Over the centuries the boundaries of Fingal have changed and so too have the size and demographic composition of its population, especially over the past 40 years, due in no small way to its proximity to Dublin City. While an

integral part of county Dublin, there is much that sets it apart: it is one of the wealthiest counties and has the youngest and fastest growing population of any in Ireland; distinctive urban and rural influences intertwine easily together; its heritage of eclectic influences readily accommodates, for example, traditional music playing side by side with the playing of cricket; and although still ‘Dubliners’ at heart, a maturing shared Fingal identity is helping the county to capitalise on creativity attendant on disparate social and cultural backgrounds and identities and younger population.

In a reorganisation of the administrative areas of Dublin City and County in 1994, County Fingal was formally established under the responsibility of Fingal County Council (FCC) with an administrative area generally comprising the geographic area of North County Dublin (Figure 1, p.2). The geographic area stretches north of Dublin City for approximately 35 kilometres, bounded on the eastern side by the Irish sea and extending inland for about 20 kilometres. The county’s northern border is at the River Delvin immediately north of Balbriggan, extending westwards to the villages of Naul and Garristown (Figure 3, page 59). The southern boundary includes the now heavily populated ‘villages’ of Howth, Sutton and Baldoyle, stretching westwards along a line close to the M50 motorway (constructed between 1990–2005) to meet the River Liffey in the southwestern corner. The western side, bordering counties Kildare to the south and Meath to the north, includes the now physically linked towns of Castleknock, Blanchardstown and Mulhuddart, each originally a village in North County Dublin that have developed as major suburbs in the gradual growth and expansion of Dublin City particularly over the past half century. These three towns, together with the more recently developed urban area of Ongar, constitute what is collectively known as Dublin 15.



Figure 3 Map of Fingal showing main towns and villages

Source: Author

The total Fingal administrative area covers an area of 448 sq. km. It has a coastline of 88kms between Sutton and the mouth of the Delvin River.

Source: Ó Broin (1980, p. 8)

60

F. Ryan 2007, p.7), a location Archer (1975, p.1) suggests is a rath in Cappagh near Finglas.¹¹

Another example of boundary change was the Dublin Boundaries Act 1900 which brought Kilmainham and Drumcondra into the city area, described by Brady (2017, p.26) as a major threat facing the then newly established Dublin County Council with responsibility for the Fingal area as Dublin Corporation sought to annex lucrative taxation districts. The western border of today's county Fingal extends further westwards beyond those described in the Annals and it excludes the Tolka river area—see Figure 4 above. This means that the now populated area of Finglas, once a prosperous village at the heart of social and economic life of south Fingal and other areas like Ballymun, Santry, Glasnevin, Clontarf and Raheny, also to the north and east of the Tolka River, are in the administrative unit of Dublin City Council, thus constituting part of Dublin City proper.

Overall, the land in Fingal is very fertile and suitable for a variety of crop and livestock production. The southern section of the county consists in the main of gently undulating plains, referred to as the plains of Fingal. The Howth peninsula has many upland features resulting in variable quality lands. There is also a range of low-lying hills in the northern half of the county, extending westwards from close to Skerries, which includes Baldungan, the Black Hills and Knockbrack, the latter meaning Hill of Brack which, Archer says, was derived from Hill of 'Breagh' or 'Bregia' (p.3). The plains of Fingal were known in more ancient times as Mágh Bhreagha (Plains of Bregia). Off the coast of Fingal are three island groups. Ireland's Eye is located 1.5 kilometres from the mouth of Howth harbour, a popular tourist attraction today as well as an important protected wildlife sanctuary. Lambay Island is about 5 kilometres off the coast from its nearest point on the mainland, Portrane (Figure 3 above). It is in private

¹¹ An Taisce, Fingall published posthumously Patrick Archer's book *Fair Fingall* in 1975. A local historian and uilleann piper, Archer (1866-1949) situated the geography of the area and presented an historical narrative that extends over a lengthy period of time, including references to its numerous ecclesiastical connections and vacillating political associations in more recent centuries on account of its proximity to the seat of power in Dublin Castle.

ownership but has been inhabited at various stages particularly following the establishment of a monastery there reputedly by St. Columcille in 530 CE. Lambay was one of the first places to be raided in Ireland by Vikings, landing there in 794 CE and using it as a base from which to launch attacks along the coastline (Green 2012, p.20). An archipelago of islands, known as skerries, are to be seen just off the coast at the town of Skerries, while further out, also opposite Skerries, is the significant Rockabill lighthouse. Ireland's Eye, Lambay and Rockabill, together with cliff areas surrounding the Howth peninsula are important breeding grounds for seabirds, including gannets, puffins, razorbills, and the rare rosette tern. Extensive mudflats at various points along the coastline, such as the estuaries at Baldoyle, Malahide, Portrane and Rush, (Figure 3, page 59) are home to a wide variety of water birds, including waders and duck, swans, herons, mallard, wigeon and shelduck, lapwings and oystercatchers. They also serve as internationally important 'over-wintering' grounds for birds such as barnacle geese, grebe, redshank and godwit (D'Arcy, 1981).

3.3 Infrastructure features

Dublin airport, Ireland's primary international aviation gateway located in south Fingal, is the most significant economic hub in the county. Fingal is home to one of Ireland's five national fishery harbours in Howth. There are also locally significant fishery harbours in Skerries and Balbriggan. Smaller harbours such as at Rush, Rogerstown, and Loughshinny, once served local fishing communities but these now provide infrastructure for recreational water sports, angling activities, and some small-scale local fishing. The towns of Malahide and Howth have significant marinas for recreational boats and watercraft and various tourism related water-based recreational and sea angling activities operate from these ports. South Fingal borders two significant public parks in Dublin. The Phoenix Park, open to the public since 1747 and one of the largest enclosed parks in a city in Europe, comprises 707 hectares.¹² It is used for a wide

¹² www.phoenixpark.ie (accessed 1 July 2022)

variety of recreational activities and St Anne's Park in Raheny has almost 100 hectares available for recreational purposes. Fingal has large public parks in the vicinity of all the main urban centres, many of which were acquired from the estates of ruling elites in the second half of the twentieth century, such as Malahide Castle from the Talbot family, Newbridge House in Donabate from the Cobbe family and Ardgillan Castle near Skerries from the Taylor family, all open to the public and catering for a range of recreational activities.

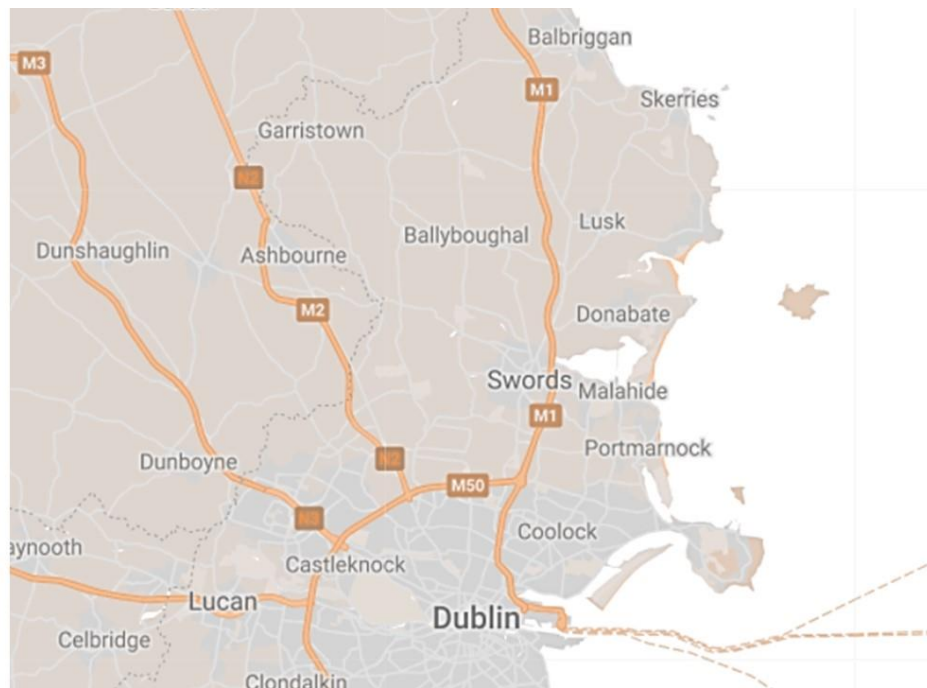


Figure 5 Roads Infrastructure in and around Fingal.

Source: Google Maps.

Fingal is well served by motorways, three of which traverse the county in a north-south direction - the M1 (Fingal sections mainly completed during the 1980s) on the eastern side, and the M3 (completed 2007), and M2 (completed 2004) on the western side – see Figure 5. The three motorways are linked by the M50 running east-west across the southern boundary of the county that in turn forms part of the motorway orbital route around Dublin City. The motorways collectively provide important access as freight transport routes to Dublin port, the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor and to other parts of the country through direct links to the national motorways network. Public transport, integrated with Dublin City, serves populated areas on both sides of the county, but the absence of cross county bus services and any significant cross

county roads, reflecting the more rural character of the centre, other than the M50 on its southern border, militates against greater county integration. Railway lines also form part of the transportation infrastructure. The Dublin to Belfast mainline railway serves as a commuter rail system in conjunction with Dublin's DART system, primarily serving the eastern and south eastern areas of Fingal.¹³ A second commuter rail line serves Dublin 15. In less populated areas, limited bus services exist which, according to its Director, is a major impediment to enticing visitors to the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre in Naul, one of two arts centres in the county.



Figure 6 Séamus Ennis Arts Centre, Naul

Source: Author

The extant built infrastructure includes a wide variety of housing types. The most frequently occurring are two story semi-detached units in housing estates developed close to the main

¹³ Dublin Area Rapid Transport (DART) currently serves stations on the northside of Dublin from the City centre to Malahide and Howth. Mainline trains serve outer commuter destinations from Malahide to Balbriggan inclusive.

towns and villages from the 1970s onwards. Apartment accommodation in three to four story units and duplex units¹⁴ have become a common feature over the past two decades. Much rural housing is dominated by stand-alone bungalow type units, while evidence of nineteenth century vernacular housing, although no longer thatched, is relatively common. The Séamus Ennis Arts Centre (SEAC) in Naul is located in one such vernacular house (Figure 6). There is much evidence of nineteenth and early twentieth century public building architecture. These include red brick-built Carnegie Libraries in towns and villages on the eastern side and many churches in use today, serving various Christian denominations, usually located in town and village centres. Howth and Malahide contain examples of faux Georgian townhouse style housing from the mid-nineteenth century while various ascendancy ‘big’ houses built from the 1700s onwards remain dotted across the county, the larger of which have generally been acquired by the State for public park amenity. Malahide Castle, the home of the Anglo-Norman Talbot family, dates to the twelfth century, although the building was much added to in succeeding centuries. The oldest built heritage in Fingal is associated with early ecclesiastical sites. Fingal contains 12 Martello towers stretching along its coastline, built between 1802 and 1815 to help rebuff a feared Napoleonic invasion (Green, 2012, p.30). Some now serve a public purpose, such as that in Howth which houses a small transport museum, while others, like those at Portrane, Portmarnock and Sutton, have been converted into private living accommodation.

Except for a small number of late Victorian era band stands in larger towns, most of the limited public monuments and statuary evident today was provided in recent decades, often as plaques commemorating events such as maritime incidents or people/events linked to the struggle for national independence. Larger monuments have made a relatively recent appearance, including

¹⁴ Duplex units normally comprise a housing unit of one bed accommodation on the ground floor and a separate larger housing unit above it, although some variations are evident.

a life size bronze statue of uilleann piper Séamus Ennis (Figure 9 in section 4.2.1) in a seated position outside the SEAC in Naul.

3.4 Fingal in the past

3.4.1 A historical perspective

Evidence of habitation in North County Dublin can be traced back to the Mesolithic period, i.e. before 4,000 BCE, attested to by archaeological finds involving settlement artifacts and middens at Rogerstown and Malahide estuaries (Fingal County Council 2008). In the subsequent Neolithic (4000–2400 BCE), Bronze Age (2400–700 BCE) and Iron Age (700 BCE–500 CE) periods, evidence, although limited, from settlements, tombs, tools and artifacts, points to the primacy of habitation initially close to the coastline, then gradually moving inland over time as the practice of agriculture expanded (2008, p.9). The early Medieval period (500–1,000 CE) was marked by significant development in Fingal, including the building of early Christian churches and ecclesiastical centres:

Settlement in the early medieval period in Fingal can be classified into two broad types: Gaelic secular sites sometimes indicated by place-names with the prefix *rath*, and ecclesiastical sites with the *cill* and *domnach* place-name elements. The most common secular settlement was the earthen ringfort, (e.g. Feltrim Hill). Ringforts generally functioned as enclosed farmsteads, though they also served as settings for more specialised activities such as the production of textiles, glass and metals. The construction of ringforts was accompanied by an explosion in agricultural activity based on cereal growing and animal husbandry (2008, p.11)

The importance of these early ecclesiastical buildings is reflected in the number of surviving examples and in their centrality to the subsequent development of towns and route-ways in the county. However, while the use of the name ‘plains of Bregia’ remained into the early Christian period, the distinctive location name Fingal (tribe of strangers) came into being with the arrival and settlement of Danish invaders in the ninth century. Their arrival heralded much development of settlements, including the establishment of some towns and villages in Fingal today and elsewhere in the country, including Dublin City. The Nordic influence in Fingal can

be seen from both Gaelic placenames, such as Fine Gall and Baile Dubh Gaill (Baldoye, meaning ‘town of the dark stranger’), and Norse placenames, including hovda (Howth, meaning ‘head’), holm (Holmpatrick, meaning ‘island of Patrick’) and skjære (Skerries, meaning ‘rocky islets’) (2008, p.11). The names Lambay and Ireland’s Eye are derived from the Norse word ‘ey’ meaning island. The name Fingal initially applied to the strip of coast the Danes first occupied, but when they subsequently pushed further inland, taking new territory from existing inhabitants, the area of Fingal became extended without regard to the ethnicity of the inhabitants (Archer 1975. p.7).

The Norman invasion in 1171 brought yet another new order to the area, again altering habitation patterns and introducing new ruling elites, such as the Talbots’ in Malahide and the Plunketts’ in Portmarnock. Further change occurred following the Cromwellian period, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. This period again saw the introduction of a new aristocracy, often acquiring lands through dispossession from existing families. Their presence would subsequently usher in periods of agricultural and industrial development, reflecting the wider industrial revolution emerging in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. Over time, wealthy families from successful commercial backgrounds also settled in Fingal, particularly from the late eighteenth century, such as the Jameson family of the distilling dynasty who settled in Portmarnock in 1804, naming their substantial house ‘St Marnock’s’ after the local fifth century patron saint, while going on to provide much local employment during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century (Ahern 2013, pp.75-80). An important step in the formation of modern Fingal was the coming of the Dublin to Drogheda railway in 1844. It was one of the earliest railway developments in the world and heralded many opportunities for growth in trade and, in the later Victorian period, brought recreational visitors to the county (2013, pp.182–191). A strong agriculture sector in Fingal involving the production of food for sale to the inhabitants of Dublin City was important from the thirteenth century and progressively grew in significance in terms of quantity and variety of crops, vegetables and animal-based products

produced to meet population growth in the City (Green, 2012, p. 17). An important consequence of this growth in agricultural produce was that by and large Fingal suffered less mortality and emigration than other parts of the country during the Famine period and aftermath, attributed to farming on better quality land involving a mix of grassland, cereal and other food crop growing. However, the southern areas abutting Dublin City experienced inward migration of people fleeing from more impoverished areas (Crowley Smyth and Murphy 2012, pp.113, 325-333).

Much local industry was also evident from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some of substantial scale. High quality brick making was undertaken from the late eighteenth century and possibly earlier for use in construction in Baldoyle and Portmarnock (Ahern, 2013, p. 114). From 1780 Smyth and Company, operating under the Smyco label, became a major employer in Balbriggan for nearly two centuries, employing 700 workers at its peak, producing quality clothing for the international market, including for Queen Victoria who, it is reported, wore stockings made by them.¹⁵ The business popularised the type of hosiery known internationally as ‘Balbriggans’ described in Chambers Dictionary as: ‘a knitted cotton fabric like that made in Balbriggan, Ireland, underclothing made of it’.¹⁶ The factory struggled from the 1960s, but despite efforts to introduce greater efficiencies and cut costs, it eventually closed in 1980 unable to compete with cheaper, mass-produced imported products and suffering significant financial losses (Murphy and Ryan 2007, p.54).

Horticultural production is widely associated with Fingal, but the intensive industrial level it operates at today only stems from the 1930s with the arrival of Dutch and Belgian families. They first produced flowers in the light, sandy soil around Rush, introducing glass houses to Fingal for the first time. Production capacity spread to other areas in Fingal such as Kinsealy

¹⁵ ‘*Queen Victoria loved her little bit of Balbriggan*’, Fingal Independent 28 May 2004
<https://www.independent.ie/regionals/fingal/independent/news/queen-victoria-loved-her-little-bit-of-balbriggan-27772469.html> (accessed 14/12/2021)

¹⁶ Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, 1983 edition, W&R Chambers Ltd., Edinburgh

and the sector also expanded into market gardening, turning it into the multi-million-euro industry it is today (Murphy and Ryan, 2007, p.42). A pattern associated with the industry today is the use of seasonal skilled migrant labour, mainly from Eastern Europe, to undertake harvesting, the practice of which became quite controversial during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷ However, seasonal migrant labour from other parts of Ireland to Fingal has long been a feature. Dave O'Connor informed me that he recalled the late renowned story teller and singer Mick Quinn from Mullaghabawn, Co Armagh telling of his grandfather walking over 70 kms to Holmpatrick farm in Skerries each August to work for a month at the harvest, joining labourers from many parts of Ireland, where there were nightly singing sessions at which the workers traded songs. The inflow of migrant labour has long been a cause of civil strife and division, such as in the first two decades of the twentieth century when farm owners sought to secure their harvests while rejecting demands for better pay and conditions by an increasingly organised and disenchanted farm labouring cohort, see section 3.4.2. While the arrival of the Danish Vikings in the ninth century may have been significant in bequeathing a unique identity and character association with the place, regular reconfiguring of the boundaries of the area and movement of peoples in and out of the county over the centuries has resulted in an eclectic genealogy.

Among the factors that helped Fingal to retain some level of distinctiveness despite the legal integration of the region with Dublin City from about the seventeenth century was that inhabitants, particularly in the northern parts of the region, spoke Fingalian. Extinct since about the mid-nineteenth century, Fingalian was an anglic language, an off shoot of Middle English, although much vocabulary would seem to have been taken from the Irish language as well. Archer (pp.131-143) identified a substantial list of words from Fingalian that continued in local

¹⁷ Article in the *Irish Independent* newspaper on 5 May 2020 titled *Wanted: 800 Irish fruit and vegetable pickers*. <https://www.independent.ie/business/farming/news/farming-news/wanted-800-irish-fruit-and-vegetable-pickers-39179745.html> (accessed 14/12/2021)

vocabulary after use of the language died out. An awareness of difference was still evident to a degree in the early part of the twentieth century. In their 1909 advice to the cyclist visitor to North County Dublin, in which they also incorporate geographic and historical details relating to Fingal before the occurrence of major development and population growth from the mid-twentieth century, Cosgrove and Dillon (1909, p.60) recommended visiting the coastal district of Rush, Lusk, Loughshinny and Skerries as: ‘the true home of the Fingallians (sic) . . . The Fingallians (sic) are said to be different in features, voice and manner from the other people of Leinster and this difference may be ascribed to their Scandinavian origin. They are good farmers, sailors and fishermen and have many good qualities’. They also highlighted praise for ‘their cleanliness and excellent housewifery’, again underscoring a reputation that was forged from a millennium earlier.

3.4.2 Nationalism an Early Driving Force for Irish Traditional Music

Despite a strong Anglocentric disposition within Fingal society throughout the nineteenth century, the successful promotion of an ‘Irish Ireland’ agenda during the *fin de siècle* period helped create local audiences receptive to Irish culture and the playing of traditional music.¹⁸ Chapter four considers how Irish traditional music is practiced today in Fingal, including providing retrospection on the standing of the music in past decades. An aspect of this is understanding why interest in traditional music emerged in some areas of Fingal in recent decades and not in others. Interviewees suggested part of the reason the music remained visible in locations in Fingal through the mid-decades of the twentieth century, longer than was the case in many other parts of Ireland, was because of a tradition in parts of Fingal of strong support for an Irish nationalist agenda, evident from the 1798 Rebellion onwards, and especially at the turn of the twentieth century, a period of much political turmoil and cultural redirection

¹⁸ Ó Corráin and O’Riordan (2011, p.260) define ‘Irish Ireland’ as ‘a general term for the forms of cultural nationalism that took shape during the 1890s and early 1900s. In sport, literature, language and education, there was a desire to move away from the dominant influence of England to develop an ‘Irish Ireland’.’

throughout Ireland. Archer (1975, p.83) highlighted the notable part played by pikemen from Fingal in the 1798 rebellion and he provides the verses of a ballad titled ‘The Muster in Fingall (sic) 1798’ (see text box below)—said to have been composed shortly after the rebellion, commemorating those who lost their lives in the conflict.¹⁹ Fingal is also connected to events during the 1916 Rising. Hegarty and O’Toole (2006, p.114) state: ‘Outside Dublin, the major engagement of the Easter Rising took place in Ashbourne, County Meath. It was carried out by the Fingal Battalion [based in North County Dublin] ... Led by Thomas Ashe’. The battalion also carried out attacks on post offices and local RIC barracks in Swords, Skerries, Garristown and Donabate, among others.²⁰ Bartlett (2010, p.390) described the same event as: ‘one of the deadlier encounters [in the Easter Rising].’ During the War of Independence 1919-1921, the sacking of Balbriggan in September 1920 by Crown forces in response to activities by the Fingal Brigade was one of the most significant and widely publicised activities during the war.²¹

The Muster in Fingall 1798

*I'll sing of that sweet summer's day
The glorious twenty fourth of May
When pikemen bold in brave array
Came forth against foreign thrall.
From Santry village and Clonnee
The news swift travelled o'er the lea
And Ireland's banner floated free
Upon thy plains, Fingall.*

*The men who lived by Swords' old tower
Rose out in Freedom's morning hour
While Lusk swift marshalled all its power
As did Corduff and Naul
From high Knockbrack and Mullaghoo
From Ballyboughal and Skiddoo
From Baldwinstown and Grallagh too
Came forth thy sons, Fingall*

*And westwards as they marched away
Shanbaile joined the brave array
While Ballygara and Dunreagh
Sent forth their pikemen tall.
And with them Molly Weston came
To Worganstown belongs the fame
Of her who fought in Freedom's name
With thy brave sons, Fingall.*

*On Royal Tara, side by side
With Meath's brave men they fought and died
I sing of them with love and pride
Who gloried, thus to fall.
And though long since they've passed away
Their memory lives, and will for aye
While Freedom's cause shall ne'er decay
Upon thy plains, Fingall.*

¹⁹ Ballad reproduced from Archer (1975, pp. 93/94). Archer says the ballad was published in Arthur Griffith's paper *The United Irishman* about the beginning of the twentieth century (p.93).

²⁰ RIC: Royal Irish Constabulary

²¹ Sacking of Balbriggan, see <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/the-sack-of-balbriggan-the-burning-of-a-town-that-shocked-the-world-100-years-ago-1.4359707> (accessed 14/12/2021)

Political changes in Ireland especially following the enactment of the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898 brought new nationalist political elites to power. In relation to Fingal, the Act replaced the 23-man Unionist controlled County Dublin Grand Jury system of local government, with Dublin County Council becoming responsible for both North and South county Dublin areas and Dublin Corporation catering for the main city area.²² Throughout most of the nineteenth century two landed families dominated parliamentary representation in Westminster in the two-seat Dublin County constituency, the Taylors of Ardgillan near Skerries and the Hamiltons with extensive land holdings in Castleknock, Balbriggan and Skerries. These, and other ruling aristocratic elites such as the Talbots in Malahide and the Palmers in Rush, dominated much of nineteenth century and early twentieth century commercial and agricultural activity and influenced many aspects of social and cultural life in Fingal.²³ Although a period of Protestant aristocratic dominion, many middle class and land-owning Catholics also espoused a strong Unionist disposition and supported the status quo. Despite the enactment of the 1898 Act, the franchise, being primarily based on land ownership and wealth, remained restricted such that out of a population of 75,009 in North County Dublin in the census of 1891, only 11,743 were entitled to vote (Brady 2017, p.14). Top of national political agendas at the turn of the century were achieving home rule and land ownership. In the case of the latter, the Land Act of 1903 enabled almost half of Ireland's 545,000 tenant farmers to purchase their holdings, which had the domino effect of increasing demands for home rule and, by default, widening the franchise base in favour of nationalists (Brady 2017, p.26.).²⁴ In parallel with the transforming political scene, profound changes in the cultural, linguistic, and sporting life of the country were instigated in what is known as the Irish Revival. Kiberd and Mathews (2015, p.24) describe the period 1891–1922 as: ‘an extraordinary era of literary achievement and

²² The Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898 (61 & 62 Vic., 37) passed in August 1898

²³ A description of Malahide at the turn of the twentieth century from a social and economic perspective is to be found in *Old Malahide* by Richard Green, published by Fingal County Libraries in 2012.

²⁴ Irish Land Act, 1903 (3 Edw. VII, c.37), also known as the Wyndham Act

political ferment. This period generated not only a remarkable crop of artists of world significance, but also a range of innovative political thinkers and activists, among the most influential that Ireland has produced'. The Irish Revival included the promotion of the Irish language, Gaelic sports and Irish arts including the playing of traditional music and dancing. For many activists, the cultural and political developments went hand in hand, promulgating an 'Irish Ireland' sentiment. Seán MacPhilbín (section 5.2.10) also highlights the importance of a tradition of fife and drum and pipe bands in helping to promulgate and sustain music playing, including traditional music, in communities in Fingal at the time, such as the Black Raven in Lusk, of which Thomas Ashe, 1916 Rebellion leader, was a co-founder.²⁵ As well as being a local historian, Archer was an uilleann piper who gave piping lessons to Ashe and another 1916 Rebellion leader, Eamonn Ceannt. Ashe, although a native of Kerry, was a National schoolteacher at Corduff, near Lusk and leader of the Fingal Brigade that took part in the Battle of Ashbourne in 1916 (Archer 1975., p.118).

The changing political and cultural environments brought new actors of a strong nationalist mindset onto the stage, including members of three families, the O'Neills, the Kettles and Lawlesses, who would dominate political life and aggressively drive an Irish cultural agenda in Fingal in the 1900s and 1910s. Among these, P.J. O'Neill was the first chairman of Dublin County Council (established pursuant to the 1898 Act), serving in that capacity for almost 20 years. The first resolution passed by the new Council was to assert 'That the people of Ireland are a free people with a national right to govern themselves ... and that we repudiate the claim of any other Legislature or Government to legislate for or govern the people of this country' (Brady 2017, p.25). Landowner, Andrew Kettle would achieve prominence in nationalist politics. Frank Lawless founded an early branch of Sinn Féin in Swords in 1906 and, along with P.J. Kettle, promoted the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association aggressively

²⁵ <http://www.blackravenpipeband.net/history.html> (accessed 14/12/2021)

particularly on the eastern side of Fingal (pp. 21-27), leading in time to strong local interest in the Irish language, traditional music, and Gaelic games. Lawless, along with his two sons, would go on to serve under Thomas Ashe at the battle of Ashbourne in 1916.²⁶ Eoin MacNeill, joint founder of the Gaelic League in 1893 and founder of the Irish Volunteers in 1913 also lived near Kinsealy. Seeking a self-governing Ireland was an agenda which nationalists of different classes in society could collectively aspire to, farm owner and farm labourer alike. But as the first decade of the new century progressed demands for agrarian reform, including the franchise, better working conditions, and landownership for agricultural labourers, caused sharp differences to emerge between the differing social groups, pitting landowners against their employees, while cementing new alignments between business owners, farm owners and even the aristocratic elites they once opposed. Brady (2017, p.38) noted: ‘The farm proprietors of north Dublin in 1913 were organised and experienced, determined to protect the prosperity they had gained on the back of political struggle and land purchase, and were capable of taking on [the farm labourers]’. A fraught and divisive political climate occasioned by such class conflicts, where strikes, boycotting and intimidation mirroring employer / labour disputes in Dublin associated with the 1913 lockout caused much social division and rancour in Fingal and the sundering of long-standing nationalist political allegiances. What the oft-times near warring factions continued to share was the Catholic religion and an interest in Gaelic games and culture, shared interests which persisted into the formation of the new Irish Free State (p.45). Brady observed that the further from Dublin one travelled in Fingal, support for Irish nationalism lessened, citing Balbriggan as an example where a pro Union ethos was notable. Even in Swords, despite an apparently strong Gaelic League presence, it appears the general culture within the town a century ago was somewhat less Gaelic in outlook, including in relation

²⁶ An example is the Gaelic League in Swords can be found at <https://www.swords-dublin.com/politics-in-swords-dublin-in-1911.html> (accessed 14/12/2021). St Margaret’s and other villages also had a significant Gaelic League involvement

to its choice of music and with a less than complimentary regard for traditional musicians, termed ‘lesser musicians’, as the following account from a community event in Swords demonstrates:

Then we had trios and quartets, usually good musicians. Violin, cello and double bass. Violin and harp, violin and cornet, two violins, violin and cello (Glynn Quartets) and the German bands, about eight or nine musicians. Lesser musicians, banjo's, tin whistle, flutes, all these tramped from Dublin, did the round of the village and tramped off to the next village. Some of them would stay the night in the lodging houses in the village at 3d. a night for bed and cooking facilities, supply your own food. Most of them tramped off to the workhouse, about eight miles from Swords, at Balrothery, where they could get a night's lodging by doing a spot of work on the farm the next morning to earn their keep.²⁷

Unlike the progression of other aspects of literary, cultural and social life in the Irish Revival, music remained problematic in terms of a bifurcation between Western art music of the middle classes and traditional music lately associated with the rural peasantry (Dowling 2014, pp. 151–207). In the case of the incident referred to in Swords, social class as much as cultural preferences was most likely at play.

3.5 Fingal today

3.5.1 Population

The national 2016 census reports a total population of 296,000 in Fingal, representing a doubling in number since 1991, making Fingal the third most populous administrative unit nationally and representing 6% or 1 in 15 of the country's population. Much of the increase in population occurred through inward migration, people moving to Dublin City and its environs for work purposes. The influx resulted in long established towns expanding side by side with the creation of new communities with little or no past links to the region and often incorporating new multicultural populations. The flow of people also included many well-established traditional musicians from elsewhere in the country and this had an important impact on the

²⁷ Quotation at <https://www.swords-dublin.com/music--amusements-swords-dublin-history.html> (accessed 14/12/2021)

development of the traditional music in Fingal since the 1980s (see section 4.6.3). Areas closest to Dublin City experienced the greatest enlargement, but over time locations further north, like Balbriggan, also experienced significant development. Table 1 shows the distribution of the population across the seven administrative subdivisions of the county (see Figure 7) from the 2016 census (rounded to the nearest 100):

Table 1 Population Statistics for Fingal based on 2016 Census

Electoral Subdivision Area	Population
Swords	51,400
Rush-Lusk	34,700
Howth-Malahide	56,100
Balbriggan	36,600
Blanchardstown-Mulhuddart	35,300
Castleknock	46,100
Ongar	35,800
Total Population	296,000

The following points are notable from the published information on the census material:

1. Approximately two thirds of the population are concentrated in three localities, Dublin 15 (117,200), Swords (51,400) and Balbriggan (36,600)
2. An 8% population increase between 2011 and 2016 in Fingal has been attributed in the main to a “natural rate”, described in *The Fingal Independent* newspaper as ‘something of a 'baby boom' ongoing in the county as its young population begin to start families. The county has only seen a modest increase in net migration over the last five years’.²⁸
3. While the 2016 census shows that Fingal had the youngest population in the state, the proportion of its pre-school population fell by 6.8% between 2011 and 2016, with

²⁸ <https://www.independent.ie/regionals/fingalindependent/news/fingals-population-has-almost-doubled-in-the-last-25-years-34893252.html> (accessed 14/12/2021)

corresponding increases in older child cohorts. The census also shows Balbriggan as Ireland's youngest town with an average age of 30.8 years.

With regard to the population distribution in Fingal today, the county can be viewed from several perspectives as one of two halves. The southern part of the county is relatively densely populated and is part of Dublin City's commuter belt. The more extensive upper reach is generally rural in character but contains several significant towns, such as Balbriggan, Skerries, Swords (which is the County town), and Malahide (Figure 3, page 59), each long-established



Figure 7 Fingal Local Electoral Areas

Source: www.fingalcoco.ie

but transformed in recent decades to varying degrees by population growth and demographic change. While the population is roughly evenly divided between the eastern and western sides, there are clear distinctions between both. The subdivision of Fingal into seven electoral divisions or subregions for administrative purposes (Figure 7) generally reflects established social and links within and between adjacent towns and communities within the subregions. However, such links are less evident between the two sides. The popular local newspaper *Fingal Independent* mainly covers stories and events relating to the eastern side only. Despite the significant road networks and public transport arrangements serving both sides, cross-county roads and transport links in the centre and upper reaches of the county are more limited. Even the practice of traditional music is much more evident on one side (see chapter four).

3.5.2 Business and employment

The county has significant indigenous local employment in agriculture, horticulture, industry, services and tourism. Fingal also serves as an important reservoir of people who commute to work in Dublin City. Significant economic drivers underpinning the economic and social development of Fingal are the presence of Dublin Airport as a national scale economic hub; the area's location on the Dublin / Belfast economic corridor; the Dublin Enterprise Zone (DEZ) located in Dublin 15; the importance of the county in national food production; and more generally, the proximity of the county to Dublin City. Despite the downturn in the economy nationally from 2008, FCC report that between 2011 and 2016 employment in the county increased by 15%.

Information published by Dublin Airport Authority and Fingal County Council's (FCC) Economic, Enterprise and Tourism Development Department give an indication of the scale and importance of the key production sectors to employment and wealth creation in Fingal:²⁹

²⁹ The information was sourced from:

(1) Dublin Airport Economic Impact Study 2019 published by the Dublin Airport Authority, page 4 at <https://www.dublinairport.com/docs/default-source/2016-economic-impact-assessment/economic-impact->

1. The economic impact of Dublin Airport, which includes activity directly related to the airport, the multiplier impacts that flow from it, and the other sectors of the economy facilitated by the airport, amounts to 129,700 jobs in Ireland, equivalent to 114,900 Full Time Equivalents, earning a total of almost €5.0 billion. A total of €9.8 billion is contributed to GDP, representing 3.1% of the national economy.
2. The Dublin Enterprise Zone (DEZ), located in Dublin 15, adds €14.4 billion to national economic output, and supports 34,600 jobs in the economy. The DEZ contains 20 Business Parks with 1,100 business premises.
3. Fingal is the most important county in Ireland for primary food production with 600 farmers producing 14.5% of national potato output, 47% of field vegetable output and 37% of protected fruits, vegetables, and nursery plants.
4. Up to €0.5 billion per year is spent by visitors to Fingal, which supports an estimated 20,000 jobs.

Together, the four impacts highlighted serve to illustrate a county of significant wealth creation and employment opportunities, one that generates positive economic impacts beyond its borders through downstream multiplier effects and the country's Gross Domestic Product. Proximity to the Dublin market is an important driver of business while favourable port and motorway links extend the reach of businesses. Notable too is the wide variety of business sectors involved and the presence of large-scale business hubs, which are important in securing economic resilience and in attracting new companies as well as in the promotion of creativity to sustain competitiveness and job creation. Not included in the bullet points above is employment in the education and social services sector (next section) which also provides significant employment opportunities in the county.

report_2019.pdf#:~:text=Dublin%20Airport%20Economic%20Impact%20Study%20The%202015%20economic,used%20to%20estimate%20the%20distribution%20of%20jobs%20and (accessed on 14/12/2021).

(2) Dublin Enterprise Zone. Details available at: <https://www.gatewaytoeurope.org/dublin-enterprise-zone#:~:text=The%20Dublin%20Enterprise%20Zone%20%28DEZ%29%20is%20a%20major.and%20contributes%20%E2%82%AC14.4%20billion%20to%20national%20economic%20output>. (accessed 14/12/2021).

(3) FCC's Economic, Enterprise and Tourism Development Department at <https://www.fingal.ie/reasons-do-business-fingal> (accessed on 14/12/2021)

(4) Tourism in Fingal at: <https://www.fingal.ie/sustainableswords/tourism> (accessed on 14/12/2021)

3.5.3 Social and educational aspects

Fingal has the second highest county median household income at €58,800 compared to the national county average at €43,300.³⁰ Three of its towns are in the top ten list of towns with the highest household income, viz. Malahide, Swords and Skerries, all on the eastern side. Juxtaposed with areas of wealth are locations with socially and economically challenged communities, more often associated with newly developing areas with populations from diverse backgrounds. As already noted, much of the growth in population was centred on the expansion of once small towns and villages. A significant feature of these is that in many cases the original village structure has remained the active centre of the town and community activities today. This is evident, for example, in Howth, Malahide, Skerries and Swords on the eastern side. Even on the western side there is some evidence of retention of village structures, although to a lesser degree than on the eastern side. Today, the importance of maintaining vibrant town centres is recognised by FCC, which has been promoting policies to enhance the social character and infrastructure of the centres, in the process promoting new facilities and services and addressing building dereliction and antisocial behaviours sometimes associated with such dereliction. This is evident, for example, in a major plan recently adopted by the Council to develop the economic and social infrastructure of Balbriggan that places much of the actions under the programme in or near the old town area.³¹ A recognised village or town centre provides a focal point for small-scale village enterprise, the provision of retail and community public services facilities, a location for clubs to operate from and, critically, a place for people to socialise in, such as in cafés, restaurants, and pubs, including for playing of traditional music in public settings. FCC's plans stress the importance of building community cohesion and identity linked to town centres. Although many towns in Fingal have now grown significantly

³⁰ Central Statistics Office report of June 2019 on household median income by county for 2016

³¹ Fingal County Council's Balbriggan rejuvenation plan: <https://www.fingal.ie/council/service/balbriggan-socio-economic-strategy> (accessed on 14/12/2021)

in size, the centre is still often referred to as the ‘village’ by the local community, such as Malahide village and Castleknock village.

There are two FCC provided arts centres in Fingal, the larger Draíocht centre in Blanchardstown serving all art forms, and the SEAC located in the rural setting of Naul has a strong association with traditional arts. On their own, two arts centres serving a population of 300,000 seems inadequate, but it should be noted that arts facilities in Dublin City also serve Fingal. Under FCC’s current arts plan (see section 6.4.3), the development of arts activities in the three significant population centres of Swords, Blanchardstown, and Balbriggan are proposed. Consultation on the development in Balbriggan shows strong public demand for greater arts facilities in the town.³²

The Blanchardstown campus of Technical University Dublin is in West Fingal and Dublin City University (DCU) is located close to the southern boundary of the county, while other third level institutions in Dublin City and Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) are also relatively easily accessible to students from Fingal. Both DCU and DkIT offer opportunities to study music, including Irish traditional music. The 2016 census reported 48.7% of the population over 15 years of age having a third level qualification, the third highest by county and some 7% above the national average. Schools at primary and secondary levels are geographically widely distributed, many original schools having been scaled up in size to cater for the needs of the expanding population while schools in new communities like Ongar on the western side were green field developments. A 400-bed teaching general hospital employing over 2,000 people is located in Blanchardstown, West Fingal.

Ireland’s National Sports Campus is in Abbottstown, near Blanchardstown, serving as the national high performance development centre for a wide range of sports including swimming,

³² https://www.fingal.ie/sites/default/files/2019-05/our_balbriggan_strategic_plan_200x287mm_2.pdf (accessed on 14/12/2021)

football, cycling, boxing and field and track sports. The governing bodies of most Irish sports are also located on the campus. Gaelic football and hurling clubs are to be found in most towns and villages in the county while rugby and soccer football have a presence in the longer established towns. A stadium in Santry in South Fingal serves as the main centre for athletics in Dublin and is home to several soccer football teams and cycling. There are sailing clubs in all towns bordering the sea. Present, but to a less significant degree, are clubs catering for such sports as tennis, hockey, basketball, and rowing. The growth in cricket in recent years has been a notable feature of the sporting environment in Fingal. Cricket had maintained a presence in the county, especially in long established towns that had an association with an aristocratic family. A combination of recent successes of the Irish cricket team in international competition and an inflow of immigrants from countries internationally associated with the playing of cricket, such as India and Pakistan, has helped to rejuvenate the game. Golf is also a very significant recreational activity throughout Fingal, the area boasting more than a dozen golf courses, including some of the oldest courses in the game, such as in Portmarnock and the Island in Donabate. Fingal is also endowed with many safe sandy beaches, including Sutton, Portmarnock, Donabate, Rush, Skerries and Balbriggan, all serving as popular bathing and water sports locations for the residents of Fingal and day trippers from Dublin City alike.

3.6 Conclusion

The fertile soils and favourable sea access points marked Fingal out as a place of early habitation in Ireland. But Fingal was, and continues to be, influenced to a considerable extent by its proximity to Dublin City. This has provided opportunities for trade and commerce and access to cultural activities. The growth of Dublin has also directly impacted the recent growth in population in Fingal, which has seen a doubling in size to 296,000 since 1991. From about 500 CE, when many ecclesiastical sites were first established, the area has been ruled variously by disparate elites: Vikings, Anglo Normans, local clans, Cromwellian planter families, Protestant ascendancy families and wealthy commercial and farming interests. Throughout the

nineteenth century Fingal was ruled by conservative Unionism, but a strong seam of nationalist sentiment persisted, such that the promotion of Gaelic sports and culture, including playing traditional music as part of the Irish Revival at the turn of the twentieth century, received a receptive audience, providing a foundation for the development of a notable tradition in Irish music playing. Today, Fingal is characterised by a young population but with separate communities on the east and west sides respectively. There are locations of significant wealth juxtaposed with socially and economically challenged communities, many of which are located in newly established towns with populations from diverse backgrounds. However, the availability of employment and significant social infrastructure has assisted in the general integration of communities across the county. The area is well served with educational resources including to third level. Two arts centres and the presence of many clubs and organisations has helped in encouraging engagement with the arts. Although the county has experienced much social change, many aspects of an older Fingal remain, such as the retention of village centres, while the population influx has helped to reinvigorate many long-standing sports and social clubs serving, in the process, to link recent arrivals to the heritage and creating a sense of belonging to the county.

Chapter four critically examines the practice of traditional music playing in Fingal today. It addresses the impact of traditional musicians settling in Fingal over the past 40 years and highlights a continuity in playing the music throughout the decades of the twentieth century. The period 1900-1920 saw a significant interest emerge in playing the music, and while it would be difficult to determine now the extent to which that contributed to a continuity in playing, it certainly brought the music into many local communities and playing the music has continued to be part of the life of the county.

Chapter 4: Irish Traditional Musicking in Fingal

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how Irish traditional music in Fingal is practised today. It sets the contexts in which the music and the music community or, more accurately, music communities, have developed. The focus is on events since the 1980s as this period represents a time of significant advancement in engagement with the music. The chapter examines how the music is manifested and sustained—the activities, the people, and groups involved. Information on transmission arrangements is provided and physical and social infrastructure associated with the music is identified. Responses to an online survey on public interest in traditional music are reported and the chapter concludes with a retrospection and critique of the processes of change and the current state of the music in the county.

Chapter three alluded to events extending back to the early twentieth century to provide context and background relating to the standing of traditional music within the local population. Given the objectives and scope of this research, it is not proposed to delve in-depth into the history of traditional music in the county over the past century or more, or to seek to provide a definitive view on the extent to which the many players collectively over the decades could be considered to constitute a continuation of a once strong and unbroken tradition. It is clear, however, that many individual musicians continued to play traditional music even as interest in the genre fell away around them, reflecting the work of O'Shea (2008) in a broader geographical context. Recognising the important contribution of locally born players serving as 'threads to the past' as interest in performing the music increased from the 1980s, this chapter provides examples of such players and the settings in which they performed. The rekindled interest in playing traditional music in Fingal from the 1980s mirrored a rise in interest nationally in the music. This enthusiasm was also reflected in renewed interest in set dancing, the revival of the

mumming tradition and, importantly, also led to the establishment of the SEAC in Naul to promote the traditional arts.

Section 4.4 in the chapter addresses engagement with the music today across Fingal. It includes a critical examination of areas of the county where engagement developed most from the 1980s and, consequently, how manifest it is in these locations today. I focus on understanding the drivers of change, both in those instances where the music has been successfully promoted as well as in understanding the reasons for decline in interest in the music in locations once considered music strongholds. Section 4.4 also examines the music repertoire played in the county. The chapter reports (section 4.5) on responses to an online survey into public interest in traditional music and how people engage with the music. The survey attracted a significant response, which included responses from an almost equal number of male and female musicians that suggest, among other things, differences between genders in music participation.

A critical commentary taking an overarching perspective of the processes of change and the current state of traditional music in Fingal is provided in section 4.6. This includes consideration of what constitutes the traditional music community and the relevance of various recognised community group arrangements to the life of the tradition. While the term ‘traditional music community’ is employed in this dissertation (see section 1.6), this research suggests that no such single grouping exists. Instead, there are many small communities involved. Nor are these small groups homogenous. Many have different interests and objectives, sometimes competing, and often with little contact between them, while allegiances to traditional music formations beyond the county are discernible. Included in the critique is consideration of the role of the family within traditional music and the status of transmission in Fingal, as well as how the various actors responded to the COVID-19 restrictions. Section 4.6 concludes with the identification of the main elements of the traditional music ecosystem in Fingal (section 4.6.9), listed by domains in Schippers and Grants five-domain analytical framework.

As noted in section 1.4.2 above, throughout this and other chapters in the dissertation, direct quotations attributed to informants are taken verbatim from the recorded transcripts of interviews with individuals listed in Appendix 1.1, which also contains information regarding dates and formats of interviews.

4.2 Overview of traditional music in Fingal

4.2.1 Local strength

Fingal today exhibits features associated with the presence of a significant, if localised, and vibrant traditional music culture: It enjoys the presence of musicians born in the county and others who have settled in the area and a variety of stakeholder groups mainly comprising community and commercial interests active in the transmission, promotion and performance of the music. The region boasts a rich history connected with the tradition, while the association of Séamus Ennis with the area, the success of an annual traditional music festival and the presence of an arts centre with a focus on the traditional arts have helped lift the reputation of

Return From Fingal



Figure 8 Return from Fingal–March associated with the playing of Séamus Ennis

Source: Author

the county in the traditional music world. Before the imposition of national measures to counter the spread of COVID-19 in March 2020, weekly traditional music and singing sessions, some of many years standing, took place in locations spread throughout the county, although not uniformly so. The county is noted for having retained community folk traditions in addition to music, passed down through generations, not least the performance of mummers (section 4.3.3) at Christmas time. Traditions of pipe bands and singing are also important. FCC, which has responsibility in the county for promoting traditional music (see chapter six), refers to this rich heritage in promotional material on their website, highlighting the contribution of uilleann piper and folklore collector Séamus Ennis, originally from Finglas and associated in the later part of his life with the village of Naul, where an arts centre named after him is located. Séamus's playing included the old pipe march tune *Return from Fingal* (Figure 8), a name incorporated in the title of this research.³³ On its website FCC asserts:

Fingal has a rich legacy of traditional Irish music. The greatest and best known (sic) exponent is undoubtedly the late Séamus Ennis, master Uilleann Piper, raconteur, singer and storyteller. Séamus did extensive work for RTÉ & BBC during the 1950's and 1960's (sic) in collecting folk music and folklore . . . The full extent of his contribution to the revival of Irish music and song is not yet fully appreciated; suffice to say that his contribution to the Irish Folklore commission is unparalleled and is noted for its quality and extent.³⁴

Séamus Ennis is indeed significant in the story of Fingal's relationship with Irish traditional music, his name certainly has helped to boost interest in the music from the 1980s. But how relevant he is to the practice of the music today in Fingal may be a moot point. Certainly, having an arts centre named after him in Naul and a life-size statue outside of him seated playing the uilleann pipes reinforces Ennis's association with local traditional music, despite him only returning to the area for the final ten years of his life and having died almost 40 years ago in 1982. While the statue of Ennis serves as an important visible reminder of traditional music

³³ The pipe march *Return from Fingal* is also known as *Fingal March* and *Return to Fingal* and by various other titles elsewhere—see entry for *Return from Fingal* at www.the-session.org.

³⁴ <https://www.fingal.ie/seamus-ennis-centre> (accessed 25/08/2021)

making in a rural part of Fingal, much that has happened over the last four decades to shape the practice, place and perceptions of traditional music has been driven by other forces, such as musicians settling in the area and by people through their wider community development activism.



Figure 9 Statue of Séamus Ennis outside the SEAC in Naul.

Source: Author

Aside from referring to Séamus Ennis, FCC's statement of a 'rich legacy' doesn't make any direct reference to other local musicians down through the generations or take account of the fact that most of the primary actors associated with leading the rise in interest in the music in Fingal since the 1980s had little or no engagement with the Master piper. Some were undoubtedly enthused by the association of the county with such a celebrated piper and his playing but, to borrow from Ó Riada's (1982) imagery, other

streams have been feeding the river and continue to do so today.

The influx of people over the past forty years into Fingal, described in chapter three, included many established musicians from across the country to add to the musical mix there. The success of Scoil Séamus Ennis from the mid-1990s and the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, first held in 2002 (see section 4.4.2), owes much to strong local business and community support, while more recent ventures like the Fingal Fleadh, introduced by FCC in 2017, attest to the continuing public support for the music tradition. Yet, if there is a feeling

that traditional music in Fingal is in a good place today, many of those closer to the action and contributing to this research maintain reservations about its current standing and future trajectory. The picture emerging suggests a blossoming of the music from the 1980s for about two decades in some locations, after which there was an ebb, although much remains. The rising tide at the time did not affect all areas of Fingal equally, and significant areas of the county remained untouched, such that low levels of engagement with Irish traditional music by communities in many areas within Fingal endures.

4.2.2 The players

The reasons why interest in traditional music emerged in some areas of Fingal from the 1980s and less so or not at all in others is important. The presence of a strong nationalist tradition in parts of the county at the turn of the twentieth century was noted in section 3.4.2, including in relation to playing traditional music. Interviewees hold different views on the extent to which a once notable heritage of traditional music playing in the county persisted through the decades of the twentieth century, ultimately contributing to the upsurge in interest in the music in the 1980s, raising a question of whether there was a significant endogamic element to the development of the music in the 1980s or was it mainly exogamic—a marriage of internal and external forces? The musicians involved in playing in the county from the 1980s period can be seen to fall into several categories: (1) those who had grown up in Fingal and had learned to play in the locality before 1980; (2) those who settled in the county as adults already proficient as players (the ‘blow-ins’); (3) local people who, as young adults, learned to play motivated by the general uplift nationally in interest in traditional music, here termed ‘self-starters’; and (4) regular visitors from locations adjacent to Fingal, particularly from Dublin City. A small cohort comprising musicians of note nationally and living in the county has not been included as a separate category in this analysis as their interaction with the local music scenes was often limited, such as in delivering occasional workshops or concerts.

The mix of players from the different categories varied from location to location and influenced the nature of the sessions. While the experiences of Ballyboughal and Skerries, two locations which displayed significant growth in interest in the music, displayed several similarities, an important difference was that players from the locality were engaged early in the uplift in Ballyboughal while Skerries relied to a greater degree on musicians and activists from elsewhere who had settled in the town. Some informants associated with Ballyboughal consider the participation of older musicians in the early sessions there to reflect an important ‘thread to the past’, to an underlying heritage of traditional music playing in the area, extant albeit much weakened, which helped motivate a new generation of players and singers in the sessions and the revival of mumming and dancing. In other words, the continuing visibility of traditional music, although by then quite modest and associated more with individuals or families rather than the wider community, helped secure the foundation upon which the upswing in Ballyboughal, when it did come, could foster new roots in the community. Many in this older musician cohort had continued to play traditional music as interest in it weakened around them for their personal enjoyment or to support community activities like mumming, although it too was on the wane. Others played traditional music alongside or in association with more popular music genres as those musicians pivoted to meet the shifting music demands of a society itself in change.

Musicians settling in the county were important catalysts for starting sessions in Fingal, but it soon tapped into a valuable seam of local interest.³⁵ Mags (Margaret) Maxwell (section 5.2.8), who grew up in Ballyboughal village and attended music sessions there from the early 1980s, explained that many musicians involved in playing in sessions at the outset had settled in the area, such as banjo player Noel McGarry, the person credited by Seán MacPhilínbín (section

³⁵ Kaul (2009, pp.84-102) employs the term ‘blow-ins’ in relation to musicians or aspiring musicians settling in Doolin. A more colloquial term occasionally used in Fingal referring to people living in an area but not born there is ‘outsiders’.

5.2.10) with starting-up the first session in Ballyboughal in 1979 on Tuesday evenings.

According to Mags, locally born musicians were initially slower to engage in the session:

Even though there were musicians in Ballyboughal, there were accordion players and mouth organ players, but they didn't take part in this traditional music in the pub. They would have played ... after the pattern of the graves they might play, or after a football match, and they were big things like in those days. They were all big family events and community events and social events. They would play everything, they would play tunes but they would also play waltzes and airs, songs and people would sing, there was always a sing song because if you didn't have an instrument then you would sing.

Older players from the locality, such as Jimmy Gilsenan, Paddy Clarke and Paddy Seavers, and a younger generation of players born there from the 1960s were important actors in creating and amplifying the surge from the 1980s. The involvement of both younger and older cohorts together linked an existing but fragile music tradition to a new generation of local players while helping forge a new awareness of the value of traditional arts in the locality. Another cohort of musicians born in Fingal, termed 'self-starters' above, such as James O'Mahony and Terry Kirk (see sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 respectively), also played a key role in driving the musical uplift in the county. These locals were not initially engaged with traditional music in their early years but became attracted to it, usually in their late teens, through listening to emerging groups like Planxty and The Bothy Band. Members of this cohort still form an important presence in the traditional music community today. But in a folk music tradition that has as its core the notion of handing down the music through the generations (Breathnach 1971, McCarthy 1999), musicians that represent or constitute 'threads to the past' are especially important to the maintenance or even to reimagining a sense of a local passed-down heritage. Despite playing little while living in Fingal in the final years of his life, Séamus Ennis may also be regarded as an important thread to the past in the county. By associating with Séamus Ennis's widely regarded music and collecting attainments, FCC and others were able to utilise his name and reputation to promote interest in traditional music through organising activities and transmission that included establishing a music school and a traditional arts centre in his honour.

4.3 Threads to the past - traditional musicscape before 1980

4.3.1. Examples of players active before 1980

During my fieldwork, a number of interlocuters commented on the low visibility of traditional music in Fingal in the decades immediately preceding 1980. This of course was not an exceptional position throughout the country at the time; for example, Cotter (2016) noted an



Figure 10 Antóin Mac Gabhann

Source: A. Mac Gabhann

almost absence of traditional music in Ennis before 1961, a position that changed as a result of the actions of individual ‘motivators’ (p.29) and a collaboration between CCE and Clare Vocational Educational Committee to provide instrumental classes (pp.2-3).³⁶ Jim Grant (section 5.2.9) reported that when he and his wife moved to Skerries in the 1980s there was little traditional music apparent: ‘I didn’t know it at the time but not long before we arrived, Skerries was regarded

as a kind of British town. It wasn’t really steeped in Irish traditions’. Michael Gavin made a similar point about Skerries and noted the absence of traditional music in the Balbriggan area when his family moved there in the 1970s, as did Antóin Mac Gabhann when he served as a member of An Garda Síochána in the Balbriggan / Skerries area in the mid-1960s.

Although not previously widely acknowledged, McElwain (2014) demonstrated an underestimate of the presence of traditional music in the Sliabh Beagh area of Monaghan and Fermanagh. This research identified many individuals in Fingal who played Irish traditional music in the decades before 1980. I am indebted to Seán MacPhilbín, Dave O’Connor,

³⁶ Clare Vocational Educational Committee was the then state-funded education body responsible in the county for certain aspects of post-primary education, further education and adult education.



Figure 11 Dave O'Connor

Source: D. O'Connor

originally from Garristown and living in Ballyboughal, Michael Gavin from Balbriggan and Christy Sheridan (see below) from Swords for their assistance in helping identify musicians operating in past decades and in supplying photographs, which included players born in the second half of the twentieth century as well as older players.

This following paragraphs describe several musicians active particularly in the mid-decades of the twentieth century and selected activities

associated with the performance of traditional music. As already indicated, this is not presented as a history of traditional music in Fingal; it provides an indication of the type of musicians active and the circumstances of their playing. It includes musicians who mainly played traditional music and those who incorporated it within their general music playing.

A distinguished piper and Irish dancer in his early years, Chris Langan (1915-1992) from Rush, began playing with the *Black Raven Pipe Band* and was a founding member of The Gaelic Pipe Band of Toronto after he moved there in 1958 (Cranford 2002, p.vi). Chris, an Irish speaker, also played and made uilleann pipes, for which he was largely self-taught. He returned annually to Ireland to attend the Willie Clancy Summer School and play music locally in Rush. Reports indicate he made a significant contribution to the traditional Irish music and highland piping scenes in Canada. He



Figure 12 Chris Langan

Source: Kieran Wade

composed many tunes suited to the uilleann pipes (a sample is provided in section 4.4.4).³⁷

Annual Chris Langan festivals held in both Toronto and Rush are testaments to his enduring influence.³⁸

Mags Maxwell, an active participant in the sessions and in the revival of mumming and set dancing in the 1980s, observed that there were many local musicians who played traditional music, including highlighting the role of families as tradition carriers in her locality:

there might be a whole family who play music and they would be recognised as a musical family and they would have instruments but not everybody could afford instruments. There were a few families who were very musical, and they did play traditional music, but they played other music as well, played all kinds of music, but they did actually play traditional music.

An example of one such family playing traditional music is that of Jacqui Martin (section 5.2.4), fiddle player from Kilsallaghan, who still lives there. She recalled that both her paternal and maternal grandfathers played fiddle. The late Dinny O'Brien, a cousin of her mother, was raised in Kinsallaghan by his grandmother and two uncles (great grandmother and granduncles, respectively, to Jacqui). Both brothers played traditional music, on accordion and harmonica, and they taught Dinny how to play. Dinny's own family in turn continued playing the music, including the late whistle player Denis (Donncha) O'Brien and noted uilleann pipers Mick O'Brien and John O'Brien.

Christy Sheridan (Figure 13), born in Swords, is a multi-instrumentalist and now retired, having spent his working life as a professional musician and long-time member of the folk group *The Bards*. He recalled his father and other relatives playing music:

³⁷ A book of his tunes was published in 2002: Cranford, Paul, Patrick Hutchinson and David Papazian 2002, *Move Your Fingers: The Life and Music of Chris Langan*, Cranford Publications, Nova Scotia, Canada

³⁸ Information relating to the Canadian event is at: <http://www.chrislangan.ca/> (accessed 23/08/2021) and for the event it: <http://www.Seannosdance.com/appearances-events/2018/6/22/scoil-samhraidh-chris-langan-rush-co-dublin> (accessed 23/08/2021)

there was always music in the family. My father played and indeed his brothers played, and on my mother's side there were . . . seven or eight children in her family and most of them played as well. The main instrument, believe it or not at that time ... was button accordion. And for some reason button accordion seemed to feature a lot, not alone just in Swords but in North County Dublin.

Christy said that four of his father's brothers also played the accordion, all self-taught, as he himself was when he started playing that instrument. An important aspect of their playing was the repertoire they played:

I have to say there wasn't an awful lot of traditional music playing. They would have played a lot of waltzes . . . and some Irish tunes. A lot of the tunes of the day you know, you'd have somebody like maybe Bridie Gallagher . . . [singing] 'One Fair County in Ireland' . . . And a lot of dance music . . . Indeed, my father was in a band with my uncles and they had a kind of a dance band.



Figure 13 Christy Sheridan.

Source: C. Sheridan

In a changing music culture in Ireland, particularly from the 1920s, dancing became commercialised through being transferred to parish halls. New forms of dances, mainly influenced from Britain and the United States, became fashionable. Céilí bands, popular from the 1920s, eventually gave way to the Showbands in the 1960s where yet more new forms of dancing, such as the jive, waltzing and the twist were introduced (Vallely 2011, p.199). Parallel with the development

of showbands was the start of Ireland's ballad boom of the 1960s, much assisted by the advent of television (Ó hAllmhuráin 2017, p.153). Céilí bands also sought out ways to retain their popularity, Christy explained:

I had an uncle who played in a céilí band called the Columbkille's Céilí Band . . . and he played fiddle . . . There was a music teacher in Swords called Tommy Dempsey and he would have taught my uncle to play the fiddle. Yeah and actually his son was Mick Dempsey

who was the sax player in the Gallowglass Céilí Band. I think one of the first céilí bands to have a sax player in it . . . It was a unique sound in actual fact.

Christy placed his uncle learning the fiddle with Tommy Dempsey, also known locally as Plant Dempsey, about 1930, reporting that: ‘apparently he was extremely strict if you missed a note’. According to Seán MacPhilbín, many of the players before 1980s were self-taught, but he also made the point that there were local

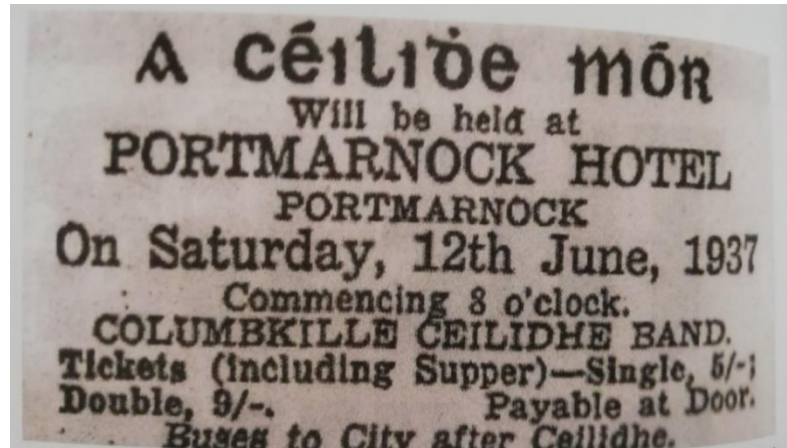


Figure 14 Dance ticket for Columbkille Ceilidhe Band

Source: Aherne (2013)

teachers available. One such teacher from near Lusk was Mrs. Terese Nulty (Figure 15). Sally Corr (section 5.2.3) reported learning to play the fiddle from her, while she and Seán



Figure 15 Terese Nulty

Source: Gerry Nulty

MacPhilbín were among several interviewees who recalled The Nulty Céilí band, comprising primarily Mrs. Nulty and her children.

Terese Nulty (1930-2003), née Sheridan, grew up in Home Farm Road, Drumcondra, Dublin and moved to Lusk after marrying a local man from the village. Terese was the daughter of Christina Sheridan, also a fiddle player who in turn was the daughter of Brigid Kenny, identified as ‘The Queen of Irish Fiddlers’ by Captain Francis O’Neill.³⁹ Christina and her sister Josephine,

³⁹Extract from Captain Francis O’Neill’s *Irish Minstrels and Musicians*, published in 1913, about Mrs Bridget Kenny, identified by O’Neill as ‘The Queen of Irish Fiddlers’: ‘In no country save Ireland, would a violinist of such demonstrated ability as the subject of this sketch remain unappreciated and practically unnoticed, while obliged by necessity to contribute to the support of a large family by playing for a precarious pittance along the highways and byways of Dublin for a generation or more. The Gaelic Revival brought Mrs. Kenny into the

Slominski (2020, p.81) reports, ‘swept the prizes at the Feis Ceoil in 1915-25’. Martin Nulty, Terese’s son, informed me that his mother taught piano and fiddle locally throughout her life. His grandmother Christina also lived with them for a couple of years. Martin said that his family, including his grandmother, played together quite a lot in the house. Mrs Nulty taught all her children to play traditional music and they also participated in Irish dancing events, including being associated with the Balbriggan CCÉ branch (see next section). Another of Mrs Nulty’s sons, Gerry, runs a music school in Swords today and her grandchildren continue to play traditional music.⁴⁰

Included among the self-taught players were Jimmy Gilsenan and Paddy Seavers. Gilsenan was a fiddle player living near Lusk, with a strong personal style, whose nephew also played the box, according to Seán MacPhilibín. Terry Kirk’s recollection of Jimmy, who died in 1988, included the following:

He was a great fiddle player. And he was old style ... he would have played an odd time but not much because he had no transport, he just had a bike and he lived out sort of out near Ballough and he’d ride the bike into the Top Shop [pub in Lusk]. When I heard him playing at the Top Shop one night I said . . . ‘that sounds very sweet, who’s playing that?’ Someone said that’s the Gaff, they used to call him, Gaff Gilsenan. ‘That’s Jimmy.’ I went in then and I was listening to him. He was the sweetest player I tell you, but his repertoire of tunes wouldn’t be hundreds, might be 30, 40. But what he played was fantastic.

Jimmy Gilsenan (Figure 16) lived in a house that had limited utility services, according to various interviewees. Sally Corr, who lived close to him, says that he also played the harmonica. Terry Kirk’s recollection of him was that he: ‘was the type of guy that wouldn’t be mad into singing ... He was one of these guys who would just rather play [tunes] all night’. Yet there was local regard for him as a musician, Terry relaying how people interested in traditional music

limelight, and after she had outclassed all competitors as a traditional violinist at the annual Feiseáanna, winning first prize year after year, she was proclaimed "The Queen of Irish Fiddlers" (p.387).

Bridget Kenny, the grandmother of Mrs Terese Nulty, was the daughter of John McDonough from Galway. O’Neill described McDonough as ‘the premier Irish piper of his day and generation’.

<http://bridgetkenny.theanteroom.com/> (accessed 26/08/2021)

⁴⁰ ‘Play Piano in Swords’ provides tuition in traditional music playing and other genres.

regularly called to give him a lift to and from sessions, enabling him to play, and when his fiddle got damaged: ‘the lads in Rush gave him another fiddle’. On the sleeve notes of his first album released in 2006,⁴¹ Ballyboughal fiddle player Brendan Lynch (see Figure 17) wrote of Jimmy: ‘the first two tunes here I learnt (sic) from the playing of Jimmy Gilsenan, a great fiddle player from the Lusk area . . . His memory will live on in O’Connor’s pub every Tuesday’.



Figure 16 Jimmy Gilsenan playing in Ballyboughal mid-1980s

Source: Dave O’Connor

The tunes in question are ‘Paddy on the Railway’ and ‘Miss McLeods’, two popular traditional tunes in the Irish music canon.

Paddy Seavers (Figure 17), who died in 1997, played the button accordion. Seán MacPhilibín recalled his repertoire would have been: ‘jigs and hornpipes and maybe an occasional reel and songs for which he would accompany himself on the accordion’. MacPhilibín also reported:

Scoil Séamus Ennis recorded him in 1997. We made him guest of honour . . . [I]t was just to pay tribute to the man because in a local context, he lived in a little thatched house less than a mile from here, less than 17 miles as the crow flies from O’Connell Street [Dublin], played the accordion, sang tunes, had a few Irish songs, milked cows by hand and farmed a very small, dispersed landholding. I think in other counties they might have made an industry out of him.

Terry Kirk recalls as a younger musician playing tunes with Seavers in a session in Man O’War village: ‘back then there was Paddy Seavers, these old-timer musicians, played the accordion in C. He’d a BC accordion, he played in the inside row, you know. So, everything was in C.

⁴¹ Brendan Lynch released 2 CDs: *Irish Traditional Music from the Heart of Fingal* in 2006 and *Tunes from the Hearth* in 2011

We all had to drop down or put a capo on so we could play in C'. Terry and Seán acknowledge the value of players such as Jimmy Gilsenan and Paddy Seavers to local traditional music and of the joy these players obtained from the music without reference to any yardstick relating to technical or artist prowess or other conditionality.



Figure 17 Paddy Seavers special guest at the Fingal Tradition Club, October 1994. With Dave O'Connor (guitar) and Brendan Lynch (fiddle).

Source: Dave O'Connor

Their accounts have much in common with Dillane's (2012) telling of her neighbour in Templeglantine, Jim the bodhran player for whom playing music was also an integral part of his everyday life: 'within Jim's universe, music finds its natural place' (p.13). We learn that Jim made his own bodhrán: 'in the same manner he would mend the leg of a chair . . . He made one

because he needed one and he could do it' (p.12). The respect described by Terry Kirk for Gilsenan by his local community is also mirrored in Dillane's story about the wren boys visiting Jim: 'I think the Wren Boys (and Wren Girls) saved performing for him for last because the community holds Jim in such high esteem and because he enjoys the craic and festivities so much' (p.14). A photograph of the Western Stars Céilí Band (Figure 18) hung until recently in a prominent position in the SEAC. Seán MacPhilíbin identified musicians who played in the band as Kevin Connell (fiddle), Dodi Delaney (accordion), Jimmy Downes (melodion and button accordion), Paddy Clarke (fiddle) and a drummer name Flynn from Oldtown. According to MacPhilíbin: 'the Western Stars Céilí Band played in all of the villages around North County

Dublin throughout the 40s and 50s'. Paddy Clarke often joined in the monthly CCÉ Balbriggan session held in the Carnegie Library in the mid-1970s (see section 4.3.2). Michael Gavin observed of Paddy Clarke: 'He could play the fiddle and knew every tune no matter what tune you played. . . [He had] a great heart and [was] a lovely man'.

The instruments generally played by musicians in Fingal in the mid decades of the twentieth century were the accordion, the fiddle and the harmonica or French fiddle as it was often locally known. The 1937/1938 National Children's Folklore Collection includes references to the playing of these musical instruments (example 1, Appendix 4.1). Christy Sheridan's recounting above of his family's association with accordion and fiddle, especially the former, is also illustrative. In terms of the quality of instruments played, Seán MacPhilbín recalled how a neighbour of his, Dessie Begg, at the time of the opening of the SEAC offered him an accordion that had belonged to his uncle Peter who had been playing about the 1950/60s. Seán says he declined taking the instrument as it was a high quality 1950s Paolo Soprani 'grey' model, which



Figure 18 Western Stars Céilí Band

Source: Director, Séamus Ennis Arts Centre

although requiring repair work, was valuable in financial terms and an instrument much sought after by accordion aficionados today. Seán also believes class distinction was a feature in terms of who played what instrument within the community. Inevitably, economics played a hand here: ‘you had big farmers and then you had a big farm labourer class . . . And the instrument of choice was, if it wasn’t box it was the mouth organ, still called the French fiddle by some of the older local practitioners’. O’Shea (2008) refers to research undertaken by Koning (1976) who established that there were significant differences in musicians’ social class, O’Shea highlighting: ‘a far more socially divided ‘community’ than most commentators on the period of house dancing recognise . . . [Koning] notes that ‘big farmers’ frequented the hotel but not the pubs, and that paid gigs invariably went to musicians belonging to their social group’ (p.63). Seán offered as examples of French fiddle players the McCann brothers of Ballyboughal, Jamsie Byrne from Naul, Dick Despert who played box and mouth organ and ‘the Bow McCann from Ballyboughal . . . B-O-W, that was his nickname’. It is notable that these four mouth organ players came from the Ballyboughal/Naul locality, an area that featured prominently in the upsurge in playing traditional music from the early 1980s.

The Ballyboughal sessions that commenced in the 1980s were built on a foundation of local players joining with experienced musicians settling in the area, connecting to the tradition of the past while tapping into a resurgent and burgeoning interest in traditional music nationally. Seán described as ‘organic’ the confluence of the old and new that led to a flowering in music playing, singing, dancing and mumming: ‘you had this kind of background, which was here, was extant so to speak and then you had people who moved into the area becoming engaged with the local sessions. And there was . . . a number of what I'd consider organic developments’. While several interviewees described the state of traditional music generally in Fingal forty years ago as being relatively weak, those familiar at the time with the playing of local musicians like Paddy Clarke, Jimmy Gilsenan, and Paddy Seavers held them in regard, although sometimes as much from a sociable as from a musical perspective.

While the Ballyboughal sessions provide some evidence of interaction between local players and incoming musicians from the 1980s, this situation appears to have been less common elsewhere. Part of the reason may have been the low visibility of the local musicians, but it is also pertinent to ask if the concept of authenticity played any part in influencing how incoming musicians viewed the playing by locals and the local traditional music scene pertaining at the time. Or was there a more prosaic explanation, that local players were perceived as being of a limited playing standard, since some of them may not technically have been on a par, playing wise, with many musicians in, for example, the monthly session in Balbriggan (see section 4.3.2)? The limited repertoire of the local players was also remarked on. Nettl (2015, p.146) informs us that the concept of authenticity is: ‘not frequently discussed but [is] always lurking in the background. O’Shea (2008, p.2) addresses authenticity in an Irish traditional music context: ‘The concept of *authenticity* (italics in original) performs a legitimising, and hence gate-keeping, function in the discourses of the nation and of ethnicity, place and gender, in which ideas about Irish traditional music are embedded’. However, during her discourse on regional styles in traditional music, O’Shea also points to the importance of understanding ‘the locality and tradition’ rather than simply trying to adjudicate on claims of authenticity. The presence of local players who did not play in the early sessions, described by Mags Maxwell, many of whom may not have been considered as ‘authentic’ players and outside the usual traditional music circles (see James O’Mahony, see next section), perhaps some even perceiving themselves as such, may have resulted in the story of that cohort of musicians being obscured from local traditional music narratives. Christy Sheridan’s recounting of his family’s involvement with the music suggests echoes of this. But for such local players traditional music was present in their lives in a meaningful form, reflecting Titon’s (2020, p.125) experience of being initially disappointed by the content of a report by a member of a group of Old Regular Baptists on their visit to Washington to perform at the Smithsonian’s Festival of American Folklife, until he himself rationalised that: ‘foremost on [the writer’s] mind were feelings about

the people and places they encountered, not the abstract ideas of authenticity, contextualisation, presentation and cultural conservation that bedevil the proponents and critics of folk festivals'. As with Dillane's neighbour Jim, there was no evidence to suggest that Jimmy Gilsenan, Paddy Seavers and Paddy Clarke doubted the authenticity of the traditional music they played.

4.3.2. Harbingers of change

From the 1960/70s onwards several activities were initiated that would have a significant impact on the advancement of traditional music in Fingal, mirroring national trends. These included, according to Ó hAllmhuráin, the popularity of the fleadh cheoil movement following the founding of CCÉ in 1951 and the: 'phenomenal influence of Seán Ó Riada, who transformed the status of Irish traditional music in the 1960s' (2017, p.148). Equally significant was the establishment of branches of CCÉ introducing opportunities across the country to learn to play traditional music, three of which were established in Fingal in the 1970s (section 4.6.5). Growing interest in traditional music in Fingal was evident from the 1960s. Christy Sheridan recalls two sessions being started up in late 1960s in Swords; one in O'Toole's Bar, later renamed the Lord Mayor's bar, on Thursday nights by Christy himself and a group of young players: 'we had a great fiddle player . . . his name was Barry Ward who was classically trained but he was a lovely trad player and Owenie Sheridan'. Sheridan, a piccolo player from Swords who worked in a local milk farm, was described by Michael Gavin as 'the most famous musician' to come from Swords, reflecting his musicianship but also him being a national celebrity in motorbike racing circles. The second session was in the Star Bar in Swords frequented by musicians such as fiddle players Maura Garvey and Ciarán Ó Reilly from Dublin, Christy recalling: 'I remember Maura down in The Star because I learned a great tune. . . I was only starting out . . . it was the Silver Spear'. The 'Silver Spear' is a popular and widely performed tune in the Irish tradition, which can be found in collections including Breandán Breathnach's first *Ceol Rince na hÉireann* (1963, no. 141) and Ceoltóirí Chluain Tarbh's *Student Work Book* compiled by Mullen and Rosell (2014, no. 57, p.60). It will be noted in the

version of ‘Silver Spear’ reproduced below that both musical stave and alpha (ABC) notation systems are provided since the latter system is used widely in traditional music transmission for students particularly in the early years of the learning process. In addition, the transcription and others included in the dissertation are drawn from sources available to members of the community but typically represent a melodic outline of the tune with limited reference to aspects of style and musical interpretation.

F A A B A F A D' F' E' D' B C D' A F A A B A F A D' F' E' D' B A

F A A B A F A D' F' E' D' B D' E' F' G' G' E' F' G' F' E'

D' F' E' D' B A F' A' A' B' F' A' F' G' F' E' D' B C D' E'

F' A' A' B' F' A' F' G' F' E' D' B A F' A' A' B' F' A' F'

G' F' E' D' B D' E' F' G' G' E' F' G' F' E' D' F' E' D' B A

Figure 19 The Silver Spear Reel

Source: Mullen and Rosell (2014, p.60)

Cotter (2016, p.2) attributes the impact of the establishment of a CCÉ branch in Ennis, Co Clare, as the reason for the increase in interest in playing traditional music in the town in the early 1960s:

very little traditional music was ever performed in Ennis in the 1950s . . . [The] change came largely as a consequence of . . . *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* (italics in original) join[ing]

forces with County Clare Vocational Education Committee [in 1961], a state-funded education structure, in order to create the first formal classes in teaching traditional music, which then had a domino effect in creating a community of practitioners and audiences.

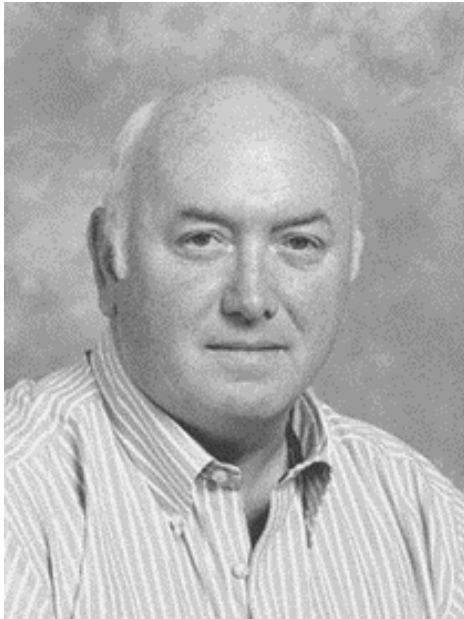


Figure 20 Michael Gavin

Source M. Gavin

The three CCÉ branches established in the 1970s in Fingal were Balbriggan (1974), Kinsealy (1974) and Malahide (1975). In the early 1970s fiddle player Paddy Gavin and his family moved from County Mayo to Balbriggan. Paddy Gavin, along with renowned fiddle player Antóin Mac Gabhann, then a member of An Garda Síochána in the town, established a branch of Comhaltas in Balbriggan. Originally from Westmeath, Paddy had lived for several years in County Mayo where he became steeped in the music of that region, numbering among his musical friends players such as Fred Finn, Peter Horan

and Johnny Henry. Michael Gavin (Figure 20), Paddy's son and noted traditional musician himself, said his father set up the Balbriggan branch because 'traditional music in this part of the country is very scarce'. Antóin Mac Gabhann said of the locality: 'I knew all of the countryside, being a Guard, I knew the district inside out. So, the music was sparse and scarce'. Antóin related how Paddy Gavin sought out local musicians while travelling about the county for his work. Paddy's ramblings seeking musicians and teachers paid dividends, Antóin recalling: 'I was on duty on the square in Balbriggan, and [recall] him pulling up and rolling down the window, and us having a great chat, and he would have been out, and maybe he found a musician somewhere, but us deciding that we would have to form a branch of Comhaltas'. First step was the provision of classes in instrumental playing. A notable venture engaged in by the newly established Balbriggan branch was the organisation of a monthly session upstairs in the Carnegie Library in the town (see Figure 21).



Figure 21 Session in Balbriggan Library 1970s, organised by Paddy Gavin

Source: Michael Gavin

Back Row L to R: unknown, Pat Timmons, Simon Curran, Antóin Mac Gabhann, Paddy Joyce, John Grey, Des Leach, Pat Corbett, Noreen Devane. Middle Row: Fred Nutty, Kathleen Gavin, Paul McNevin, unknown, Patrick Gavin, Ray Mc Kenna, June White. Front Row: Michael Gavin, Mary Ryan, Patricia Ryan, Paddy Gavin.

Michael Gavin reported:

my father used his connections with Comhaltas to try and get people to come to it. So, people from Dundalk like John Joe [Gardner], ... Joe Ryan ...[and] Séamus Ennis would come in now and again. But they were great sessions. They just ran once a month. No drink because you were upstairs in the library, it was tea and sandwiches. [P]eople from Dublin used to come out to it, people like Denis Moynihan the dancer ... Tom Glackin, Paddy's father. So, they became a kind of a fixture.

According to Antóin, local musicians including Paddy Clarke, fiddler from Naul also attended as well as Dinny O'Brien from Dublin (originally from Kilsallaghan), while Paddy Timmins, whistle player originally from Cavan and living in Balbriggan, Jack Howard originally from Balcadden (recordings of him are retained in the Irish Traditional Music Archive) then living

in Dublin, Brendan Gaughran from Dundalk and two Gray brothers from Drogheda were also occasional attenders. Antóin identified the teachers in the new CCÉ Balbriggan branch as including himself on fiddle, Seán O'Brien from the army camp in Gormanston teaching whistle and Ray McKenna. Both Michael Gavin and Antóin Mac Gabhann confirmed the high quality of the music playing in the sessions, yet also accepted that over the period the session operated the music did not embed itself in any significant way into, or engage, the local population. Set dancing also featured. James O'Mahony (section 5.2.1) from Skerries, then learning to play traditional music on banjo, attended the session on several occasions, although his interest was not only in the music:

you might get a couple of set dances with some of the young ladies of the town! . . . but the music was good . . . But I wouldn't have known who these people were at all. . . . I mean they meant nothing to me. I didn't come from . . . the music circles at all, not at all, in fact I would have gotten to know these people many years later. These would have been quality players and the music was quality and, to be quite honest, I wasn't over the moon about the atmosphere in the place, the kind of a hall and a cup of tea, it wasn't my scene, I came more from the Planxty side and that's a bit sexier! . . . [B]ack in 1976 that had an influence on me.

James' observation that he did not come from the 'music circles' raises questions of how inviting local players perceived the event to be; were they intimidated by a perceived asymmetry in playing standards between them and the visitors; did locals interested in traditional music view the session as an opportunity to hear quality musicians or view it as primarily for the benefit of a closed group not 'of the town'? How, or by what yardstick, local players viewed their own traditional music heritage is not established, but it is likely the views of the visitors would have been framed to a significant degree within national narratives on the quality of players, playing styles and repertoire, presented in contexts such as fleadh competitions, commercial recordings, and acclaimed performances. The choice of venue, a public library, is also of interest today as an alternative to relying on pubs for performance spaces—see chapter six.

Section 4.6.5 provides additional information on CCÉ activities in Fingal, including in relation to the Kinsealy and Malahide branches and several others established more recently. CCÉ branches have played an important role in promoting traditional music in Fingal; it is notable, for example, that four out of nine musicians whose stories are reported on in-depth in chapter five attended CCÉ classes at some stage in their learning. McCarthy (1999, p.167) summed up the contribution of CCÉ in promoting and transmitting traditional music, remarking:

the single most important agent and patron in the transmission of traditional music has been Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. Young performers are not only taught in regular classes but also exposed to the experience and expertise of the masters through sessions, workshops, concert tours, television programmes, and festivals. A rich learning context is provided, achieved primarily by the organisation being rooted in the community and working consistently at the local level.

The introduction of CCÉ classes had a positive effect on the level of public engagement nationally with traditional music. However, not everyone welcomed CCÉ's approach to performance or the promotion of competitions; O'Shea observed: 'While CCÉ undoubtedly broadened the base of participation in Irish traditional music-making, it has also fostered its commodification and standardisation' (2008, p.46). O'Shea, drawing on McCarthy (1999, p.135), also asserted that: 'CCÉ has continued to shift performance standards, stage presentation and teaching methods towards those of the art-music academy' (p.46). Kearney (2013, p.91) in his review of the impact of CCÉ on regional styles of playing and the promotion of regional identities through their performance programmes and infrastructure, confirmed a significant institutionalising role of Irish traditional music played by the organisation since its foundation in 1951. He also concluded the following, pertinent to the standing of traditional music today in considerable parts of Fingal:

Despite the success of the organisation over the past sixty years there are many areas of the county 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 competition. 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. (Kearney, 2013, p.91)

4.3.3. The mumming tradition in Fingal

Archer (p.126) observed: ‘Among the ancient customs of Fingall (sic) that of “Mumming” at Christmastide still holds its place. A band of Christmas mummers usually consists of about a dozen or more young men, all of whom wear disguises of some sort’. In Fingal, the mummers presentation or ‘play’ usually consisted of multiple parts, with performers or ‘characters’ taking turns to enter the performance space, each reciting a rhyming verse. Regarding the play itself, *Fingal Independent* reported: ‘There is a rich cast of characters in mumming, including Rim (sic) Rhyme who fights Prince George, and is brought back to life by the Doctor. Joe the Butcher and Slick Slack appear, as well as the Devil and the Wren, Handy Andy and Tom the (sic) Fool’.⁴² There are also references in the 1937/1938 National Children’s Folklore Collection to the mumming tradition then actively pursued by young boys at Christmas time, although in the two examples from Balbriggan presented in Appendix 4.1 the term wren boys is used in place of mumming. Gailey (1968, p.35) provides the following observation:

In North County Dublin there survives an active and lively mumming tradition. Recordings of a group, performing in a public house and in the street, were made in Swords as recently as December 1965. The performers were fully within the limits of tradition since most of them were grown men and not small boys, or even girls, whose inclusion usually signifies the degeneration of the custom, heralding its final disappearance.

Gailey’s observation on the degeneration of the mumming tradition signified by the involvement of children suggests the tradition was already on the wane in Balbriggan early in the twentieth century. Des Keogh presented a film package on the Swords mummers for the RTE programme ‘Newsbeat’ broadcast on 11 December 1964.⁴³ The piece contains an

⁴² An article in the *Fingal Independent* in the year 2000 affirms the popularity of mumming in Swords at the time <https://www.independent.ie/regionals/fingal-independent/localnotes/swords-mummers-calendar-27782705.html> (accessed 24/08/2021)

⁴³ <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2014/1210/665990-mumming-in-swords/> (accessed on 24/08/2021)

interview with local General Practitioner Dr May who is credited with reviving mumming in Swords in the 1940s. The mummers performing in Des Keogh's TV programme package included Christy Sheridan's father Stephen, an accordion player. Christy himself would go on to participate in the mummers too and was in the audience for the recording of the programme.⁴⁴ He also confirmed that at the time the programme was made there were several mumming groups in the vicinity of Swords, including in Rathbeale, St. Margaret's, Donabate, Portrane and Balbriggan, many of which competed in local and national mumming competitions:

Initially they went out on Stephen's Day and then of course they started, and it was all for charity. Every penny was charity . . . so then we decided that you know, we'll go to Malahide next week and we'll go to Rush the week after that and we'll go to Skerries and it would go on, it could go on for certainly all the month of January. And usually maybe the first week of February, you know!⁴⁵

By the time Christy became involved in mumming (early 1960s) performances had long moved from individual house visits and took place in local pubs and public spaces. Christy singled out the important role played by Harry Hanratty in the Swords group, who played Tom Fool, in constructing the rhyming verses recited by the characters:

Harry was an extremely talented man, and he would write a piece about every character, after they did the play and after we played the music and all he would then recite a piece. He'd call out every character . . . and he'd bring them out and he'd recite maybe anything up to three or four minutes about that particular character. And it would be on current affairs. . . He used to get a huge laugh, of course, it was very clever, it was very well put together. And he spent a lot of time, and how he remembered it all, you'd see him beforehand when we were getting ready to go to do the show . . . in the dressing room. The dressing room now, it could be a hay-barn but . . . he would be deep in thought, especially on Stephen's Day the first time we would start

⁴⁴ Christy Sheridan identified the mummers in the RTE broadcast in 1964: Jim O'Rourke (Rume Rhyme), Stephen Sheridan (Prince George), Frank Loughran (Doctor), Paddy Crosby (whistle player, the Butcher), Harry Hanratty (Tom Fool) Jim Sheridan (Slick Slack). He identified the second accordion player as Dick Slattery from Swords, Jim O'Connor played banjo, Tom Crosby played the bones/castanets. His uncle, Jim Sheridan, also played fiddle that night but did not feature in the final edit for the TV programme. Sheridan confirmed that the members of the mumming group would change from time to time, depending on their availability, sometimes by other members of the same family.

⁴⁵ Christy Sheridan said that after the immediate Christmas period the group only performed the play on one night per week, i.e. Saturday.

Granville's (2017, p257) description of the Dingle Wren tradition shows it to be quite different from the mummer tradition in Fingal – it is primarily a marching event incorporating music playing, comprising simple march tunes in the main, where straw suits and a hobbyhorse feature. For Christy, mumming should be viewed as 'theatre', making the point that the



Figure 22 Swords mummers circa. 1968

Source: Christy Sheridan

Picture includes back Row: Paddy Crosbie, Tom Crosbie, James O'Rourke, Harry Hanratty, Gerry O'Rourke, Dermot Brown. Middle Row: Stephen Sheridan, Aidan Mooney, Dick Slattery, Christy Sheridan (in black face mask), Liam Molloy, Willie Crosbie. Front Row: Stephen Sheridan (jnr.) Christy O'Rourke, Frank Loughrin.

performers viewed it as such in the mummers' group he participated in. Gailey confirmed: 'there is no great insistence on concealing the identity of the performers' (1968, p.38).

Unlike other mumming groups, including the Fingal mummers today, the Swords group (Figure 22) did not cover their faces with straw or other material, although blackening and colouring

featured. Christy stated: ‘I think it’s better not to [cover the face], now I know it was part of tradition to have your face covered but I think . . . it’s very hard to perform, if you’re doing a performance with your face covered . . . Because they were characters and that character came across because you were able to see their face’. The Swords mummers continued through the 1970s, Christy again: ‘it wasn’t dying out, not in the 1970s, years later it did’. Gathering on St Stephen’s morning in Swords main street: ‘we’d go on down the town, do every pub, all the way. And then finish up down in the Big Tree’.

As the 1980s wore on what had been unfettered access to pubs became conditional on what sports were being viewed by the pub patrons when the mummers arrived, initially having to wait until the sporting event was over and eventually having to agree in advance with the pub owner the time the mummer group could visit. Christy remembered:

going to the pub, the first thing is there could be guys in there watching racing, they could be watching the football match. You didn’t have that in the 60s and 70s and so, the thing about it is you can’t go in . . . you’re interfering with what’s going on in the pub. So, you’d be thrown out. . . A lot of the time they don’t want you even in. So, it’s not that the mummers changed, but society changed and entertainment in pubs changed. . . a lot of the pubs we went in to at that time didn’t even have a television.

The Fingal mummers was established by a group led by Seán MacPhilínbín in the mid-1980s to revive the tradition that was fading at the time (Figure 23). Fingal mummers remain active today, with many of its original members continuing to participate and playing the same characters.⁴⁶ Originally only males participated, but the Fingal group includes women too. Ballyboughal native Mags Maxwell, a member of the group who started the Fingal mummers, reported:

⁴⁶ An account of the Fingal Mummers performing on St Stephens Day 2019 starting in O’Connor’s pub in Ballyboughal and moving onwards to other pubs in the vicinity published in the 5 January 2020 edition of the Roaring Water Journal is at <https://roaringwaterjournal.com/2020/01/05/fingal-mummers/> (accessed 26/08/2021). An article in the Fingal Independent in 2015 on the mumming tradition in Fingal is at <https://www.independent.ie/regionals/fingal/independent/entertainment/tradition-of-the-men-with-straw-masks-34141444.html> (accessed 26/08/21)

We knew of the mummer tradition when we were younger, but we'd never actually seen anybody mumming in our village. As it turned out my father was a mummer in his younger days and as were a lot of the people in the village. Now, we knew, maybe just through osmosis ... [b]ut we never actually saw the locals mumming. . . later on, we saw the Swords mummers when Dr May was with them.

Through examining the 1938/39 National Children's Folklore Collection records, Mags Maxwell said she became aware of how strong the mumming tradition had been in her village. She credits Seán MacPhilínbín with the idea of reviving it: 'he talked a lot to the locals and the locals . . . would relate to the stories of the mummers'. The revived tradition differs in some respects from the past; it is no longer based on visiting houses, entering pubs is by appointment and it no longer takes place over the 12 nights of Christmas. Mags says they are now only able to perform on St Stephen's Day:

it has evolved as well; it has moved on and it's a different thing than it was then in those days. Like the music, everything moves on, changes. But it's still there and it's more say, a spectacle now rather than something that happens in the village every year ... I'm glad I was involved.

Yet, it appears that not everyone in the traditional music community shared the Fingal mummers' enthusiasm for the revival of mumming. Seán MacPhilínbín related an instance of a nationally known traditional musician attending a Scoil Séamus Ennis event dismiss mumming by suggesting 'in the most disparaging of terms' that Séamus Ennis himself would have had no regard for the art form. Mags Maxwell conveyed an important point that such critics might have missed: the fun to be had from it and the sense of a shared endeavour. Perhaps it was the simple tunes such as marches and song airs played by groups like the earlier Swords mummers rather than a more challenging choice of traditional dance music, or the inclusion of the rhyming vignettes as theatrical performance observed by Christy Sheridan, that motivated the criticism of the art form.⁴⁷ While most of the Fingal mummers happen to be very competent traditional musicians, the critic may also have failed to appreciate that even non-musicians can participate in mumming, allowing them to enjoy and participate in an activity associated with traditional

⁴⁷ Christy said marches played included *Twenty Men from Dublin Town*, *A Nation Once Again* and *Roddy McCorley*. Playing marches was particularly important as an accompaniment to the mumming group moving from public house to public house in villages and towns. Waltzes based on popular Irish airs such as *Three Flowers* were also important in support of the main theatre-based performance by the mummers.

music, and the incorporation of the ‘theatre’ and music together is important in helping weave traditional music into the fabric of general community life. Granville (2017, p.260) highlighted a similar point to Mags Maxwell about the Dingle Wren tradition when she (Granville) noted



Figure 23 Fingal Mummers today Source: S. MacPhilibín

Recent members include Seán MacPhilibín, Mags Maxwell, Daracha NicPhilibín, Fiachra Mac Philibín, Dave O'Connor, Gerry O'Reilly, Sadhbh NicPhilibín Ó Raghallaigh, Oisín Thurlow, Rosie Davis, Ronan Lawless, Paraic O'Lunaigh, Bartle Maxwell, Ray Lawlor.

Source: Séan MacPhilibín.

Munnelly's 'somewhat dismissive[]' attitude to the 'repetitious' simple music being played. Granville asserts: 'For many residents the music associated with the wren groups . . . is their music, their soundscape' (p.259). She positions the Dingle wren performance in the category of Turino's participatory music:

There are various degrees of musicianship within all the groups but that does not essentially matter – the main aim is participation and including as many musicians as possible . . . The Dingle Wren bands repeat tunes, sometimes up to twelve times in the course of a parade. For

most musicians, it is the only time of the year that they play the repertoire or, indeed, a musical instrument (Granville, 2017, p.260).

4.3.4. A ‘Planxty’ moment

An important cohort of players who participated from early on in the upsurge in traditional music playing in Fingal comprised individuals (termed ‘self-starters’ in section 4.2.2 above) who were already playing music of another genre, usually folk music. Interviewees spoke of their conversion to playing Irish traditional music as life-changing after hearing performances by emerging music groups such as Planxty and the Bothy Band. In the case of each of the following five examples the musicians, on becoming aware of the music, pursued their interest through engagement in session playing as a key aspect of both learning and enjoyment, reflecting Fairbairn’s (1994, p.581) analysis in which she acknowledged the importance of major performance groups such as the Bothy Band in creating public awareness and interest in the revival of Irish traditional music, but who also pointed out: ‘The vitality of the popular revival of tradition came not from these media-based experiments but from a grass roots regeneration of musical activity in the form of the public music session’. The five cases also demonstrate the social, participative and networking elements associated with traditional music. Each of the five players continues to perform the music today.

James O’Mahony (section 5.2.1) related his story:

I suppose it was like a lot of people at the time, it was the kind of folk revival and Planxty and Sweeney’s Men and . . . Christy Moore songs on the guitar and that type of thing, that had happened right through my college years. But I remember listening to one of the Planxty LPs at the time and I remember a friend of mine wanting me to learn some song and I said listen to these tunes, I said listen to that music. So suddenly I got attracted to this sound, to the music, and that was the first time that I said to myself I want to learn this music.

Terry Kirk’s (section 5.2.2) interest was aroused when, while participating in a ballad session in the Drop Inn bar in Rush in the early 1970s, he heard John Garry play traditional tunes. Explaining that John had settled in Rush from Ballyfermot and was a childhood friend of the Fury and the Keenan brothers there, Terry said: ‘one night he [John Garry] started playing the

real McCoy, the real deal, traditional... John was probably the biggest influence on me then because I went away from the balladsy (sic) stuff". Terry explained that he had initially become attracted to playing Irish traditional dance music, what he referred to as 'the real McCoy' or 'the real deal', through hearing recordings of the Dubliners, a folk group that had by then achieved international acclaim performing a mixture of ballads and traditional tunes. He was particularly impressed by the playing style of Barney McKenna on banjo—his competence as a player and how he brought great life to the tunes being played—which served to heighten Terry's own interest in playing dance music. John Garry's unexpected playing dance tunes in the session in Rush provided the first real opportunity for Terry to hear traditional dance music played live and to try playing the tunes himself. A growing engagement with traditional music also brought new awareness for Terry about other traditional players in his community: 'other players around suddenly came out of the woodwork who were tipping around at home playing . . . and we ended up with, over those years, away back, we ended with little sessions in the pubs'.

Bill Haneman's (section 5.2.7) experience was similar to James and Terry. Now living in Skerries for over twenty years and an active player in the traditional music scene there, Bill was born in the United States. A musician from an early age, he traces his interest in Irish traditional music to his youth in North Carolina, where an encounter with an Irish person while studying science introduced traditional music and the uilleann pipes to him through recordings of the Bothy Band, ultimately changing his lifestyle and country he lived in:

I put the needle in the groove . . . and immediately played the album over and over and I was just captivated. There was a sound in the mix that was completely unfamiliar. No idea what I was hearing but that was the pipes, and they definitely grabbed my attention immediately.

Both the music genre and the sound of the uilleann pipes, including subsequently turning his hand to making them in a professional capacity, have become defining aspects of Bill's life.

Victor Byrne (Figure 24), singer and whistle player, lives in Swords but he grew up in



Figure 24 Victor Byrne

Source: V. Byrne

Ballymun, then a rural area in North County Dublin.

Attending the local national school, St Pappin's, Victor's singing skills were spotted early on:

I just loved singing. . . it's my happy place, always has been. . . [In secondary school] I was just influenced by other guys playing the guitar, into folk music like Bob Dylan and Neil Young and that sort of thing. But at the time my older brothers were playing traditional music and they were going to pubs like Slattery's and O'Donoghue's.

While Victor's first impressions of Irish traditional music were muted, a tipping point familiar to many occurred:

I didn't like [traditional music] because in my teens I just felt it was just repetitive, until my older brother who used to play whistles and mandolin and guitar, he brought me to a fleadh [in Listowel] and I was mesmerised by it, by the amount of people that were playing it and the different variety and the atmosphere that was created.

Like James, Terry, and Bill, once smitten, Victor has enjoyed a life-long engagement with traditional music and remains a noted singer and musician performing in the Fingal and Dublin City traditional music scenes.

Liam Curran (Figure 26, page 122) grew up in Kilkenny and moved to Dublin to attend teacher training college. Coming from a musical family, multi-instrumentalist Liam first visited O'Donoghue's pub in Merrion Road as a banjo player, playing in sessions in the back room led by Hughie McCormack. Liam reported:

I would have passed by John Kelly and Joe Ryan, playing this absolutely sweet music. Too sweet for me at the time . . . I would have been playing the back room [in O'Donoghue's pub] quite a bit before I got the courage to go up and sit anywhere close to those fellows. But I struck up very well with Joe Ryan . . . because Joe was really fond of hurling.

From a strong hurling county and family, Liam's knowledge of this sport would prove invaluable as an entry point through Joe Ryan. Liam reported that he still enjoys performing the Co. Clare tune repertoire he learned from playing with John Kelly and Joe Ryan. Although a somewhat different type of 'Planxty' moment to the other four examples provided, Liam's encounter with John Kelly and Joe Ryan caused him both to renew his interest in playing fiddle and to engage more deeply with the music.

Dowling (2014, p.249) describes a similar 'Planxty moment' in Belfast in the late 1970s and early 1980, the same period as pertaining to the five examples described above. He reports Belfast born flute player Gary Hastings borrowing the phrase 'a kind of red mist comes down' from Donegal fiddle player Con Cassidy to describe a new found attraction to playing Irish traditional music experienced by a cohort of aspiring musicians in their late teenage years in that City at the time.

4.4 Traditional music landscape from the 1980s

4.4.1. Transformation underway-synopsis

Developments in the Irish traditional music ecosystem from the 1980s onwards in areas of Fingal were significant. They included local music sessions starting up, an increased availability of learning opportunities, the revival of mumming, the establishment in 1996 of Scoil Séamus Ennis, the commencement of the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, and the opening of the SEAC in Naul the same year dedicated to the traditional arts. These activities and events collectively marked a quantum step forward in the visibility of traditional music in local communities and elevated the standing of Fingal as a location of interest to traditional musicians and audiences within and beyond the county lines. But the uplift was subsequently tempered by an ebbing in certain respects while many areas remained untouched by the transformation.

The surge in session playing was primarily confined to several locations on the eastern side of Fingal, initially in places such as Ballyboughal, Howth, Rush/Lusk and Skerries from the 1980s, followed in the 1990s in such locations as Naul, Oldtown, Swords, Malahide, Portmarnock and

Man O'War. Some of the traditional music sessions developed from existing ballad orientated pub sessions, some in existence since the 1960s. Terry Kirk described a gradual increase in the quantity of traditional music tunes being played, displacing songs as the players' repertoire of tunes expanded, as an example. Except for sessions that started in villages such as Oldtown as offshoots of the sessions in Ballyboughal (see section 4.4.2), the inspiration for playing music and joining sessions elsewhere in Fingal seems to have been driven by developments in traditional music nationally, such as the emergence of popular traditional music groups or the establishment of CCÉ branches, rather than by a type of internal domino effect resulting from any particular flagship development in Fingal. The form of session playing that emerged during this period reflected Turino's participatory performance model (section 2.5) involving no artistic audience distinctions. The sessions in Balbriggan (section 4.4.2) and elsewhere also reflected Turino and, in addition, embodied Higgins's (2012) second concept of community music, that of 'community music making' (section 2.5). By the late 1990s, in terms of absolute numbers taking place, traditional music sessions had reached a peak, with a fall off noticeable from about a decade later. This was evident, for example, in a petering out of session playing in Ballyboughal described by Seán MacPhilínbín (section 5.2.10), a period corresponding to the emergence and waning of the Celtic Tiger economy (McWilliams 2006). This period saw a revival in set dancing nationally while Riverdance had established itself on a world stage, bringing the music to audiences nationally and internationally theretofore unfamiliar with it (McWilliams 2006, p.234). In addition, a national debate had commenced on the place and promotion of the arts in Irish society, in which the Irish traditional arts featured strongly, leading to the enactment of the Arts Act, 2003 that provided for an expanded role of the Arts Council of Ireland and local authorities in the provision of supports for traditional music (see chapter six). Most of those interviewed who played leading roles in promoting traditional music at the



Figure 25 Session in Swords, March 1979

Players include Noel McGarry (banjo) from Co. Leitrim, Owenie Sheridan (silver flute and standing) from Swords, John Cushnahan (bodhran) from Co. Laois, Gerry Murtagh (wooden flute) Co. Laois, and Barry Ward (fiddle). Unseen accordion player to the left of the picture was Tom Dermody. Source: Dave O'Connor.

time indicated they were not generally aware of statutory and institutional advances in the traditional arts then taking place. Furthermore, reference to the influence of Riverdance has also been conspicuous by its absence in my fieldwork.

Different intensities in engagement with the music were discernible in locations that experienced an uplift in playing. Places such as Howth, Malahide, Ballyboughal and Skerries had the benefit of more than one session taking place per week. Areas where interest in the music was less evident generally corresponded to those locations with significant populations. In Swords, for example, Liam Curran described the continuation of ‘ballad type’ sessions in which singing remained a significant component, a scenario less attractive to many traditional musicians, preferring sessions noted for the playing of dance music tunes in the main and a position that remains so today. A similar situation to Swords pertained in Dublin 15 and in

Balbriggan. Traditional musicians were living in these areas but generally played their music elsewhere than in their own village or town. Liam Curran lives in Swords but plays most of his music today in Portmarnock, elsewhere in Fingal and in Dublin City. Jim Jackson reported that many younger players in Dublin 15 tend to play music in the Cobblestone Bar and other pubs in Dublin City. The locations or hotspots most prominent in the music's transformation from the 1980s can be seen to have had the benefit of a person or persons actively promoting the music in the first instance, whether through organising sessions or other activities. In the cases examined the individuals involved operated in the context of a ground-up process, serving as 'drivers' energising from within communities to make things happen. Antóin Mac Gabhann stressed the importance of these organisers to any such local developments while Michael Gavin termed such people, his father being an example, 'evangelists'. Many of these individuals had settled as adults in the county, but it did include some locals who had had a long association with the music. A further influential cohort that would have an impact at this time on the developing music scene comprised musicians living in south Fingal who generally played their traditional music in sessions in Dublin City, but who supported initiatives such as festivals, events and the operation of CCÉ branches or other teaching initiatives in Fingal. This cohort also remains important to the traditional music scene in Fingal today. By the mid-1970s three branches of CCÉ had been established - one in which featured set dancing, ultimately becoming its primary activity (Balbriggan). The remaining two, in Kinsealy and Malahide, continue today. No further branches of Comhaltas were established until more recently, when units in Castleknock, Balbriggan, Portmarnock and Donabate were formed - section 4.6.5.

Regarding noted session locations, Howth evolved to host several pub sessions per week, a situation that pertains today although venues have changed on occasion over the years. An important driver of traditional music in the town was the provision of tourist orientated sessions in venues like the Abbey Tavern alongside pub based traditional music sessions frequented by

local players. The existence of the Howth traditional singers circle contributes to raising the visibility of the traditional arts generally in the town.

Malahide likewise saw up to four sessions per week on offer together with a children's session organised by the local Comhaltas branch. Three of the sessions were mostly of traditional tunes with little public participation and the fourth was a mixture of ballads and tunes enjoying strong local custom. A singing circle also met monthly. Early players in the session in Duffy's pub on Thursday evenings included Brendan Gleeson, Ger Griffin, Liam Curran, Eimear Morris, Dick Barton, Frank Heron and this author (Figures 26). This situation has changed significantly in the past ten years. The redevelopment in 2012 of Duffy's pub saw the session, hosted there since the early 1990s, move to neighbouring Portmarnock.⁴⁸ In addition, the closure in July 2019 of another pub in Malahide, Oscar Taylor's (Figure 27), for redevelopment as residential accommodation saw some of the players from another long-standing session also relocate to Portmarnock.



Figure 26 Liam Curran and the author playing in a session in Duffy's pub Malahide in 2000

Source: Peter Barriscale

⁴⁸ The players in the Portmarnock session today include Frank Heron (mandola), John Regan (accordion), Kieran Wade (banjo), James O'Mahony (banjo), Liam Curran (Fiddle) and John Kelleher and the author (flutes)



Figure 27 Final session in Oscar Taylor’s pub, Malahide - 29 July 2019

Source: Paula Murray

Today, a paid session gig on Sunday mornings sometimes attracting up to about a dozen listeners (mainly tourists), a ballad session that includes some traditional tunes on Monday evenings that remains popular with a local audience, and the weekly CCÉ student session continue in Malahide. The Sunday morning session in Gibney’s Pub is a paid gig for three musicians but there can be up to six or seven players (Figure 28). Almost uniquely for sessions in operation in Fingal today, all the musicians are in the 30-39 age category. Before the transfer of the two weekly sessions from Malahide, session playing in Portmarnock was generally confined to a local GAA club on Monday evenings. The two Malahide sessions that transferred there take place on different evenings in the same pub. Very few of the musicians were born in the area, most having settled in the locality from outside Dublin. In both instances audience participation is low, although in each case experienced musicians are involved. The format of the sessions generally includes musicians taking turns in leading off sets, while conversational exchanges between playing most often relates to aspects of the tradition, the tunes being played,

performances and recordings of noted players or forthcoming traditional music activities. (See Jim Grant, section 5.2.9, for a description of a session in Skerries).



Figure 28 Sunday morning session in Gibney’s pub, Malahide (December 2021)

Musicians include from left, Ruairí Ó hArgáin, Olivia Ruddock, Eamon Mullen, Ruth McKiernan, Owen McKiernan and Colm Fahey.

Source: Author

Referring further to the Monday evening session in Portmarnock GAA club noted above, the establishment of a branch of CCÉ in Portmarnock in 2016 operating out of the same GAA venue saw a number of learner adults join that session. According to Padraig Walsh, several of the adult learners found the pace of the session too fast, so a group of about sixteen set up a group called *Ciúnas* in mid-2018 to play together and develop a common repertoire, initially targeting twenty tunes. Padraig said they chose the name *Ciúnas* from the Irish language word ‘ciún’ meaning ‘quiet’ because the group preferred to play together in quiet non-pub venues to facilitate the exchange of tunes and enhance the learning and playing processes. The group

continued to operate online using Zoom following the imposition of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Padraig, one of the originators of *Ciúnas*, said a different host from the group is appointed every week and notes for new tunes are circulated in advance for the coming week, with forthcoming tunes selected based on themes agreed by the overall group, such as names of rivers or plants drawn from traditional tunes within the Irish session tune canon. There are no formal leaders of the group, but several more experienced players provide guidance, such as in the selection of repertoire. Before the COVID-19 restrictions, *Ciúnas* met in a local hotel away from a pub setting to avoid noise interference and to assist the learning process. Padraig Walsh believes most of the members live in the Portmarnock/Malahide vicinity, with the age range from about 45 to over 80 years old and comprising nearly 75% women.



Figure 29 Eithne O'Donnell

Source: E. O'Donnell

A tradition of ballad playing from the 1960s in the Drop Inn bar in Rush morphed into a traditional music session, according to Terry Kirk. In a tangible sense that session remains today through the participation of musicians who have continued to play together over many years, augmented by new players from time to time.⁴⁹ The session venue itself has changed on several occasions but the sense of continuity over the decades is highlighted by several of the participants.⁵⁰ A local teaching organisation, *Rinceoil Fingal*⁵¹, is also active in the town providing weekly classes to about 40 students, both

⁴⁹ Some of the players have played in the session over many years, although new players join on occasion. Players include Terry Kirk; Ray and Fionnuala Lawlor; Siobhan Fay; Denis Collins; Tony Walsh; Seán MacPhilbín and occasionally his son and daughter Fiachra and Daracha; Triona Tammemagi; and Ailish Quinn.

⁵⁰ Terry Kirk and Ray Lawlor believe the session started in the Drop Inn bar in mid-1990s, then moved to Connolly's pub followed by the Michael Collins bar for 5 years, then the Harbour bar for another 5 years, Walshe's bar for two years and finally to Martin's bar where it remains today.

⁵¹ The name *Rinceoil* is derived from an amalgam of two Irish language words: *rince* meaning dancing and *ceol* meaning music.

children and adults. Founded in the early 1990s by Lenny Martin and Jimmy Archer, it hosts a weekly session for their members in the Rush community arts centre and organises the annual Chris Langan traditional music weekend supported by FCC featuring workshops, a concert and session (section 4.3.1). Eithne O'Donnell (née Weldon), whistle player and niece of Chris Langan, and involved in *Rinceoil* from the early days, co-ordinated their recent publication of locally composed tunes, poems and songs—see section 4.6.8.

Kieran Rice, living in Balbriggan, reported limited traditional music evident in the town when he first moved there in the mid-1990s. The CCÉ branch founded by Paddy Gavin in the early 1970s was still in existence. It provided classes and had a focus on set-dancing. Kieran made the point that the few local players evident at the time tended to go to other locations to participate in sessions, such as Drogheda, Gormanstown and Skerries. He and others started up a session in the Central Bar in the town about fifteen years ago and it is still in operation, a bar, Kieran says, that was always open to musicians dropping in, including Séamus Ennis on occasion. The session there today is mainly of traditional tunes with a handful of songs.⁵² A new branch of CCÉ, Craobh na Mara was established in 2017 which provides instrumental classes for children and adults.⁵³ A further development in 2019 was the opening of the Irish Institute of Music and Song in Balbriggan which, although a general music school, also offers instruction in traditional music on some instruments.

The western side of Fingal, Dublin 15, is an area where traditional music playing remains relatively low key. Jim Jackman, originally from the neighbouring village of Cabra but living in the Dublin 15 area for thirty years, coordinates a weekly session in Milo's Pub in Castleknock. Many of the players in the session settled in the area from elsewhere in the country. The session group has been playing in Milo's Pub for the last seven years, and before

⁵² The musicians include Kieran Rice on banjo, Seamus Waters from Gormanstown on fiddle, Tony Kilcline on guitar, Mary Naughton on box, Denis Carolan on fiddle, and Mick Blount on guitar.

⁵³ <https://www.craobhnamaracce.com/> (accessed 14/12/2021)

that in various locations in the area for another eight years or so. There have been periodic personnel changes, but several of the original players remain, including Jim himself and Cork man Joe Foley on accordion. Visiting musicians to the session are a regular feature, according to Jim, given the pubs strategic location close to the M50 and the N3/R147 route, making it accessible to travel to the session from across Dublin. Jim Jackman estimates that at least 100 musicians would have played at various stages in the fifteen years life of the session. John O'Brien, noted uilleann piper and son of the late accordion player Dinny O'Brien from Kilsallaghan, lives in Castleknock and informed me that he is currently preparing a comprehensive traditional music education programme for students of Gaelscoil Oilibhéir in Clonsilla. Five years ago, a new branch of CCÉ was set up in Dublin 15, Craobh Slí Dhála, by a team led by Donal O'Sullivan, a native of Freemount, north Cork, who had settled in the area in 2003. Donal plays accordion and concertina, having learned as a child and played to a high standard in his local CCÉ branch. Donal said of his own involvement in setting up the branch:

I guess when you are brought up in the community where a branch is prevalent, and you are learning music, but you are also organising music and you are going to fleadhs and you are being brought up through music, there's something ingrained in your DNA then that you want to reproduce it and give back, what you see when you were younger. That is essentially what we are doing here. We are trying to give kids the opportunity to encounter music first-hand, to experience it at a young age and the aim really is to get them through primary school and then secondary school with music and then get them over the line when they are 18, 19, 20 [years old] and then we think we will have musicians then that will stick with music. It's a big task, especially for volunteers like ourselves.

The branch holds a monthly session. One of their future objectives, according to Donal, is to 'put Dublin 15 on the [traditional] music map' so that the wider community can benefit as well. He envisages a time when events like the recently introduced Fingal fleadh held in Swords will be held in Dublin 15. For that and other activities promoting the music in the community they need, he believes, the support of FCC and access to the local Draíocht theatre. In general, organisers of the instrumental classes in CCÉ branches report between fifty and one hundred students attending weekly classes.

Skerries and Ballyboughal emerged as locations with a significant level of traditional music activity, ultimately recognised as ‘musical hotpots’ by the traditional music community in comparison with other locations in Fingal where the music was visible. What separated the two locations from others was that they were also associated with a range of related activities including transmission, festivals and periodic community concerts in addition to local session playing. For that reason, both locations are now examined in greater detail.

4.4.2. Ballyboughal and Skerries

In 1979, musicians comprising people new to the area and some locals started a session in O’Connor’s pub in Ballyboughal.⁵⁴ Session playing in the pub expanded, ultimately reaching three sessions per week and the commencement of other traditional arts activities, including the revival of mumming in the village in 1984 already referred to above. Weekly sessions in Oldtown and Naul followed, often led mainly by musicians already playing in Ballyboughal, creating a surge in interest in the music in the locality and marking Ballyboughal out as a significant centre for this in Fingal. The three weekly sessions catered for different audiences; one mainly traditional music with some set dancing, a second a mixture of tunes, traditional folk songs, and again set dancing, while the third, catering mainly for ‘original’ locals, was a singing event with a variety of popular songs and ballads. Local schools also became active in teaching the music to children. In the late 1980s Mags Maxwell and her sister Mary started set dancing classes in Ballyboughal, which in turn resulted in the start-up of one of the three sessions just referred to, Mags explained:

my sister decided that she would start set dancing classes in the village. So, we got a hold of Mick Mulkerns and Séamus O Méalóid . . . Set dancing was kind of like being revived at the time . . . [W]e started a set dancing class in the local hall in Boughal and that was a great success, and out of that came a different session in the pub afterwards on a Thursday night and it was a really, really [good] . . . it encompassed the dancing, the singing and the music

⁵⁴ Identified by Séan MacPhilínbín as Noel McGarry, banjo player from Leitrim, Paddy Seavers and singer Owen Griffin.

which was just terrific. And the locals actually came because they liked dancing. . . and then they started to go to the music as well.

Both Terry Kirk and James O'Mahony said they travelled from Rush and Skerries respectively to the Tuesday session in Ballyboughal. In terms of deepening his involvement with traditional music, James viewed the Ballyboughal session almost like a regular class: 'I would go over hail, rain or snow to that. And that was very important in my early [playing], building up tunes, finding out what was being played and then going away and learning it'. Another important offshoot to the start-up of the music sessions, mumming and set dancing initiatives was the establishment first of Scoil Séamus Ennis in 1994 by Seán MacPhilibín and Ger Griffin that provided local concerts, instrumental classes and related traditional arts activities until 2012. A notable activity of the Scoil was an annual October weekend event of workshops and concerts, which also entailed an outreach programme to local schools to demonstrate the music and the instruments involved. Seán was also a major driver in the establishment of the SEAC in conjunction with FCC—see next section.

The pub sessions came to an end by 2005/2006, while weekly classes provided by the Scoil ceased in 2012 resulting, according to Dave O'Connor and Seán MacPhilibín, in there being little traditional music activity (other than mumming) visible in the village today and a greatly reduced number of players in the locality they are aware of from thirty years ago. Overall, the Ballyboughal sessions had a lifespan of about twenty years, eventually petering out about ten years ago. The decline may have been the result of several factors, Mags Maxwell offered a perspective:

it was really, really popular in its early days . . . But sometimes when a session gets popular in a place that's small, then you get people thinking 'oh there's a session out there, I can go and bring my guitar and Christy Moore song book', and that's what happened to it... It went away from the lovely tunes that were being played and songs that were being sung to kind of like ten guitar sessions, which really wasn't what it was meant to be.

Interviewees estimate, excluding students currently learning traditional music in the SEAC, there may be less than twenty musicians today in the village and vicinity of Ballyboughal. They

are relatively widely dispersed, as a result of young people moving away to study at college or to work, deaths of older players, fewer people with music skills settling into the area and schools not providing music classes. Seán MacPhilbín supported Mags's point but added a broader perspective to it: '[while] a lot of them [musicians] have moved out . . . the thing more than anything to take on board is just the demographic shift. So, like there's a big new community in Ballyboughal'. Interviewees did not believe changes to the drink driving laws had much impact in the decline.⁵⁵ The partial sundering of the core group within the local traditional arts community responsible for driving many activities, as a result of moving away from the area and life-style changes, was not directly mentioned by actors involved, but it is likely that this too had a significant impact. In the case of mumming, for example, where that cohesion has remained, the tradition remains.

From a very low base forty years ago, Skerries has established itself as a location with an active Irish traditional music community today, including at least fifty active players, weekly music sessions and opportunities to learn the music locally, an annual traditional music festival and a music group established to bring young people learning traditional music in the town together for socialising and performance.⁵⁶ There is evidence of the involvement of the adult children of the initial players who settled in the town as well as by young people whose families had no previous connection with the music, playing in sessions and providing teaching, suggesting some embedding of the music within the community. There is a tangible pride in local traditional musicians who generally focus their playing in the town, with few traveling elsewhere in the county on a regular basis to participate in sessions, Jim Grant making the point: '[i]t really is a very localised scene'. There is also a palpable openness and welcome in the community to those interested in traditional music, including joining in the music sessions. Bill

⁵⁵ Alcoholic drink driving limits under the Road Traffic Acts have been progressively reduced and penalties increased over the past 2 decades. The current general legal limit is 50 ml of alcohol per 100ml of blood (roughly equates to less than 1 pint of beer).

⁵⁶ Estimate of players is based on visiting music sessions and discussing with local musicians.

Haneman (section 5.2.7) settling in Skerries from the United States over twenty years ago, described the positive reception he received from local musicians which was key to him progressing on the uilleann pipes and his subsequent deep engagement with playing traditional music and pipe making:

when I came to Skerries I was prepared to be . . . very much the outsider and I just kind of quietly snuck around the periphery of the session. Very quickly [I] was brought in in one form or another. I immediately befriended people and they encouraged me to come out and play.

The music scene now includes three pub-based music sessions each week and a further one featuring a mixture of singing and some tunes. A slow session also takes place monthly. Musicians settling in the area played a critical role in introducing traditional music to the town from the 1980s and still constitute a significant cohort of the playing population. The three weekly traditional music sessions differ in nature and participants. A Tuesday evening session in the small front bar in Joe May's Pub near the harbour in Skerries is generally attended by up to about eight players known to each other for a considerable period. Flute player Jim Grant, who attends along with his wife Siobhán Breathnach on fiddle, says the session has been going for about fifteen years. The high quality of the music and the playing is acknowledged by many in the local playing community. The repertoire is broad in terms of



Figure 30 Kevin O'Keeffe

Source K. O'Keeffe

sources and types of tunes played and can include sets from the Donegal tradition (see section 4.4.4), a feature not normally observed in other sessions in the county. There is evidence of the adult children of existing members joining in. The Thursday evening session is a paid gig for the musicians in the Snug Bar. The pace of playing is very lively and attracts other experienced musicians in the locality to participate. An audience of fifteen to twenty 'regulars' was noted

during this research, a number of whom also play traditional music. The Sunday evening session can involve up to twenty musicians and is co-ordinated by Kevin O’Keeffe communicating through WhatsApp Group format. The session takes place in the upstairs lounge of Joe May’s Pub, an area generally given over to the musicians but open to listeners to frequent, although Kevin reported that normally there would be few non-playing visitors to the session. Carol Keane (section 5.2.5), who acts as convenor to a monthly slow session, explained that the session was initiated about seven years ago at the request of visiting musicians from elsewhere in Fingal, Dublin City and surrounding counties to augment a similar monthly slow session they attended in the SEAC at which Paudie O’Connor, accordion player, is the convenor. The monthly slow session gathering also takes place in the upstairs lounge of Joe May’s Pub on Sunday afternoons.

In one session observed, a father and daughter performed together, but for the most part there were few players in the under thirty age category participating. Carol Keane regularly introduces older teenagers from the *Inis Rua* traditional music group to play in the early part of the Sunday evening session in Joe May’s to gain experience of session playing. *Inis Rua*, a music cum social group for teenagers learning traditional music locally, was set up by Carol’s mother, Mary Keane (see section 5.2.6) in 1997 and which Carol has taken over since 2019. Mary taught Irish dancing in the town and was eager to make the playing of traditional music more attractive for her own and other children in the town. Mary Keane explained:

There was traditional music there [in the community] but the opportunity for those children to come together to share their music . . . was not there. . . [T]hey were all learning their music from tutors, but I noticed they didn’t come together to play . . . I said to them one day . . . whoever has an instrument bring it in and we’ll have a few tunes after the dancing.

As she steps back from running *Inis Rua*, Mary says there are fourteen teenagers today, ranging from 13 years to 18 years, playing together, developing their understanding of traditional music, building confidence in their playing, learning the etiquette of session playing and enjoying the music as ‘best . . . buddies’. These are significant and recurring motifs driving Mary’s interest

and activities in promoting the traditional arts in the town. It was an important issue for her in establishing the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend festival in 2002, complementing her objective of bringing nationally regarded musicians in as the centre piece of the festival's artistic endeavours. She explained she wanted to:

expose the youngsters to more traditional music with an ultimate aim of bringing the music from the north, south, east and west [of Ireland] to one point and opening it up to the greater Fingal area, bringing the tutors from outside because they [attendees] needed to be exposed to that greater picture.

The Weekend event is now well established and includes concerts, sessions and classes, and outreach to schools. It has developed as a valuable opportunity for players to come together and share their music. Students of traditional music have benefitted through performance and transmission opportunities, and it has also brought visibility of the music to a wider community in Skerries. The event continues to enjoy strong patronage from the traditional music community but less so, it appears, from the wider community. Mary says attracting the public to paying concerts is becoming progressively more difficult. Some interviewees considered that an unintended impact of focusing primarily on externally sourced well-known players served, especially in the early years, to discourage the involvement of local players particularly from sessions and concerts, James O'Mahony observing: 'I think it was a parallel universe to an extent'. However, all acknowledge the challenge in attracting paying audiences to fundraising concerts for the sustainability of the festival. The Director of the Draíocht theatre in Blanchardstown echoed this point in regard to engaging Irish traditional music performers and groups, saying they could fill the main auditorium with members of the general concert going public when Sharon Shannon or artists of similar international standing are presented, but that there was little demand for others, even if they were exceptional exponents of their art form. Jim Grant's summation of the Skerries event captures both sides of the coin:

it certainly serves the musicians. It is pretty high powered. I doubt if the local people were aware of it [or] would have had any appreciation of how high powered it is. They'd see it as

a musical event and not know anything about it ... [Traditional music in Skerries] is a very minority sport [within the wider population of the town].

Although supported financially by FCC, those involved in organising the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend point to the very heavy administrative and fund-raising burden involved year after year in the venture, work that is often unseen and unappreciated, such as seeking sponsorship or selling tickets for concerts, Mary Keane has also now stepped back from managing the Weekend and a new team, which includes her daughter Carol, under the chairmanship of Kevin O’Keeffe, has taken over the reins. Further comments from Mary on running the music weekend for almost twenty years are noted in section 5.2.6. Like other arts activities, the festival did not operate for 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions. The challenge of countering weakening audience numbers and reinvigorating the overall event sees the festival at somewhat of a cross-roads. In the absence of concerted action, a question mark would hang over the continuation of the event in its present form in the longer term. Increased participation of local musicians may help secure the necessary voluntary assistance required to run the overall event. Another positive for the organising team is that local traders have continued to support the festival, although again Carol admits it is always hard work to solicit financial support, particularly from traders who ‘don’t get an awful lot out of it’ besides publicity in the brochure, but she believes many of them do it out of a sense of allegiance to Skerries:

They actually . . . do it out of good faith and that's the community spirit in Skerries which is massive . . . it's a very close-knit fishing village . . . community spirit that has always [remained] no matter how big this town gets and my God it's been expanding the past few years, it still has that heart

According to Carol, the new organising team want to revamp the festival and widen local support for it by putting greater emphasis on visible outdoor events as well as ensuring quality, well publicised sessions. She reported that music performed on the street in recent years during the day proved to be attractive to the public: ‘We had street sessions, we had shops involved

and cafés, we did day-time . . . lunch performances’. So too is legwork beforehand crucial to making sure people know about the festival well in advance, a point Carol emphasised: ‘people have to know about it, you have to get the word out and make sure there's support . . . and getting people talking about it’. Kevin O’Keeffe also explains what they want to avoid:

It’s not huge . . . it’s not like the fleadh . . . and we’ve deliberately kept it lower key. We don’t want it to be like a fleadh with loads of people on the street and stalls selling food, you know. We don’t want all that. It’s low-key. It’s quality, there’s good musicians in town, it attracts in people who are good players and like to play and all of the venues you can get in, you can find space, you can hear each other and it’s comfortable.

Despite challenges relating to community engagement and funding, it was clear from the interviews that Carol and Kevin remain upbeat about the future of the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend. Nonetheless, outside of weekly session playing and during the Weekend, opportunities for attending or playing traditional music in the town today, such as in local concerts or festivals, are generally quite limited, Jim Grant again explaining: ‘There wouldn’t be any traditional music concert here at all. We used to have the [Music] Network tours coming through but that hasn’t happened for a decade even’. Nor does engaging traditional musicians in support of local events or activities appear to be significant, Jim again: ‘There used to be an occasional request to do something for a fundraising concert but not for a long time now’.

O’Shea (2008, p.99) describes a process of reinvigoration for exponents of Irish traditional music while attending the annual Willie Clancy week-long summer school in Co. Clare, explaining that those attending share a sense of community that serves as a place for: ‘a renewal of vows, a reunion, and a revival of memories’. The focus of the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend to date has mainly been on transmission and performance. In the post COVID period, as the new organising team seek to restart the event and implement changes they have identified, they might also consider if it can play any role described by O’Shea to build greater cohesion in the traditional music community, helping increase the attractiveness of the festival.

Section 2.6 includes reference to Livingston's (1999, p.69) model of music revivals, noting the presence of key elements of the model in regard to the overall development of traditional music in Fingal since the 1980s. However, a comparison between Ballyboughal and Skerries, two locations where traditional music playing thrived, serves to illustrate important differences between locations in terms of the nature of the revival. Unlike in Skerries, the existence of 'core revivalists' was observed in Ballyboughal through the presence of individuals actively seeking to create a traditional arts scene (see Séan MacPhilibín, section 5.2.10). There was also evidence in Ballyboughal of recourse to original sources such as in relation to mumming, while the presence there of existing players has already noted above in section 4.3.1. The process of revival of traditional music in Ballyboughal reflects all six basic elements in Livingston's revival model framework in many ways but the position in Skerries is different. There, the 'revival' was significantly driven by musicians settling in the area and a small number of locals (e.g. James O'Mahony, and Terry Kirk). Links to original sources and the presence of a core driving group or revivalist community were generally absent and in their stead were the personal efforts of individuals to play music or organise transmission mirroring the upsurge in interest in traditional music nationally. For Skerries, the introduction of traditional music playing and subsequent activities was novel rather than a revival to town. The common ground was how the two locations would sustain the music over time, the outcome of which has been noted above.

4.4.3 Arts Centres

The Draíocht centre is the larger of two arts centres operated by FCC in the county, with performance and gallery spaces of varying sizes, including an auditorium with a large stage and a seating capacity of 286 and a café. Located in Blanchardstown with an immediate catchment

population of close to 120,000, its remit is to support all art forms.⁵⁷ However, as noted above, the centre occasionally presents high-profile Irish traditional artists but report that currently no traditional music interests are seeking services. The apparent low level of engagement with traditional music within the community in Dublin 15 and the absence until recently of organisational structures in the locality providing transmission are likely to be significant in understanding the lack of demand for Draíocht performance accommodation. However, those running the recently formed Slí Dhála branch of CCÉ there say one of their aims is to utilise the Draíocht for performances in the future.

The second arts centre is the SEAC in Naul, also funded by FCC with support from the Arts Council. Opened in 2001 with an explicit remit to promote the traditional arts, FCC says this was formally changed some ten years ago to include general arts, involving a name change from the Séamus Ennis Traditional Arts Centre to the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre, to strengthen its audience and financial bases. Interviewees say there was limited public opposition to changing the remit. The centre includes a small theatre, a parlour performance space, an outdoor performance area and a café. The centre provides weekly classes in playing traditional music. A Sunday afternoon singing session takes place monthly, as does a monthly slow session for adults also on a Sunday afternoon. Published programmes of activities shows that artists in the traditional music sphere



Figure 31 Plaque on the wall of the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre

Source: Author

⁵⁷ Draíocht Mission: 'Draíocht means magic. Our name gives us a clear mission: to share the magic of the arts. We do so in three ways: by presenting a lively, year-round programme of events, making sure there's something for everyone to enjoy; by creating opportunities for our local community, and particularly children and young people, to discover and love the arts; by collaborating with artists to develop work specifically for our audiences'. Web site: [www. https://www.draiocht.ie/about/history](https://www.draiocht.ie/about/history) (accessed 26/08/2021)

feature on a regular basis in addition to artists from other folk related music genres and other non-music related cultural activities. The use of the centre for this wider array of activities was seen as undesirable by some sections of the traditional music community, fearing the move has weakened the supports available to the traditional arts. Others saw it as inevitable, to enable the centre to pay for itself by drawing on a wider audience base and as a means of attracting a younger audience cohort. Securing a younger audience is hampered by another issue identified by the Director, that of available public transportation serving Naul, particularly in the evening, also making it more difficult to attract audiences generally to mid-week shows: ‘that’s . . . why we would normally only programme gigs to go out on weekends . . . because people tend then to make it their night out and they will travel . . . Friday or Saturday’. Targeting young people also reflects national objectives, according to the Director, and is one of the reasons they widened their offerings:

transportation is a barrier [and it also] links into why the centre has evolved . . . becoming wider in its offerings, especially around music . . . [I]n a recent conversation we had with [the Arts Council] one of the issues they’re facing is trying to develop an interest among the younger community or that age demographic. Whereas when you’re in Dublin City you can walk everywhere. You can walk to the session in The Cobblestone.

Additional information is provided on the operation of the two centres in chapter six while the SEAC’s response to COVID-19 restrictions is in section 4.6.8.

4.4.4 An eclectic repertoire

Vallely (2011, p.570) identifies the reel as ‘the most popular tune-type [played] within the Irish [music] tradition’ and recreational performance within Fingal reflects this position—reel playing is ubiquitous, followed by jigs and, to a lesser extent, hornpipes. Other tune-types such as slides, polkas, barn dances, flings, Carolan tunes and set dances also receive a regular airing. Recalling O’Shea (2010, p.61) that: ‘hybridity and eclecticism are fundamental to the musician’s art’, musicians interviewed for this research generally report an eclectic repertoire being played, drawn primarily from traditional sources and from various regionally associated playing styles

and repertoires, such as Sligo, east Galway, Clare, Donegal and, to a lesser degree, Sliabh Luachra music traditions. Sources for repertoire include long established tunes in the Irish traditional music canon where composers are generally unknown. Such tunes would normally have been included in published broad-spectrum collections of tunes such as in O'Neill's *The Music of Ireland* published in 1903, O'Neill's subsequent publication in 1907 *The Dance Music of Ireland – 1001 Gems* and in later collections such as Breathnach's *Ceol Rince na hÉireann* (Dance Music of Ireland) first published in 1963. Vallely (2011, p.525) notes that up to about 1970 O'Neill's 1907 collection was referred to by musicians simply as 'the book'. However, tunes played can differ greatly from session to session, and even from one night to the next in particular sessions, much depending on the experience and personal interests of the players involved and length of time the session has been running.

Drawing on my participant observation in sessions, information gleaned during interviews with informants and from personal playing experience over many years in Fingal and Dublin City, I concluded that the canon of tunes played in Fingal in general reflects that of Dublin City. Repertoire associated with playing in Dublin has long been an amalgam of sources and playing styles, prompted in no small way in past decades by musicians from across the country settling in the City and enhancing the playing milieu (Kearney 2007). In more recent years the wider availability of recorded material through technology and media developments, increased institutionalisation of transmission (see section 4.6.5) and growth in festivals / workshops has also contributed to widening knowledge of and access to repertoire and playing styles from across the tradition. Of course this scenario does not imply an absence of preferences for playing particular forms of tune, composers or playing styles, a point highlighted by Kevin O'Keeffe who believes that the type of tune played on any particular night in sessions in Skerries is influenced to a significant degree by the preferences of individual participants: Examples of such include Carol Keane drawing from her significant repertoire of reels, James O'Mahony's penchant for playing jigs (both double and slip forms) and Jim Grant's interest in playing

material from the Donegal style repertoire, including barn dances, schottisches and highlands.⁵⁸

Furthermore, Bill Haneman's description of participants in sessions taking turns in starting tune sets (see section 5.2.7), underpinning a form of performance democracy and respect for fellow musicians, also facilitates engagement with a wider mix of repertoire than might otherwise be the case where an identifiable leader(s) selects the tunes being performed from their own repertoire. Sharing responsibility for starting tune sets provides opportunities for participants to introduce new material they have been working on to the wider session group, constituting a valuable mechanism for ongoing renewal of repertoire by the group. Carol Keane also confirmed the extensiveness of the repertoire drawn on by local musicians but clarified that at any particular time, especially in those sessions in existence for many years, a limited suite of material invariably acquires common currency for a period of time before gradually being superseded by new material. Carol's emphasises on the dynamic nature of the repertoire performed is important, highlighting the recycling of previously popular sets or the acquisition of newly composed material, often as a result of their inclusion on recent recordings by musicians of note in the wider traditional music community. As a teacher of traditional music in Skerries, Carol pointed out that she constantly endeavours to teach students tunes she herself hears being played in the locality.

As expected, the experience of musicians also impacts heavily on the nature of tunes being performed in sessions. In the case of less experienced players, much of the material is drawn from traditional sources. In addition, publications providing tunes identified as being commonly played in sessions today, such as those included in the suite of *Foinn Seisiún* books published by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann for use in supporting transmission by branches of the organisation, also serve as a source for many seeking to acquire repertoire. Online access to

⁵⁸ See Vallely 2011, pp.211-216 regarding the 'Donegal style'. Primarily based on fiddle playing and a distinctive repertoire, Donegal tunes played in sessions in Fingal draw on material from the music group Altan and from players such as John Doherty, Tommy Peoples, Bríd Harper and Con Cassidy among others.

tunes like 'thesession.org' web site is also a popular source of material for players. Through her facilitation of a monthly slow session group in Skerries, Carol Keane observed that the primary concern for participants is the acquisition of as wide a range of traditional tunes as possible and other popular forms such as airs, waltzes, marches and mazurkas. Carol remarked that the development of a particular playing style appeared to be of secondary importance for the slow session participants. In sessions involving more experienced players, in addition to material from traditional sources, tunes by composers such as Ed Reavy, Paddy O'Brien, Sean Ryan, Charlie Lennon and Paddy Fahey, feature regularly.⁵⁹ Their compositions are noted for more challenging constructions and for being played in settings in a wider variety of keys. Where experienced players were involved, I observed that conversation between tune sets sometimes centred on variations and versions performed on past recordings by notable musicians and on other associated aspects of performance. Determining whether there is a generational difference in regard to tune selections proved difficult as so few younger players engage in public performance at this time. However, those that were encountered during the research, for example those participating in the Sunday morning session in Malahide (section 4.4.1), performed repertoire similar to other sessions populated by more experienced players, including performing challenging repertoire referred to above. Overall, the evidence suggests that the priority for less experienced players is to gain capacity to participate as fully as possible in group music making while for more experienced players the motivation is often towards a deepening of knowledge and engagement with selected facets of the music canon and tradition.

⁵⁹ Tunes by these composers noted being played during sessions in Fingal included (1) by Ed. Reavy: *Maudabawn Chapel*, *The Hunter's House*, *In Memory of Coleman* and *The House of Hamill* reels, *Swans Among the Bushes* and *Two Sisters* jigs and *Brigid of Knock* and *Lad O'Beirne's* hornpipes (2) Paddy O'Brien tunes included: *Iniscealtra*, *Town Tein*, *Ormond Sound* and *Larkin's Beehives* reels, *The New House* and *The Fly in the Porter* jigs and *Cooley's* and *The Swan on the Lake* hornpipes. (3) Sean Ryan's tunes included: *The Glen of Aherlow*, *The Dash to Portabello* and *The Cedars of Lebanon* reels, *The Castle*, *Dooney Rock* and *Fr. Quinn's Favourite* jigs and *McMahon's* and *The Ballyoran* hornpipes. (4) Charlie Lennon tunes included: *Kilty Town*, *The Twelve Bens* and *Dog Big and Dog Little* reels and *The Flying Wheelchair* jig. Paddy Fahey did not give names to tunes composed by him.

Irish traditional music is continually being enhanced by new compositions, whether in the form of new tunes or new arrangements of existing tunes. The following are examples of tunes composed by local Rush musicians. ‘Tommy’s Teapot’ in Figure 32 is a recently composed tune by young fiddle player Edith Lawlor from Rush which was included in a book launched by Rinceoil Fingal in January 2022 of newly composed tunes, poems and songs—see section 4.6.8. Edith was ten years old when the book was launched in January 2022. The Rush Reel presented in Figure 33 is by Chris Langan, see section 4.3.1 above.

Tommy's Teapot

Edith Lawlor



Figure 32 Tommy’s Teapot Jig

Recent composition of Edith Lawlor from Rush

Source: Rinceoil Fingal 2021

The Rush Reel

Chris Langan, 1989



Figure 33 The Rush Reel.

Composition by Chris Langan

Source: Rinceoil Fingal 2021

4.5 Online survey

4.5.1 Overview and methodology

To assess interest by the wider population in traditional music in Fingal, I planned from the outset to undertake a detailed survey based on random selection within targeted populations. This would have entailed the completion of questionnaires involving short face-to-face interviews with members of the public in a range of locations across the county. However, restrictions imposed by the Government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic specifically prohibiting any such face-to-face encounters and on movement significantly limited the form of surveying possible. Nevertheless, as this research had established that little hard information on the practice of traditional music by recreational musicians in Fingal exists, it was important to undertake a survey to gain more substantive insights into engagement with the music by this cohort and by the public more generally. An online survey was undertaken in April and May 2021 seeking information on public interest and how they engage with the music. Respondents who played traditional music were additionally asked about how they learned to play the music, their family involvement and playing in pub sessions. The survey elicited over 500 responses. This section provides an outline and salient information on the responses received to the questions. A more detailed note on the survey is presented in Appendix 4.2.

Having perspective on the extent of public interest in traditional music helps in gauging the degree to which the music is perceived to be integral to the community rather than primarily confined to musicians and a limited cohort of enthusiasts. A second objective was to extend inquiries to a larger cohort of musicians beyond those interviewed, facilitating the experience of a greater number of musicians to be heard and enabling a more informed understanding of the involvement of musicians within the traditional music ecosystem in the county. The survey underscored the value of undertaking in-depth targeted analysis to better understand the art form in the community. It suggests there is significant interest in traditional music, shared by women and men. It provides information on the ways the tradition is engaged with, including

through participating in pub sessions, attending live musical events and through a variety of media forms. It also shows there are multiple learning options availed of for the music.

A high proportion of respondents indicated a strong interest in traditional music, but the lower percentages of respondents who attended music sessions in pubs, live music events or who engage with the music through various media forms suggests the high level of interest claimed may be overstated. Responses from 176 musicians to the survey, comprising an almost equal number of males and females, is also significant. These responses indicate more males attend pub sessions than females, while over half of female musicians report seldom or never playing in sessions in Fingal. Likewise, fewer females attend live music events. In response to a question on the principal way traditional musicians learned to play, one third of respondents said they learned from a local teacher, another third learned in a recognised teaching organisation and just under a third said they were self-taught. However, when separated by gender, more female respondents said they learned in classes provided by local teachers or a recognised organisation while relatively few reported being self-taught. The survey also highlights significant family involvement in traditional music, which was intergenerational and extended to wider family members. However, very few reported a family member being the principal source for learning to play.

Drawing on Besen-Cassino and Cassino (2018, p.303), the form of nonprobability survey method employed to broadcast the questionnaire was ‘convenience sampling’. The approach also employed elements of ‘snowball sampling’ since the survey was sent to musicians who were asked to forward it to other musicians known to them. The use of nonprobability surveying can pose challenges in regard to the representativeness of responses to a wider population and avoidance of systemic bias, rendering it difficult to draw generalised conclusions from the data (p.287). Caution must, therefore, be exercised when interpreting responses from the public relating to questions on interest in traditional music, in this case especially in relation to questions 4 to 8, see table 2. However, a high number of responses were received from

traditional musicians, likely attributable to a snowball broadcasting effect, enabling more generalised conclusions to be considered from that cohort.

The survey presented the following questions:

Table 2: Questions in online survey

Question Number	Question	Reason for inclusion
1	Are you over 18 years of age?	A compulsory question, survey was only open to persons over 18 years.
2	Do you agree to this information being given to Maurice Mullen from DkIT for research purposes?	A compulsory question to enable responses to be used in the research.
3	Where do you live in Fingal?	Information collected was by Fingal local electoral areas.
4	How interested are you in Irish traditional music?	5 optional answers ranging from ‘extremely interested’ to ‘not interested’ were provided.
5	Do you attend Irish traditional music sessions in pubs in Fingal? (Pre COVID-19 restrictions)	5 optional answers ranging from ‘at least once a week’ to ‘never’ being provided.
6	How often would you attend live musical performances featuring Irish traditional music? (Pre COVID-19 restrictions)	5 optional answers ranging from ‘at least once a week’ to ‘never’ being provided.
7	Do you watch / listen to programmes featuring Irish traditional music on television, radio, or other media?	5 optional answers ranging from ‘at least once a week’ to ‘never’ being provided.

8	Tick any of the following that you have heard of.	Aim was to gauge public knowledge on 7 traditional music activities/people provided.
9	What is your gender?	Options for female, male and other were provided.
10	Do you pay Irish traditional music?	A 'yes' answer directed the respondent to an additional set of questions - numbers 11 to 14 inclusive.
11	Do other members of your family play Irish traditional music?	4 categories of relations were offered: Parents; Spouse/Partner; Children; Extended family members.
12	What was the principal way you learned to play?	6 options were offered, including learning from a parent, attending classes and self-taught.
13	Do you play in music session in Fingal? Pre COVID-19 restrictions	5 optional answers ranging from 'one or more times per week' to 'never' being provided.
14	Do you play music in Dublin City? Pre COVID-19 restrictions.	5 optional answers ranging from 'one or more times per week' to 'never' being provided.
15	Are you aware of programmes by the Arts Council of Ireland or Fingal County Council to promote and support Irish traditional music?	'Yes' and 'no' options were provided.

4.5.2 Responses to survey

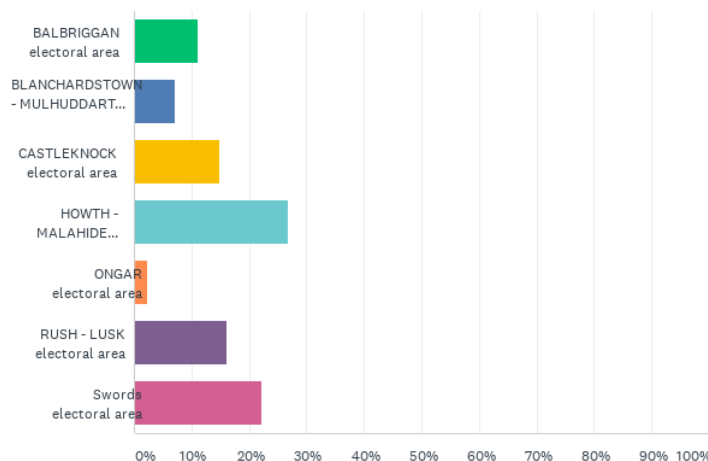
Respondents

518 people responded to the survey, comprising 62.7% female, 37.1% male and 0.2% other (Question 9). 5 responses were excluded, 3 for being under 18 years of age (Q.1) and 2 through

a failure to confirm that responses can be used for this research project (Q.2). Except for compulsory questions numbers 1 and 2, respondents could choose which answers to reply to. Most respondents responded to all questions presented to them such that on average there were over 450 responses to each question. The Fingal electoral areas in which respondents reside (Q.3) are illustrated in chart 1 below. 76% respondents reported living in one of the four electoral areas associated with the eastern side of the county - Balbriggan (11%); Howth/Malahide (26.7%); Rush/Lusk (16.1%); and Swords (22.1%). The remaining 24% reported living in one of the three electoral areas on the western side of the county - Castleknock (14.8%); Blanchardstown/Mulhuddart (7.1%); and Ongar (2.2%). These returns mirror findings in this research of greater participation in traditional music on the eastern side of Fingal.

Chart 1

Q3 Where do you live in Fingal?



The high number of musicians responding to Q.10 (176 out of 447) that they played traditional music is significant in numerical terms and allows for the possibility of drawing more general conclusions regarding this cohort. Notable also is the fact that these respondents comprised almost equal numbers of female and male musicians, 85 and 90 respectively, facilitating gender comparison regarding transmission and engagement with the music. However, responses from musicians representing a third of total responses to the survey invariably introduces some bias

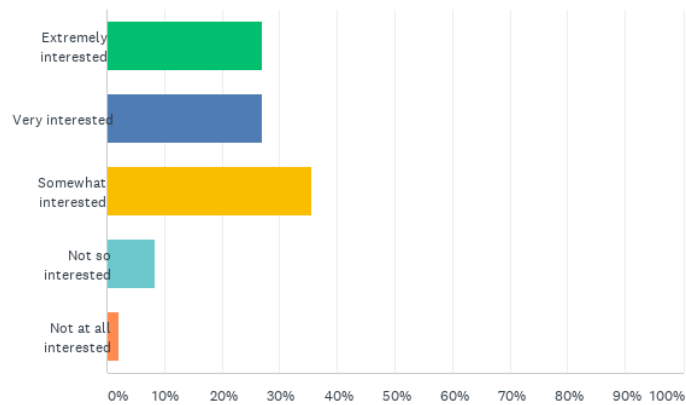
in replies to questions 4-8 on public interest in traditional music. Questions 4-8 inclusive relate to public interest in and engagement with traditional music. Q.4 is pivotal, with respondents rating their level of interest in traditional music from 5 options provided, ranging from ‘not at all interested’ to ‘extremely interested’. A consideration is the extent to which respondents might unintentionally overstate their interest, a form of systemic bias. Thus, questions 5-7 help to elaborate on respondents’ interest through exploring how they engage in activities normally associated with the performance of the music, i.e. by attending sessions (Q.5), live performances (Q.6), and watching / listening to programmes featuring the music on television, radio or other media formats (Q.7). Additionally, Q.8 asked respondents to indicate which of 7 aspects associated with traditional music they had heard of. Appendix 4.2 provides detailed analysis and the following summarises the position.

How interested are you in traditional music? (Question 4)

Table 3 enumerates and chart 2 illustrates the responses received (corresponds to table S4 in Appendix 4.2)

Table 3: Interest in Irish traditional music

Q.4	A Extremely interested	B Very interested	C Somewhat interested	D Not so interested	E Not at all interested
% of responses	26.9	26.9	35.6	8.5	2.0
(No. of responses)	(121)	(121)	(160)	(38)	(9)

Chart 2**Q4 How interested are you in Irish traditional music?**

Almost 54% of respondents claimed to be either ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ interested in traditional music (columns A+B), 35.6% claimed to be ‘somewhat’ interested (column C) and only 10.5% ‘not so interested’ or ‘not at all’ (columns D+E). A combination of systemic bias in the survey methodology and respondents’ variable interpretations in the use of the term ‘interested’ are likely to be factors in the very high positive response. However, if the high positive responses (54%) and less interested categories (10%) are excluded, the 36% in the ‘somewhat’ interested category might suggest there is a substantial cohort in the community who may not be engaged in traditional music but could be disposed to it given the right public policies or the creation of circumstances encouraging interest in the music.

Attending sessions, events and media (Questions 5-7)

The responses to questions 5, 6 and 7 are brought together in table 4 (table S6 in Appendix 4.2) to ease comparison. The questions relate to, respectively, attendance at pub sessions (Q.5), attendance at live music events (Q.6) and watching / listening on media (Q.7). Responses to Q.4 are repeated in the table to aid analysis.

Table 4: Attendance at sessions, events and media

Question	A Attends sessions or live performances weekly / engages through media WEEKLY	B Attends sessions or live performances monthly / engages thro' media FORT-NIGHTLY	C Attends sessions or live performances bi-monthly / engages thro' media MONTHLY	D Seldom attends sessions or live performances / engages thro' media OCCASION-ALLY	E NEVER attends sessions, live performances or engages thro' media	No. of responses
	%	%	%	%	%	
5	16.6	14.4	8.4	39.5	21.1	(451)
6	8.9	13.1	6.9	50.8	20.3	(449)
7	31.3	8.0	8.4	41.1	11.1	(450)
4	Extremely interested	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not so interested	Not at all interested	
	%	%	%	%	%	
	26.9	26.9	35.6	8.5	2.0	(449)

Together, responses to questions 5, 6 and 7 suggest less enthusiasm by respondents for engaging in traditional music activities than their responses to Q.4 might otherwise suggest. A trend evident in the responses too is that those who are ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ interested in traditional music frequent pub sessions more often than attending live performances, while media in its various guises is the conduit through which the music is engaged with by the greatest number of respondents, convenience and easy accessibility no doubt being factors.

For a more concise conceptualisation of the returns relating to questions 5, 6 and 7 along with those for Q.4, the responses in the above table are grouped into 3 interest categories in table 5 - ‘high interest’ comprising column A, ‘occasional interest’ comprising columns B+C and ‘limited or no interest’ comprising columns D+E (corresponds to table S7 in Appendix 4.2).

Table 5: Summary for attendance at sessions, events and media

Question	High interest (Column A) %	Occasional interest (Columns B+C) %	Limited or no interest (Column C+D) %
5 (sessions)	16.6	22.8	60.6
6 (live perform.)	8.9	20.0	71.1
7 (media)	31.3	16.4	52.2
4 (interest)	26.9	62.5	10.5

Included in the additional details provided in Appendix 4.2 are differences in responses from females and males. Female respondents reported attending less sessions and live events and engaging through media less often than males. A possible explanation is that more non-musician females completed the survey than non-musician males. Table 6 shows responses relating to attending sessions (corresponds to table S8 in Appendix 4.2). A similar pattern of lower attendances at events and engaging through media will also be noted in Appendix 4.2.

Table 6: Attending sessions - female and male responses

Question 5	A At least once per week %	B Once per month %	C Once every 2 months %	D Seldom %	E Never %
Total responses	16.6	14.4	8.4	39.5	21.0
Females	8.5	14.2	8.9	43.6	24.8
Males	30.5	15.0	7.8	32.3	14.4

Appendix 4.2 also provides alternative analysis of responses based on an inference that the number of ‘skips’, i.e. respondents who skipped the question, are almost identical for Qs.4-7

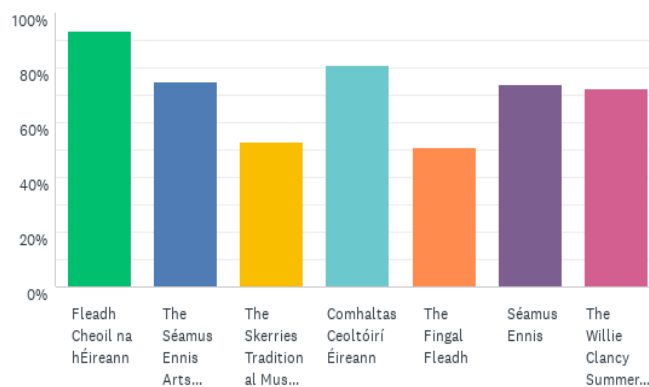
inclusive, providing the possibility for the skips to be attributed to ‘not at all interested’ as a means of exploring a more nuanced interpretation of the responses.

General knowledge of traditional music activities (Question 8)

Respondents were asked to indicate which of 7 organisations, events and an individual (Séamus Ennis) associated with traditional music they had heard of. Very high percentages (chart 3) heard of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, CCÉ, the SEAC and Séamus Ennis while about half of respondents heard of the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend and the Fingal Fleadh. The responses suggest that nationally associated organisations and events are better known than local traditional music events, and unsurprisingly, less knowledge of local events was particularly marked in the case of those respondents who reported limited or no interest in the music (cross-comparing responses to Q.8 with Q.4 on interest in traditional music). Significant in this regard was that only just over half of respondents who indicated they were very interested in traditional music said they had heard of the Fingal Fleadh (55%) and the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend (57%).

Chart 3

Q8 Tick any of the following that you have heard of



Cross-comparing responses of males and females indicates that for all elements listed in Q.8, more males said they had heard of the 7 choices, except for Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, where an almost equal percentage of females (93%) and males (94%) had heard of the event. The most significant gender difference related to knowledge of the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend,

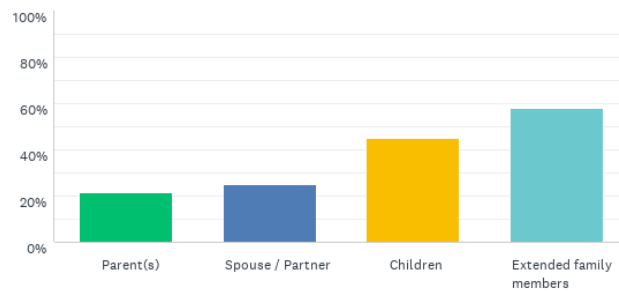
where 62% of males reported they had heard of the event as against 48% of females. Again, a possible explanation for the difference is that more non-musician females completed the survey than corresponding males.

Traditional musicians: learning and playing (Questions 10-14)

Questions 10 to 14 asked musician respondents about the involvement of families in playing the music (question 11) and the principal way they learned to play the music (question 12). Questions 13 and 14, respectively, enquired whether musician respondents played in sessions in Fingal or Dublin City, in both cases offering response options ranging from ‘never’ to ‘one or more times per week’. Recalling that 176 respondents indicated they played traditional music (Q.10), comprising 90 males, 85 females and 1 other, the responses indicate significant association with playing traditional music among family groups. However, 82% of the musician respondents lived in one of the four electoral districts on the eastern side of Fingal. The inclusion of so many musician respondents from the eastern side of the county reflects the strength of the music on that side of the county. This holds true for both female and male musicians, where respectively 83.7% and 81% live on the eastern side. A relatively even spread of musicians responding from each of the 4 eastern electoral areas also provides a useful basis for comparison in relation to the remaining questions 11-14 and their application more widely.

Chart 4

Q11 Do other members of your family play Irish traditional music?



Responses to question 11 indicated a significant family involvement in playing traditional music at parental, spouse/partner, children and extended family levels. Overall, 136 respondents

indicated family members played traditional music, representing 77% of the total number of musicians who responded to the survey. (Returns for each category are not mutually exclusive, as a musician can have family members from several categories involved, for example, parents and children, respectively). Detailed analysis provided in Appendix 4.2 indicates:

1. slightly more female respondents reported family involvement in playing traditional music, at 80%, compared with males, at 74%.
2. about a fifth of both female and male musicians reported having parents as players.
3. 29% of females reported having a spouse or partner who plays, while the corresponding figure for males is 25%.
4. almost 45% of musicians reported having children who played, but gender difference is discernible: 48% of female respondents reported children playing in comparison with 42% of males.
5. 58% reported having extended family members who play, with relatively little gender difference.

Despite the significant association with playing traditional music within family groups, it will be noted from Q.12 that only 6.9% of respondents reported learning from parents or family members. The responses chime with Cawley (2013b) - see section 4.6.4 below. Responses to Qs.11 and 12 together underscore the view that visibility of the music within family groups in the first place, irrespective of how members formally learn it, is important, suggesting the presence and practice of playing the music may be normalised within the wider family. Children in a family where traditional music is evident can, from a young age, gain familiarity and knowledge of the music, and access to play in traditional music circles. It will also be noted from responses to Q.12 below regarding the principal way music was learned, that more females attended classes or a local teacher, compared with males, where 44.3% of respondents said they were principally self-taught. Whether the propensity to attend classes by females is a contributing factor in a higher number of children of female musicians playing, and therefore an unacknowledged but important conduit in the transmission of traditional music, is an issue worthy of consideration in a more comprehensive study.

How musicians learned to play traditional music (Question 12)

Chart 5 provides a visual representation of the responses received and the percentages are set out in table 7 (see table S.16 in Appendix 4.2).

Chart 5

Q12 What was the principal way you learned to play?

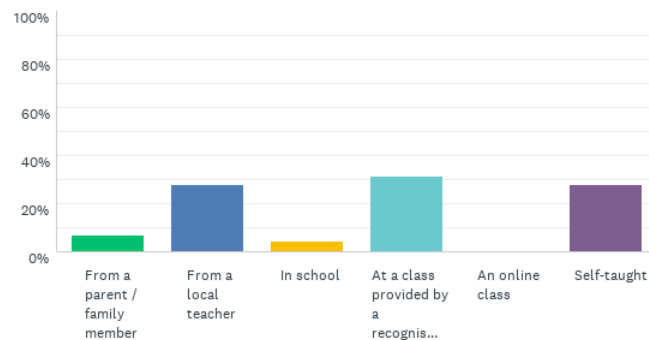


Table 7: Principal way of learning traditional music

	A Parent / family member	B Local teacher	C In school	D A recognised organisation	E Online class	F Self- taught
Female	9.4%	32.9%	7.1%	40%	-	10.6%
Male	4.6%	23.9%	2.3%	23.9%	1%	44.3%
Other	-	-	-	-	-	100%
Total	6.9%	28.2%	4.6%	31.6%	0.6%	28.2%

Of the 6 options presented, three feature strongly and are of similar significance:

1. learning through a local teacher (column B, 28.2%),
2. attending a class provided by a teaching organisation (column D, 31.6%) and
3. being self-taught (column F, 28.2%).

The responses may be perceived to run counter to popular narratives that focus on transmission being ‘handed-down’ through traditional music families. In contrast, the replies suggest multiple routes to learning. Of course, as noted in the responses to Q.11, family links remain

important in engaging their children with the music, but less so in more formal transmission, where various routes are being availed of generally. The high number of males declaring that they were self-taught, 44.3% of male responses in comparison with 10.6% for females, is a standout feature in the returns to Q.12. A possible explanation for such a high number of males declaring being self-taught may be that many of the respondents are of an older age cohort and experienced a more limited availability of classes when they first engaged with the music. This was the case with several informants to the research in the age bracket fifty years and upwards, an age group still significantly represented in session playing in Fingal today. Recognising that playing traditional music is a life-long commitment of continuous learning, self-taught players will variously attend classes and festival weekend workshops to acquire technique and repertoire, while continuing to manage their learning in a self-directed manner. Informants in this category include Terry Kirk, James O'Mahony and MacPhilíbin. Others, like Kevin O'Keeffe, taught themselves to play having already been musicians in other genres. Irrespective of how informants learned in the first instance, the process of acquiring tunes on an ongoing basis is a common feature widely shared by informants, explained by Slominski (2020, p.12) as 'lateral peer-to-peer transmission of tunes as the way most musicians learn repertoire'.

A higher percentage of females reported attending classes as their principal way of learning, either through a local teacher (32.9%) or through a recognised teaching organisation (40%), with only about 10% declaring to be self-taught. In the context of increasing institutionalisation of transmission of the music noted in recent decades, including through the wider provision of classes, the responses might suggest that female respondents comprised a younger cohort of musicians. However, information relating to age of respondents was not gathered in the survey, so it is not possible to determine how age profile and attendance at formal classes correlate. Given the circumstances today of a greater availability of classes to learn the music, it is possible to hypothesise that the proportion of males attending classes in the first instance as the

principal way of learning has been increasing over time and consequently that for self-taught correspondingly reducing.

Learning with a local teachers also features strongly in the responses. Cross-comparing the returns with electoral districts where respondents live confirms that local teachers are most popular in those area where no teaching organisation is situated or convenient - Appendix 4.2 provides additional details. Veblen (1994, pp.24,25) described the principal way her informants (operating in the 1980s and 1990s) taught Irish traditional music, viz. teaching by ear, with students repeating over short phrases, followed by recording the tune being learned. Despite a wide variety of books of Irish traditional tunes in notation format, six teachers in Fingal consulted during this research all confirmed, mirroring Veblen, teaching primarily by ear.

Frequency of musicians playing in sessions (Questions 13 and 14)

Musician respondents indicated the frequency they play in sessions in Fingal (Q.13) and in Dublin City (Q.14), respectively, before COVID-19 restrictions were introduced. A summary of key responses and analysis is provided here while more details are in Appendix 4.2. The following 2 charts (6 and 7) and table 8 present the responses.

Chart 6

Q13 Do you play in music sessions in Fingal? (Pre COVID-19 restrictions)

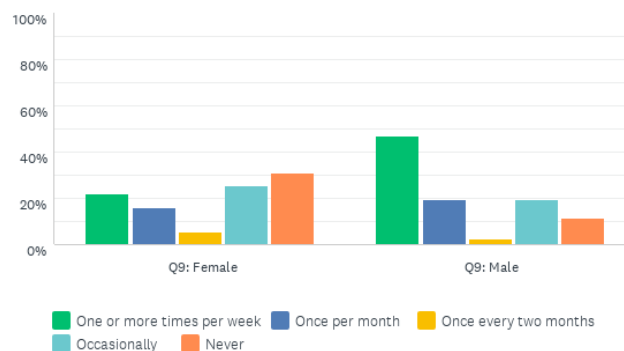
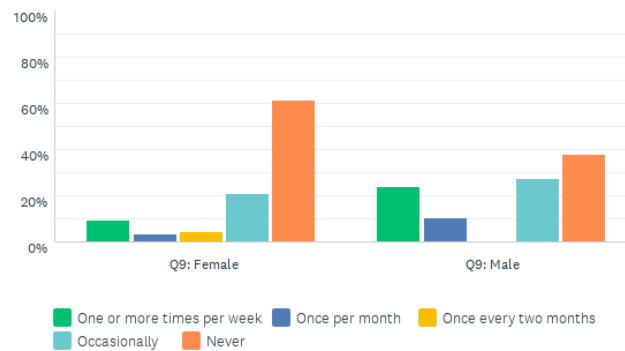


Chart 7

Q14 Do you play in music sessions in Dublin City? (Pre COVID-19 restrictions)



For ease of comparison, table 8 (corresponds to table S20 in Appendix 4.2) brings together the returns for playing in pub sessions in Fingal and in Dublin City, respectively, into 3 categories: ‘Weekly’ (one or more times per week); ‘Less Often’ (‘once per month’ plus ‘once every two months’) and ‘Occasionally/Never’ (‘occasionally’ plus ‘never’), including separation by gender.

Table 8: Comparison of session playing in Fingal versus Dublin City

	Weekly %	Less Often %	Occasionally / Never %
Fingal (Q.13)			
Total	34.3	21.7	44.0
Females	21.8	21.9	56.3
Males	47.1	21.8	31.0
Dublin (Q.14)			
Total	16.7	9.2	74.1
Females	9.3	8.2	82.5
Males	24.1	10.3	65.5

A third of respondents said they played once per week or more often in sessions in Fingal, one fifth (21.7%) play monthly or every two months while the remainder, comprising 44%, play either occasionally or never. In this instance ‘occasionally’ means less than once every two months, such that playing in sessions for this cohort might take place no more than three to four times per year. When female and male returns are segregated, significant differences in frequency of participation in sessions will be noted. One fifth of females (21.8%) versus nearly half of males (47.1%) play weekly in sessions. Conversely, over half of females report only playing occasionally or never in sessions (56.3%), while the comparable return for males is less than a third (31%). As expected, fewer players travel to Dublin City to play in sessions than play in Fingal, but the number is still significant—16.7% on a weekly basis, with males again outnumbering females by almost 3 to 1. Three quarters of all respondents said they never play in sessions in Dublin, and for females the percentage rises to over 80%. Responses from musicians raises questions of: (1) why are there fewer female musicians playing in sessions in Fingal; (2) do musicians (female and male) who do not play in pub sessions participate on a regular basis in other session playing formats, such as at house sessions;⁶⁰ and (3) what, if anything, might be done at a policy level to encourage or enable more females to engage in regular ensemble playing? Recent scholarship has addressed aspects of female participation in traditional music. Monaghan (2021, p.29), reporting on the findings of a survey on the impact of gender on participation in the music, concluded:

it is clear from respondents’ experiences that gender affects participation across all contexts in Irish traditional music. Impacts are not confined to the professional sphere, nor are they confined to the past . . . and when considering the broader implications of this, respondents noted a decline in women’s involvement with age, and lower numbers in professional traditional music contexts.

⁶⁰ ‘House sessions’ here refers to groups of musicians playing together in private homes or other accommodation not open to the public or other musicians to attend or participate in.

Slominski (2020, p.134) also explores the experiences of women in Irish traditional music since



Figure 34 Joanne Cusack

Source J. Cusack

the early twentieth century, concluding that: ‘women still struggle for equal treatment in musical contexts as well as in society more generally in Ireland’. Issues identified relating to women’s inequality in traditional music in Monaghan’s survey include: the traditional music scene privileging the contribution of men; the close association of the music with alcohol, a predominantly male environment and one where many women feel less safe; relationships and family life, including having children, and greater responsibilities often falling on females; women suffering the effects of gendered power dynamics; aggression towards women and feelings of isolation; and, not

least, bias and exclusion from performance opportunities in the commercial music world. Joanne Cusack demonstrated, among other things, that women performing in bands with a multiple number of men are: ‘still expected to pursue a role that is reflective of their assumed gender’ and that they face different expectations from male performers to be successful in commercial Irish traditional music (2021, p.105). It is beyond the scope of this research to examine in-depth the position of women in traditional music in the context of prevailing scholarship, nor is it possible in the absence of in-depth research into the matter relating to female recreational musicians in Fingal to draw firm conclusions regarding why fewer females play in sessions in Fingal. However, informal enquiry with ten female musicians during this research highlighted limited time availability during college and early working years, family and work commitments at a later stage in life, unattractive playing venues and the absence of peer musicians to engage with. Reference to exclusion on gender grounds was not directly referenced although reference to the unattractiveness of a primarily male pub environment was referred to by one person. Musicians

gaining entry to participate in pub sessions may also face impediments not always immediately obvious. It can depend in the first instance on successfully engaging with an existing network of musicians often based around groups that share close friendships and socialise together, or with networks that exist in the context of transmission bodies such as CCÉ branches, a choice not always attractive to players who are not members of that organisation. Bill Haneman's description (section 5.2.7) of joining a session in Skerries illustrates firstly, the importance of the visibility of the local traditional music scene and secondly, that much luck and good will is also required. It can also be difficult for musicians who stop playing, particularly in early adulthood, to re-engage. What can be said is that in circumstances where a policy is adopted to promote recreational playing within communities, ensemble playing options in addition to the pub session that are attractive and inviting to all need to be explored (see chapter six).

Knowledge of public funding and support (Question 15)

All respondents to the survey were asked if they had knowledge of programmes by the ACI and FCC to support Irish traditional music. 31.4% (140) replied that they were aware of such programmes while 68.6% (306) reported they were not. There were 72 respondents who skipped the question. If they are included with an inference that those concerned had little interest or knowledge of traditional music and would be unlikely to know about support programmes, the adjusted figures would be 27.3% having knowledge and 72.7% not knowing, roughly speaking, one quarter knowing about the programmes and three quarters not. However, half of musicians indicated they were aware of support programmes, almost evenly split on gender lines.

4.5.3 Conclusions on survey

The survey received a significant response at over 500 responses, including from an almost equal number of female and male traditional musicians. Responses were received from all 7 electoral districts in Fingal, but those from the four districts on the eastern side of the county were considerably more numerous, reflecting the stronger presence of the music there. Despite

limitations in applying the responses to a more general population because of the nonprobability form of survey adopted, the replies provided important information in relation to how perceived interest in traditional music translates into active engagement in the music, the implications of which can inform an understanding of how to attract more people to the art form. A critical conclusion to be drawn from the survey is the value and importance of undertaking in-depth, targeted research into traditional music in the county. It has not been possible to identify such research undertaken to support arts planning and development by official bodies, including in relation to traditional music. The responses to the online survey convey a substantial interest and involvement in playing at recreational level in the county and provide useful information on the practice of the music today. These issues, and more, need to be better understood to provide the base information necessary to determine how to support the music in the community in terms of financial and art form supports, infrastructure development and access opportunities. A high proportion of respondents indicated a strong interest in traditional music, but that interest does not translate into active attendance at events or engagement through various media, suggesting a lower level of interest generally than implied by the responses. However, while only 10.5% of respondents indicated little interest, an important and significant cohort comprising one third of respondents (35.5%) indicated they were ‘somewhat interested’, suggesting interest in the music by this group could be fostered for the benefit of recreational playing in the community while helping to widen the audience base for the professional artist. The 176 musician responses to the survey provide a useful base to reflect the behaviours of musicians more widely in the county and for comparison between female and male musicians. More male musicians reported attending pub sessions than females, while over half of female musicians report seldom or never playing in pub sessions in Fingal. A smaller number of musicians (16.9%) play in sessions on a weekly basis in Dublin City, with males again dominating on a ratio of almost 3 to 1. Those musicians who play in sessions in Dublin come from across the county rather than from those areas immediately adjacent to Dublin City.

Similarly, fewer females attend live music events. The responses on the principal way musician respondents learned to play, that multiple routes are adopted, is significant—approximately one third from a local teacher, another third in a recognised teaching organisation and just under a third reporting being self-taught. Despite an unexpected 44% of males reporting being self-taught the greater transmission opportunities today may see classroom-based transmission featuring more strongly in relation to males in the future. Individual teachers dominate in areas where teaching organisations are less active. 77% of musician respondents indicated that family members also played. Overall, the survey portrays significant association with playing traditional music among family groups, both intergenerational and through extended family: Very few reported a family member being the principal source for learning to play; 25% of musician respondents reported having a spouse / partner who played; and 45% indicated they had children who played. While the strong family involvement suggests family connections will remain central to the future of the music in Fingal, the fact that multiple ways are adopted to access learning the music can provide the necessary framework to foster the music in areas and communities where it has low visibility at this time.

4.6 Retrospective and critique

This section provides critical commentary on the processes of change and current state of traditional music in Fingal having regard to the five-domain music ecosystem analytical framework posited by Shippers and Grant (2016). It primarily covers domains relating to systems of learning; musicians and culture; and contexts and constructs. The impact of elements comprehended by the regulations and infrastructure and the media and the music industry domains are addressed in chapters five and six.

4.6.1. A County divided

Noting the ‘contexts and constructs’ domain, traditional music in Fingal today has a profile in certain locations and far less so in others, a point well illustrated by FCC in explaining the presence of the music: drawing a diagonal line between Baldoyle in the south eastern corner of

the county and Garristown in the northwest, the area in Fingal where interest in traditional music is strongest is to the right or east of that line.⁶¹ The towns and villages on the right-hand side of the line include Skerries, Rush, Malahide, Portmarnock, Howth, Ballyboughal and Naul, all of which have had, to varying degrees, traditional music activities in recent decades. Swords and Balbriggan, two of the fastest growing towns in Ireland today, have not been particularly noted for association with traditional music to the same degree as their sister towns on the right-hand side of the diagonal line. The towns constituting Dublin 15, including Blanchardstown, Castleknock, Clonsilla and Mulhuddart, all substantial centres of population on the left or western side of the diagonal line, experienced far less engagement with the music. FCC attributes the presence of traditional music families for the strength of the music on the eastern side and it also says it focuses its funding support for traditional music on this area, for example, funding the SEAC in Naul, the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, and the recently established Fingal Fleadh in Swords: ‘we have targeted what we feel are areas of need, ours would be an evidence-based approach’.⁶² Funding policies by the FCC are considered in chapter six, including the issue of addressing the weaker manifestation of interest in traditional arts in Dublin 15 and its environs.

4.6.2. Understanding a downturn in popularity

Of the two locations examined in some details where playing traditional music blossomed, Skerries was slower to develop than Ballyboughal but today it is still noted as a place where traditional music can be heard in weekly sessions and related activities, including transmission. Although the number of people involved is small in relative terms to the overall population of the town, there remains in Skerries a tangible presence of a music community interacting together, although an important point is that the early evangelists have been joined by new faces

⁶¹ FCC email response to author of 15 October 2018

⁶² *Ibid*

today. In contrast to Skerries, over the past ten years or so there has been a significant ebb in interest in the music in Ballyboughal for reasons noted in section 4.4.2, or at least it is no longer visible to the wider community. Notable is the absence of an identifiable cohort of practitioners. But not all links to the past have been extinguished: mumming continues; the SEAC is active and provides classes in instrumentation; and Scoil Séamus Ennis technically remains in place and has been active recently in organising a concert commemorating the centenary of the birth of Séamus Ennis. One danger is that links to a successful past may be misinterpreted triggering an overstatement of the strength of the music in Ballyboughal now, particularly by those from outside the locality who rely on memories or reports of great sessions and events there in the past and in the absence of sufficiently critiquing or interrogating narratives on the state of art forms at community level today. Another threat, and perhaps a greater impediment to the future of traditional music in Ballyboughal and elsewhere, is that the shoes of the evangelists of the past remain to be filled.

4.6.3 Role of blow-ins

Musicians settling in Fingal, usually driven by employment opportunities in Dublin, played a key role in fostering the playing of traditional music in areas of the county and many continue to play in sessions today. Their contribution falls under two domains in the five-domain framework—systems of learning and musicians and communities. They can be seen to have played three important roles:

1. Bringing playing expertise to areas where traditional music was weak
2. Forming the backbone of the players involved in session playing and other visible manifestations of the art form, and
3. Serving as ‘evangelists’ leading the uplift in the music in the county.

Their role in relation to point 3—serving as evangelists—has been especially important. The example of Paddy Gavin’s role in establishing the first CCÉ branch in Balbriggan was given. So too is the example of Mary Keane from Limerick who instigated and ran the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend. Many of those leading the recently established branches of CCÉ

in Dublin 15, Balbriggan and Donabate have also settled in the area. It is critical to recognise this development pathway, recalling that Cotter (2016, p.6) also noted that individuals from elsewhere in Clare and further afield played a central role in re-energising traditional music in Ennis from the early 1960s. Kaul brings a different perspective on the issue of people interested in traditional music settling in Doolin, referring to them as ‘blow-ins’: ‘[they] are classified as people who were born elsewhere but now live permanently in the village. They cannot become “local” in their lifetime’ (2009, p84). He further states:

The distinction between locals and blow-ins is given special attention in this book for the simple reason that it is the most salient and important distinction between permanent residents. Blow-ins have become prominent and influential in the social, political, and economic life of the village . . . In Doolin it is the blow-ins who have completely appropriated the traditional music scene (2009, p.85)

In towns like Malahide and Skerries distinctions can be made between those born there and those who settled in; one often hears reference to individuals as ‘old Malahide’ or ‘original Malahide’.⁶³ However, unlike Kaul’s example, such social division is not maintained in relation to those playing traditional music as in many instances the blow-ins brought the music to the locals, the opposite of the position in Doolin. A pertinent point would be to understand the extent to which the music has transferred from blow-ins to members of the ‘original’ population, a feature not particularly evident in places like Skerries to judge by the continued preponderance of blow-ins / their children observed playing in sessions there. This scenario may have the undesirable impact of pigeon holing the music to a limited cohort within the general community, similar to the manner in which some observers, echoing popular narratives, view traditional music families (see next section) as being the anchor and custodians for the music in their localities. In places like Ballyboughal where a resurgence in the music has yet to show itself and where there is difficulty at the moment in identifying potential energisers,

⁶³ This reflects personal experience as a blow-in living in Malahide for 35 years.

relying to any significant degree on a new wave of musical outsiders settling in the area to re-energise traditional music playing may be difficult given that the 2016 Census shows a population increase between 2011 and 2016 in Ballyboughal of 14%, most of which came from internal population growth rather than from people settling in the area (section 3.4.1).

4.6.4 Role of the family

In defining family socio-musical interactions, Cawley (2013b) identified four major categories of interest: parents, siblings, members of the extended family and family members who are not musicians, singers or dancers. She concluded that:

Irish traditional musicians experience diverse types of family interactions, which significantly affect musical development in correspondingly diverse ways. Therefore, the influence of family on the musical development of Irish traditional musicians is not homogeneous, and often difficult to generalise (2013b, p.95).

Some interviewees located the Fingal traditional music landscape by reference to the location of musical families, integral to the domain musicians and communities. Even at official level ‘musical families’ define geographical spaces where the music is strong on the eastern side of a diagonal line across the county (see section 4.6.1). Most interviewees reported some family association with music, primarily Irish traditional music but not exclusively so. Those who reported parents playing other genres said their parents retained some interest in traditional music. In almost all cases learning through attending classes was a significant feature, but there were notable exceptions involving self-learning. The responses to the online survey and information gathered from questioning musicians born in Fingal and players who settled in the county confirms Cawley’s findings that the influence of family on the musical development of Irish traditional musicians is not homogeneous. It suggests the experiences of both cohorts regarding family influences were not dissimilar, implying little differences generally between Fingal and the rest of the country.

4.6.5 Transmission

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

Schippers and Grant (2016, p.12) assert: ‘transmission processes ... are central to the sustainability of most music cultures’ in introducing the domain ‘systems of learning music’.

In the past two decades learning opportunities have expanded significantly in Fingal, primarily in the informal education arena. Seven CCÉ branches have been established in Fingal, three in the 1970s and four in the past 6 years – Figure 35 with CCÉ locations marked with a star.

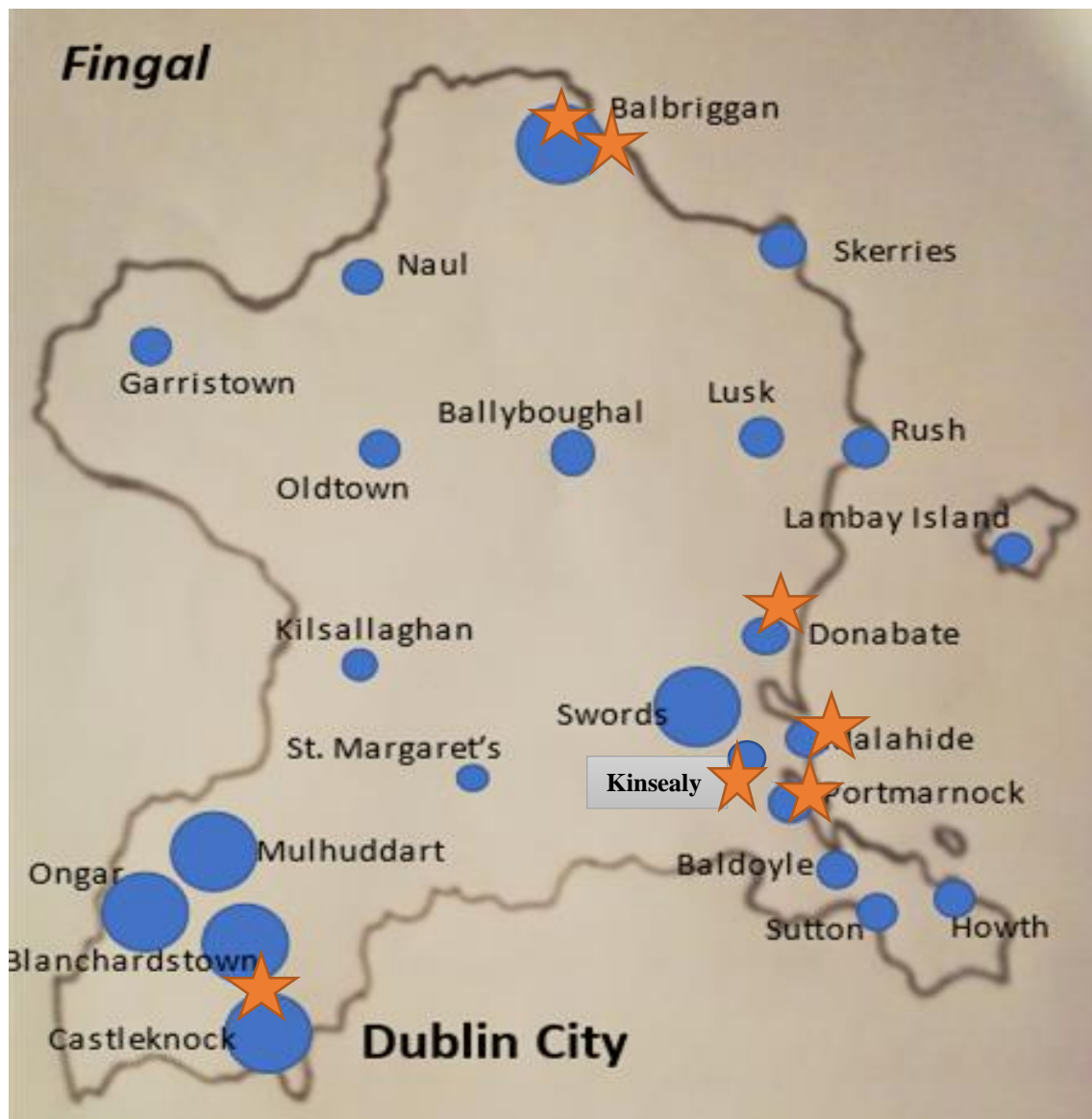


Figure 35 Location of CCÉ branches in Fingal

Source: Author

The provision of instrumental classes was a high priority for those establishing Comhaltas branches. Today six of the seven have teaching and session playing programmes while the first Balbriggan branch established in the 1970s subsequently focused on set dancing. The early branches were formed in areas where growth in population and housing development was evident. In most cases those establishing the branches included people who had settled in the area. The branches tended to be formed in relatively affluent areas, resonating with Slominski that: ‘trad (sic) participation both inside and outside Ireland tends to be a middle-class pastime’ (2020, p.165). This has resulted in branches being unevenly dispersed throughout the county with limited presence in new population growth areas and a stronger representation in areas of higher income groups. Coupled with the observations of the Director of the Draíocht arts centre on the lack of demand for services for traditional music, this further corroborates a weakness encompassed within the infrastructure aspect of the domain regulations and infrastructure. Those involved in establishing the four most recent Comhaltas branches (Dublin 15, Balbriggan, Portmarnock and Donabate) cited seeking to provide classes for their own children as an important motivating factor and the unavailability or unsuitability of other local transmission arrangements. In addition, a concern to have their children learning the music was also amplified by those who were players themselves and members of Comhaltas branches in their youth. It will be noted also that organisers of other traditional music related activities in Fingal, such as the establishment of *Inis Rua*, the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend and *Rinceoil* in Rush were also motivated in the first instance to cater for their children. It is notable that no Comhaltas branch was established in Ballyboughal or Skerries. The presence of Scoil Séamus Ennis and the SEAC may explain the absence in the former. In relation to Skerries, Bill Haneman, whose views were shared by several interviewees from the town, suggested:

Comhaltas has done enormous work over the years, but it isn't for everyone, you know, and I think that a lot of musicians have mixed feelings about the competition morale of learning traditional music. . . I think it is really important that there be venues for kids to learn that don't emphasise,. . . that . . . don't even breathe a word of competition. The competition is not

part of the universe. . . there are loads of people who are motivated by competition and kids are motivated by it. . . I'm not sure that really feeds the spirit of the music. The musicians who really are going to keep things going for a lifetime are those who have an internal drive to play the music and love of the music for its own sake.

Aisling Ní Ghiobéin of Craobh na Mara, Balbriggan made the point that parents are often attracted to Comhaltas for their children's instrumental lessons because of the possibility for them to play and socialise together in music groups—a point also observed by Jim Grant and one of the reasons Mary Keane established the children's music group *Inis Rua* in Skerries. Aisling also referred to the attraction of cheaper cost of lessons in Comhaltas branches compared with attending a private teacher. This certainly can be the case, but caution is required to avoid comparing apples and oranges: a one-to-one class with a noted musician will invariably be more expensive than the cost of participating in a group class. Jim O'Sullivan also linked the importance of Irish music to promoting Irish culture in explaining his interest in establishing the Dublin 15 branch of CCÉ, a view shared by other CCÉ members, not unexpected given that the aims and objects of the organisation set out in its constitution specifically provides for this linkage.⁶⁴ The association of the music with Irish culture was generally not alluded to by interviewees not associated with CCÉ even though several of them are active Irish speakers and participate in other traditional arts—see section 1.7 above.

Other teaching

The SEAC provides instrumental classes and sponsors monthly adult singing and slow sessions. *Rinceoil* in Rush provides instrumental classes. A number of individuals, operating from their own homes, teach traditional music. They operate independently of teaching organisations and provide important access to the music in places such as Rush, Skerries, Balbriggan and Swords. Some general music schools also provide instruction in traditional music playing, although the

⁶⁴ Constitution of CCÉ, 1996 edition, p.3

range of instruments offered tends to be restricted. Examples of such schools include Play Piano in Swords and the Irish Institute of Music and Song in Balbriggan.

Twenty years ago, the option for most students was to arrange for teaching in Dublin, in neighbouring counties or adopt a self-taught approach. Excluding those teaching in general schools of music, the majority of those teaching traditional music are paid for their service for the most part operating on a part-time basis, including those teaching in CCÉ branches. A list of organisations and individuals teaching traditional music in Fingal is not readily available. Transmission through CCÉ branches and other organisations reflects McCarthy's (1999, p.186, 187) conclusions on learning music in Ireland being decentralised, connected to social development and intergenerational: 'a community that provides meaning and identity to the learner' (p.186).

4.6.6 What constitutes the traditional music community in Fingal

I indicated in chapter one that the term 'community' is being used in this dissertation to identify as a group those playing or engaging with Irish traditional music at any level, construct or context. As explained already, the online survey undertaken does not enable firm conclusions to be drawn about the general level of interest in traditional music in the community or to establish an estimate of the number of people engaged in activities, such as attending sessions, despite the high level of interest expressed in the art form in the responses received. A survey based on random selection is critical to establishing such basic information on practice of the music.

In relation to traditional musicians, there may be a temptation to surmise that as the overall number engaged in playing is relatively small in comparison to the population more generally, many of the players would know each other. This might be so in respect of noted musicians operating on a semi-professional or professional basis, but the research is clear that the notion of a single traditional music community does not exist, at least not in the form of a homogenous group, known to each other, with common aspirations. Instead, there are a variety of small

communities engaged in traditional musicking, usually with little interaction with other groups. Even where it is evident, the frequency and nature of such interactions is limited. While horizontal links between the disparate groups are absent or weak, stronger vertical connections are discernible linking groups to the broader traditional community, such as CCÉ branches to the parent organisation and branches from other counties, or links to nationally recognised festivals such as the Willie Clancy Summer School. The personal ambitions of musicians are also important here. Finnegan, avoiding the term community in favour of socially recognised pathways (section 2.5), provides a useful descriptor for many of the group constructs observable in Fingal, constructs that are once both firm and elastic. She observed in relation to musical groups:

The many different forms of music activity described in this study were not random or created from nothing each time by individual practitioners, but a series of familiar and – by their followers – taken-for-granted routes through what might otherwise have been the impersonal wilderness of urban life, paths which people shared with others in a predictable yet personal fashion . . . [not] always clearly known to outsiders, but settings in which relationships could be forged, interests shared, and a continuity of meaning achieved in the context of urban living . . . These local pathways were established, already-trodden and, for the most part, abiding routes which many people had taken and were taking in company with others (1989/2007, p.306)

Asked to describe the group of players he engages with in traditional music, Bill Haneman's response encapsulated both the constancy and fluidity integral to Finnegan's understanding:

I think of the musicians as a community within the bigger community of Skerries and within the bigger meta community of traditional musicians. But I'm not sure where the boundary is . . . In other words there are people who occasionally play with us, there are people who regularly play with us. . . So, it's a big wide network and it doesn't have in my view any really clear boundaries and I think that's good. I actually think that's a positive thing.

An important distinction between Haneman's understanding of community and other community models discussed in chapter 2 is that it can be considered to be less bounded than other models identified. For example, in comparison with a CoMP described by Kenny (2016) based on Wenger (section 2.5) and discussed in section 4.6.7 below, it can be seen that while

elements of mutual learning, socialising and shared repertoire in Haneman's model correspond to a CoMP, that of joint enterprise and 'situated' learning highlighted by Kenny (2016, p.11), are less distinctive (although not absent) and could be considered more reflective of Finnegan's 'pathways'.

In relation to the different pathways musicians in Fingal follow, drawing on the responses of interviewees and my own observations, they can be observed to generally fall into five informal cohorts, each one relatively separate but with some cross-overs evident. The first involves a small number of musicians of note nationally living in the county, comprising full and part-time professional musicians. Those interviewed reported limited interaction with this cohort except at special events such as at festivals.⁶⁵ However, the members of this group can influence the music ecosystem and the community more widely through performance and teaching, reflected within the domain 'media and the music industry'. A second cohort comprises those in CCÉ branches. Branches enjoy a loose association among themselves but there is limited evidence of regular interaction between musician members of the branches and other musicians active in session playing in the vicinity. CCÉ branches report they occasionally meet members of other local branches for joint musical activities, and they also meet in the context of the CCÉ organisation sponsored events such as the Dublin fleadh. CCÉ branch sponsored sessions tend to be for their own membership, particularly in providing opportunities for younger players to meet and play. The third cohort includes groups of recreational musicians participating in long established sessions. Musicians playing regularly in sessions would primarily be aware of players in their own local music playing circuit or network. Except in respect of attending events such as festivals, only a minority of session players travel beyond their immediate locality to play. This cohort can often share membership with a fourth category, comprising smaller groups or collections of individuals actively involved in activities such as mumming, transmission,

⁶⁵ Section 1.6 addresses the terms 'professional', 'amateur' and 'recreational' musicians.

festivals, and tourism related ventures. The final cohort comprises individuals who, although able to play, are not included in the above four categories because they don't play out in the community or are not involved in other traditional music related activities. While hard to quantify the number of individuals involved, responses to the online survey suggest high numbers of musicians not playing in sessions, particularly females (section 4.5.2). Individuals in this fifth cohort may engage with traditional music utilising several forms of media surfaced as important. The absence of any readily identifiable and easily accessible pathway back to performing for those who have given up is an issue of concern and is addressed in chapter six. In general, players tend to know other musicians from their own generation. Adult musicians tend not to know younger players in their locality, other than where family or CCÉ branch / organisation associations are identifiable, since locations and opportunities for different generations playing together are limited. Mary Keane reported taking steps to enable her teenage players to gain experience of session playing with adult players while intergenerational playing can be more common in CCÉ branches. The Skerries Traditional Music Weekend has provided opportunities for younger players and learners to meet their peers, but there are no ongoing opportunities where young players from across Fingal can come together. An attractive context for such an event has yet to be articulated. While the above groupings are informal in nature, the literature identifies more formal structures associated with communities of music practice that are also visible in Fingal today.

4.6.7 Communities of Musical Practice

The application of the concept 'communities of musical practice (CoMPs)' described by Kenny (2016) and others (section 2.5) has applicability in several contexts within the Fingal traditional music ecosystem. The concept of a learning community can even be applied to many Fingal pub sessions. Newer players join sessions to develop their playing and repertoire and to progressively gain a foothold in the world of traditional music. James O'Mahony spoke of traveling 'hail rain or snow' to what he regarded as a regular class in Ballyboughal (section

4.4.2) while Bill Haneman centred his learning on the tunes played in his local session in Skerries: ‘A significant fraction of my repertoire is from local sessions, things that people play here. A fraction of it, a small fraction, would be things that I was taught in more of a teaching structured environment early on’.

Sessions usually operate without an appointed leadership, Bill making the point: ‘I think there is a large level of . . . self-selection’. A feature of sessions in Fingal is that they have continued for many years, with the same musicians participating augmented occasionally by new players - examples include sessions in Skerries, Malahide, Portmarnock, Castleknock, Balbriggan and Howth. The group dynamic underpinned by mutual respect and support invariably deepens over



Figure 36 Jim Brody

Source: Paula Murray

the years. Playing music together, sharing repertoire and information, and talking about the music are central elements of these sessions. For the most part, participant musicians take turns introducing their choices of tunes to the group through starting up sets, thus contributing to promoting a shared repertoire while helping to build personal confidence and capacity in playing. An important element in the chat among the members of the session group are

exchanges about the tunes being played, the provision of information on upcoming traditional music events and performances, on festivals and critiquing newly launched CDs and recordings. Discussions on past and present players, on style and tune settings are constant elements. An example I have experience of is of the recently deceased Jim Brody (Figure 36), originally from Co. Clare, playing in the Thursday session in Portmarnock (Figure 37) and willingly imparting each week from his extensive personal knowledge of traditional musicians (and their repertoires) he had met and played with at home and abroad from the 1950s.



Figure 37 Weekly session in Portmarnock (March 2022)

From Left: John Regan, Liam Curran, Frank Heron, Kieran Wade and John Kelleher

Source: Author

CCÉ branches along with groups like *Rinceoil* in Rush and *Inis Rua* in Skerries also serve as active CoMPs, with teaching programmes set in contexts of socialising and performing, all built around a strong shared group identity. In these instances there is active leadership, supported by the group, in guiding activities to achieve specific objectives. Other examples of learning groups forming CoMPs are the adult slow sessions taking place monthly in the SEAC and in Joe May's Pub in Skerries and the *Ciúnas* group in Portmarnock. Regarding the slow sessions in the SEAC and Joe May's, a significant number of participants attend both sessions and travel from outside Fingal, coming together as a single interest group. Organisers for the group drawn from the participating musicians are evident and the musicians involved share common objectives of learning new repertoire and playing together as an identifiable session unit. In each location a teacher / facilitator is in place to lead and support the session and the learning.

The *Ciúnas* group does not have a teacher, but a cohort of stronger players guide the group in its learning.

WhatsApp is currently a very popular format for communication between members of groups and sessions. Otherwise, standard texting is used. CCÉ branches also use Facebook to publicise activities and have websites supported by the organisation headquarters. The SEAC makes significant use of technology to publicise events and to deliver online services.

4.6.8 Response to COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on this research project has been alluded to in chapter one. These restrictions have had a significant impact on the performance and transmission of the traditional arts in Fingal, as it has had nationally. All session playing in pub

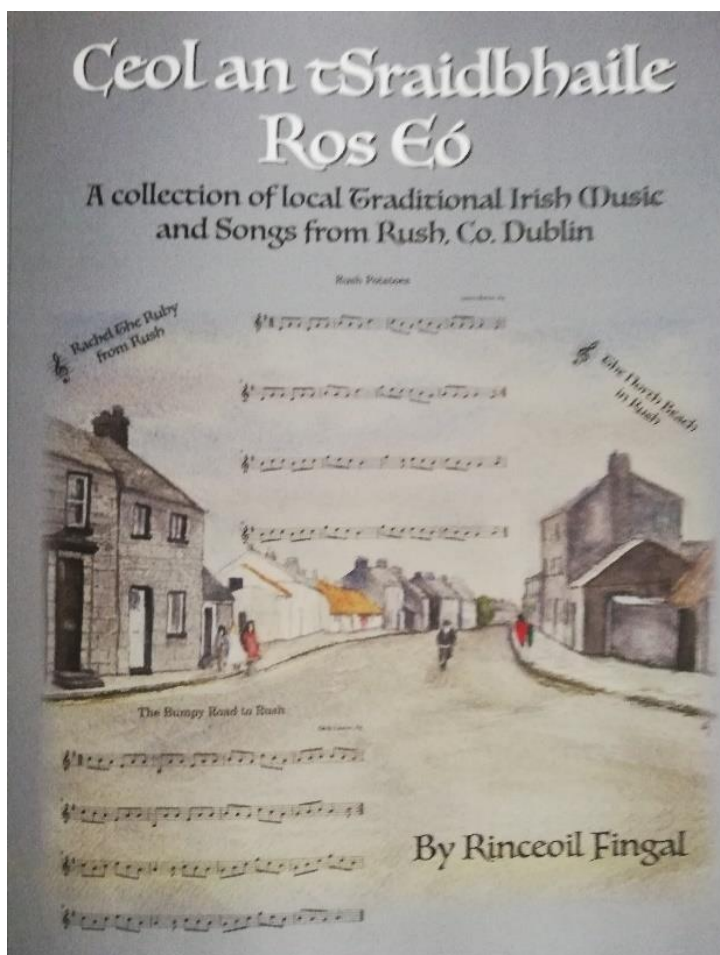


Figure 38 Book of locally composed tunes, poems and songs published by Rinceoil in Rush

Source: Rinceoil Fingal

venues and public performances, both indoor and outdoor ceased. Face-to-face music teaching also ceased but almost all teaching groups, including CCÉ classes, general music schools and many private teachers report having transferred their classes online, using software packages such as Zoom, Skype, and Google Meets. The restrictions on live performances have had significant negative impacts on the livelihoods of professional artists, including Irish traditional musicians. Listening, and viewing traditional music remained

an option through various media, including live streaming of concerts by RTE (national broadcaster) and by TG4 (Irish language station) and, in the case of the latter, broadcasting of recorded traditional music material from their archives. Victor Byrne (section 4.3.4) also live-streamed performances from his kitchen of his own work to maintain contact with his music circle. The SEAC provided classes on line and also delivered a series of online concerts featuring traditional arts performers. To keep their music community active during the restrictions period, *Rinceoil Fingal* in Rush completed a project of compiling and publishing locally composed traditional Irish music, poems and songs from the Rush area (Figure 38). The publication and access to digital recordings of the material was launched in January 2022 supported by FCC, the Creative Ireland Fund and the Irish Traditional Music Archive.

4.6.9 Fingal music ecosystem model

Figure 39 below identifies the key elements/forces influencing or impacting on the traditional music ecosystem in Fingal, listed within the relevant domains, recalling that at the centre of the ecosystem is the practice of the music. The list was prepared based on information gathered in the research relating to traditional music activities, performance and transmission; interviews with informed people, online survey and analysis of public policy (chapter six). The presentation format is guided by the analytical framework posited by Schippers and Grant (2016)—see section 2.4.3 above.

Figure 39 Fingal traditional music ecosystem

Domain	Elements (Actors / Forces)
1. Musicians and Communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence of traditional musicians (in selected locations) 2. Presence of musical families 3. Presence of musical evangelists (in limited numbers) 4. Traditional music communities exist—primarily associated with sessions, CCÉ branches, music organisations and SEAC, mainly on the eastern side of the county 5. Collaboration evident between FCC and groups running traditional music festivals

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Collaboration evident between FCC and Music Generation 7. Links exist between CCÉ branches/parent organisation and between Fingal musicians and national traditional music organisations, festivals and activities 8. Strong tradition of volunteering in the county and wide public recognition of concept of ‘greater good’ 9. Local business support for traditional music activities (limited) 10. Support of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) for traditional music 11. Presence of traditional singing circles sympathetic to traditional music activities 12. Certain locations in Fingal are associated by the traditional music community with playing the music, such as Skerries, Naul and Ballyboughal, although less so for the wider population
2. Systems of Learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence of six CCÉ branches, Rinceoil in Rush and SEAC, mainly on the eastern side of the county 2. Presence of independent music teachers (i.e. not associated with transmission organisations) and some general music schools also teaching traditional music 3. Primary schools provide an introduction / some basic teaching of traditional music 4. Workshops in traditional music operate during festival weekends 5. Online teaching adopted during COVID-19 restrictions 6. Learning opportunities available in Dublin City and adjoining counties 7. Communities of Music Practice structures evident in transmission arrangements
3. Contexts and Constructs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prestige of traditional music generally positive 2. Recognition of traditional arts as a unique Irish heritage 3. Positive public attitude to music making 4. Low visibility of traditional music playing in public 5. People are engaging with traditional music in new media formats

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Visibility of traditional music on TG4 (Irish language TV station) 7. Opportunities for the public to attend presentational performance events evident (e.g. SEAC and in Dublin City) 8. Public engagement with Irish traditional arts stronger around St Patrick's Day and Seachtain na Gaeilge (Irish language week) 9. Positive impact of the association of Séamus Ennis with traditional music in Fingal 10. Changing demography influencing direction of public support for arts generally in the county 8. Increasing choices for engagement in art forms generally intensifies competition for public support of all art forms 9. There is no clear vision for recreational performance of traditional arts in communities (see chapter 6)
4. Infrastructure and Regulations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence of SEAC in Naul as a recognised centre for the traditional arts 2. Reliance on commercial establishments for performance spaces (sessions) 3. Official bodies (ACI and FCC) assigned responsibility to promote the traditional arts 4. Public funding mechanisms for traditional music in place, but primarily targeted in support of presentational performance (Turino's definition) events (see chapter 6) 5. The stronger presence of traditional music on the eastern side of the county attracts most public funding for the art form 6. National policies supporting traditional music in place but none specifically targeted at recreational playing (see chapter 6) 7. The national Irish Traditional Music Archive is available but repositories of traditional music relating to Fingal remain to be developed 8. Legislation governing the arts, unlike sport, does not address recreational playing (see chapter 6) 9. Instrument makers are present in the community and instruments loan schemes operate.

5. Media and the Music Industry	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Printed, broadcast and online music are availed of widely. 2. The playing of traditional music is generally associated with the music industry activities (rather than as a community endeavour) 3. More people engage with traditional music through online media than attend live events or activities 4. Paying audiences exist but are limited 5. Media exposure of traditional music is mainly focused on presentational performance events
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The impact or influence of each actor or force within the music ecosystem is not uniform across the county and will depend on the unique circumstances pertaining in individual villages, towns or even localities within larger populated urban areas. For example, the presence of a teacher like Mrs Nulty in Lusk or Paddy Gavin in Balbriggan can impact significantly on the development of music playing in their immediate localities. An overview of the operation of the ecosystem is incorporated in the chapter conclusions in next section.

4.7 Conclusion

Fingal retained traditional music and community traditions through the generations in quite localised contexts. Players and teachers, such as Mrs Nulty operating from the 1960s, contributed to keeping the music alive and many of her students were active in enabling the upsurge in playing in recent decades. The uplift has levelled off although a decline in engagement in some locations once noted for the music, such as Ballyboughal, is evident. The visibility of the tradition in significant parts of the county remains low but recent developments in transmission opportunities in some of these locations are positive. The presence of the SEAC, the continuation of events such as the annual Skerries Traditional Music Weekend are also important today, serving to sustain and strengthen a series of localised communities despite population growth and demographic change. The migration of musicians into the county has been critical to all these developments, and there is some evidence within the transmission processes of the tradition being embedded. The canon of tunes played in Fingal in general

reflects that of Dublin City, an amalgam of sources and playing styles resulting from musicians from across the country settling in the City and enhancing the playing milieu. Without a survey based on random selection it remains difficult to accurately assess the level of interest in the community in traditional music. The association of Irish culture with playing music is generally more important for members of CCÉ but not alluded to by many interviewees. A recognisable family association with music is discernible, but mainly limited to those areas where the music is strongest. Although there is evidence of recent steps to promote traditional music in areas of high and growing populations (Dublin 15, Swords and Balbriggan) the general position in these areas of low levels of visibility and engagement remains, raising questions about the efficacy of relying on current approaches to promote the art form and the need to explore other avenues, including in a post-nationalist context (Slominski 2020, p.174). These points are addressed further in chapter six.

The availability of pubs as playing venues for recreational musicians is reducing while opportunities for children to play music together are more limited. Pubs are also not necessarily the most desirable venue for young people to play in. Sally Corr raises the possibility of adopting an official policy (section 5.2.3) that includes the availability of local arts houses (shared with other art forms) or utilising other accessible and affordable locations, such as libraries, to be available in the early to mid-evening time. Sally's reflections on rethinking playing venues and contexts for the recreational player resonates with Shelemay (2018) who explores remapping musical processes and places as part of rethinking urban communities in relation to the formation of migrant Ethiopian communities in the United States. Limitations in playing venues identified represent significant weaknesses comprehended within the regulations and infrastructure domain of the ecosystem model. Although festivals like the Fingal Fleadh and Skerries Traditional Music Weekend support valuable workshop opportunities for transmission, their role in providing opportunities for musicians in Fingal to meet can be important given the otherwise low levels of contacts taking place between the

different cohorts of players now. Except in the case of some individuals involved in promoting activities associated with the transmission and performance of traditional music, there is not a noticeable sense among the players of a recognition of Fingal as an important place for traditional music, or that it could be so. Other than the presence of the SEAC, most interviewees admitted to having little knowledge of any county or national policies being promoted to support or deepen interest in the heritage. Without diminishing Séamus Ennis's legacy or weakening his association with the county, recognition of more past and present players of note born, or living, in the county could help to strengthen the sense of community within local traditional music and contribute to promoting the message of a creative Fingal.

The material in this chapter along with information from chapters five and six enabled mapping of the key elements of the traditional music ecosystem in Fingal, presented in Figure 39 that, in turn, facilitated the formulation of conclusions from the research set out in chapter seven.

Chapter 5: The Lived Experience

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the personal stories of engagement with Irish traditional music in the lives of ten individuals, either born in or living in Fingal today. Collecting the stories involved in-depth interviews with the individuals that included an exploration of their introduction to the music, how they learned it, the influences that determined the trajectory they took in the music and the part it plays in their lives today. The ten stories have been selected as follows:

1. individuals born and learned their music in Fingal (Corr, C. Keane, Maxwell),
2. individuals born and learned their music elsewhere (Martin)
3. musicians who settled as adults in Fingal (Grant, Haneman)
4. individuals from Fingal who learned the music as young adults (Kirk, O'Mahony)
5. Individuals involved in organising activities / events (M. Keane, MacPhilínbín)

Interviews with nine of ten the individuals took place in their homes—the interview with Mary Keane took place outside her home, see section 5.2.6. Upon request, interviewees willingly provided a recently taken photograph of themselves, both as a means of identifying them and to emphasise the personal nature of each individual story. The ten interviews were undertaken before the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions.

The form and style of presentation in this chapter draws on Titon (2020, pp.11-26) and on Glassie (2016), allowing everyone to tell their own stories in a manner suited to themselves. Although question led, an open approach was adopted generally in the interviews to capture the interviewee's perspective on their engagement with the music and its place within communities. As I live and play music in Fingal, my positionality is important, see section 2.3.1, and autoethnography is occasionally employed in this chapter to augment or clarify the contexts or setting of stories. Titon (2020, p.13) cites Dorson (1970) and others in emphasising the distinction between 'story' and 'history'. Interviewees relating their stories in the language of their choice incorporate their perceptions of events and interactions, their reactions to them

unshorn of emotional colouring. Inevitably, the story is the result of a lived, creative process that is re-remembered over time. Titon (2020, p.13), observing that history on the other hand is the product of research to establish facts, cites Collingwood (1948) who stresses that history and story ‘are not the same and certainly not interchangeable’. Glassie’s (2016) style of narrative provides a format in which an interviewee’s story and contextual information are carefully interwoven without compromising the authenticity or importance of each story. The chapter concludes by drawing together themes or issues identified by the interviewees they believe are important in fostering traditional music in Fingal as well as impediments to its sustainability within local communities.

As the emphasis in this research is on recreational playing, the ten interviewees and others interviewed but not reported on in this chapter (see Appendix 1.1) have mainly been drawn from that cohort. To maintain the focus on recreational playing in Fingal, interviews have generally not been pursued with nationally recognised and highly regarded players within the music tradition, although a small number live in Fingal, since it is expected their perspective on and engagement with the music generally extends far beyond the county.

5.2 Ten personal stories

5.2.1 James O’Mahony

I have known James O’Mahony from about the mid-1990s through playing music together in sessions in Fingal. Thinking about potential interviewees, James was one of the first to come to mind. A conversation with James about sessions and events he has participated in over the decades will leave the listener in no doubt as to the depth of his interest and experience in traditional music over the years, and it remains a constant in his life. The interview took place on 30 April 2019 in the afternoon in his house near Skerries. A retired school teacher, James moved to Skerries with his parents when he was six years old and has lived and worked there since except for a brief period when he attended university. A player well regarded for his musicianship and knowledge of the tradition, today he plays in weekly traditional music

sessions in Skerries and Portmarnock and attends several music festivals each year. James's active participation from the early years of the development of the traditional music scene in Skerries and surrounding areas made him an important source of information to the research. Although his parents were from Kerry and engaged in set dancing: 'neither played music so there was no music to be heard when I was growing up. I just developed an interest in music myself'. James explained:

I went through secondary school, bought a guitar, would have played pop songs and that type of thing ... I had no traditional background during those years. In fact, I had heard that the Gavin family from Balbriggan had won the All-Ireland when I was in fifth year in secondary school ... but it meant nothing to me.

It was not until his university years that James's interest in Irish traditional music was aroused through a chance listening to a Planxty album. An important aspect of his story is of forging his own pathway to the tradition at a time when there were few road maps available. In the 1970s locating people who played music or finding a session to join posed challenges, especially since communication relied heavily on word of mouth and



Figure 40 James O'Mahony

Source: J. O'Mahony

establishing connections with other players. A changing national musical scene had an impact on him. A chance listening to a Planxty album made him determined to learn to play Irish traditional music (section 4.3.4). He started playing traditional music about 1975: 'I decided I was going to buy a mandolin and to learn some of these tunes ... And I didn't know where to go ... there was nobody playing traditional music ... that I would have heard of in North County Dublin before that'. He cannot recall how he first learned of classes being provided by Clontarf branch of CCÉ in Dublin, but he attended there in 1976 for a limited period, made possible, James explained, by getting a car! Importantly, a skill set to which he was introduced to there

was the fundamentals of written music: ‘that was very important for me ... that helped me in a lot of the tunes I would have learned... that was my introduction into traditional music’. About 1978, James bought his first banjo, all the while continuing to learn tunes and listening to musicians: ‘I wanted to play music’. Then chance played a second hand, this time through the looking glass!

I got married in 1978 and that year we moved into a house in Skerries and there was a couple of neighbours of mine and they spotted that I had a banjo and a mandolin in through my window ... So, they accosted my wife and said does your husband play music, so she said he does, come down and talk to him. So that evening in they came, and they said that they had started a little session and would I be interested in joining them.

The session took place in the Gladstone Inn which, James thinks, was the first regular session in the town primarily featuring traditional music. The players included Séamus Tynam, a teacher in Corduff primary school, whose pupils included Sally Corr, and with whom James would strike up a long session playing friendship, describing him as ‘an accomplice’. James recalled the sessions in Balbriggan library described by Michael Gavin where he encountered great musicians. Another notable event to stimulate James’s interest was in attending a Tionól Cheoil held in Gormanstown College in 1976: ‘the atmosphere was brilliant there. And the embryonic Stockton’s Wing were there ... they were only young lads in 1976 ... this music just blew me away. That and Paddy Gavin playing the box, standing ... he was just playing wonderful music’. His explanation for attending the Tionól says much about his personal determination to seek out the music: ‘I think I just heard about it. I was very much a lone wolf, you know, I didn’t have huge contacts, but I had huge interest. So, I’d take off if I saw something to be investigated, I’d take off’. It also underlines the importance of regularly seeing quality players performing to encourage continued learning. About 1980 James and Séamus Tynam joined a session in Ballyboughal: ‘[we] had heard that there was a little bit of music in a pub called O’Connor’s ... Of course, there was quite a scene there ... There was a number of players that lived locally’. Like Terry Kirk, for James this was the real thing: ‘a few songs but it was

trad and that's what we wanted. And it was manna from heaven for us, you know, because there was nowhere else, no place else in Fingal as far as we knew'. James also noted several younger players from the locality joining in over time, including Mary and Mags Maxwell, Brendan Lynch (fiddle) and Sally Corr. He compared the Ballyboughal session to a regular class: 'I would go over hail, rain or snow to that. And that was very important in my early [playing], building up tunes, finding out what was being played and then going away and learning it'. He saw another important side to the Ballyboughal session: 'it was all about building up connections'. For James, interacting with the Irish traditional music community is as important in the formation of a musician as acquiring repertoire or gaining facility on an instrument.

Continuing to play in the Gladstone Inn, musicians living in Rush joined in occasionally, including John Garry (banjo), Ernie Tammemagi (fiddle) and Martin Quinn, box player, then playing mandolin. This group was occasionally invited to perform in a newly constructed GAA clubhouse in Skerries, a venue that would in time offer classes on tin whistle and fiddle to cater for a new generation of players such as Carol Keane. Linking with the players from Rush saw James gravitate in the mid-1980s to the Drop Inn Bar in Rush as the Gladstone Inn session petered out: 'that was important to keep things together, to keep you in touch with some musicians'. In due course other musicians joined in—Terry Kirk described them as coming out of the woodwork'. One was Siobhan Bhreathnach, fiddle player from Skerries, who had moved there with her husband and flute player, Jim Grant. James viewed the Rush session, like Ballyboughal, as welcoming to a new young generation of players such as Triona Tammemagi and Ray Lawlor, and part of the reason the session continues today, albeit in a different venue. An 'invitation from Joe May's Pub' is how James describes his return to playing regularly in Skerries in the mid-1990s. Over time musicians living in Skerries, such as Bill Haneman and Kevin O'Keeffe also joined, and his circle of musician contacts widened to include Colm Ó Maoinaigh (accordion) and Jim Grant (flute): 'we sometimes used to play in the Mills on a Sunday lunchtime, it was kind of a charity gig ... and as young children [attended] it was an

outlet for them to play music’. James also reported that the performances in the Mill were: ‘very much the Donegal style’, illustrating the eclectic musical interests of the musicians settling in Skerries. Exceptionally, James sought links with musicians beyond his own locality: ‘it was notable that the Rush musicians would play in Rush and not outside. The Ballyboughal musicians played in Ballyboughal and didn’t move out. I tended to go to the different places ... and I suppose I got to know quite a lot of the musicians in those days’.

Local musicians were initially somewhat hesitant to engage with the fledgling Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, James observing:

we felt that there was a bit of a disconnect between the two, that they didn’t involve local musicians at all ... myself and Jim[Grant] and Siobhan [Bhreathnach], that was about it, that would be about the max in the early days that would have sat in on a session down there. But like there were mainly musicians that we didn’t know who would be brought from town [Dublin].

Providing externally sourced top-tier artists for workshops and performance was a core objective for the Weekend organisers (see Mary Keane, section 5.2.6) but overlooking local players may have contributed to an ‘us and them’ situation developing, with some musicians avoiding the festival. However, ‘carpe diem’ seems to have informed James’s response - an opportunity to widen his network of musical connections could not be missed. James participated in the sessions and subsequently helped deliver the associated schools’ outreach programme. A lack of confidence by some local musicians might also have contributed to their reluctance to participate in the early years but festival programmes for recent years confirms a significant local involvement. That a person not associated with local musicians established the Weekend was important in music sustainability terms; it increased community awareness of the music, a key factor identified by Schippers and Grant (2016, p.336) and it widened the range of activities associated with the music, thus enhancing biodiversity within the music ecosystem (Titon’s first principle of sustainable music ecosystems).

In response to my enquiry about members of the public attending local sessions, James explained: '[T]here's a handful of people that would call in from time to time ... [T]he native Skerries person ... likes songs rather than music'. But changing session formats to accommodate more singing is not an attractive option to recreational musicians who want to focus on playing tunes. James explained that those playing in sessions can be uncomfortable with more than a few listeners because of a tendency to: '[t]alk over the music ... it can get too, too noisy'. He contrasts this with tourists or visitors who: 'listen to it and they'd say it's the only music we've heard as we've travelled around Ireland'. Talking over a session touches on the availability of suitable public spaces for recreational musicians and catering for local tourism, addressed in chapter six.

As a retired school teacher, James regrets that learning traditional music in school remains 'very hit and miss', depending to a considerable extent on individual teachers having an interest and skill to do so: 'I would hope my grandchildren . . . would learn the whistle. . . I would love to be able to give the interest and the love of music which I have to my grandchildren'. But he remains upbeat about their music community today: 'there is a whole hub here in Skerries, far more vibrant because people have come into the town as well'. A positive indicator is the age profile of players, with James describing himself as the 'oldest player now ... there's nearly fifteen years between myself and the next age group'. Commending young players emerging through *Inis Rua*, James adds: 'we're encouraging the older ones . . . to come into the session on a Sunday night . . . which they're doing, they're building up their repertoire'. To this he might have added 'and making connections', for that is a part of the traditional musician's tool kit that James himself has very successfully utilised in forging his own path to the tradition.

The pathway that James would follow to traditional music was one that others would tread particularly in the earlier years of the revival of interest in Irish traditional music from the 1970s onwards. In an environment without roadmaps, navigating it required determination, self-assurance and persistence. Reflecting Finnegan's concept of socially recognised pathways, the

process can be seen to consist of (1) hearing and being captivated by the music, (2) engaging in self-learning as an initial engagement, (3) seeking out individuals and locations associated with the music, (4) pursuing learning and repertoire acquisition from eclectic sources, and (5) building up a network of connections with whom to experience and engage in playing the music. Important themes emerging from James include: (1)) the necessity of participatory playing (sessions) as learning opportunities; (2) the need for establishing and maintaining a network of contacts to successfully engage in the music at a recreational level; and (3) the differing interests of recreational players and the wider public who often prefer more singing and less tune playing in sessions.

5.2.2 Terry Kirk

I was not acquainted with Terry Kirk, a traditional musician living in Rush, before this research project started. Many of the interviewees were already known to me, either through having played music with them over the years or being aware of their existence from talking with other musicians in Fingal. Terry's name had been drawn to my attention as someone with a long and informed association with traditional music in Rush. This certainly proved to be the case, with many aspects of Terry's music playing and his life in music surfacing in the interview proving to be of interest to this research. Not least of these was his connectedness to the local community, no doubt facilitated by having grown up and working as a mechanic in the town all his life. Another aspect was how he pursued learning the music, including the steps he took to acquire repertoire. This involved targeted collecting from several key sources over decades, tape recording and noting material down as a precursor to hours of practice in a room adjacent to his house he had specially kitted out for playing traditional music and engaging in other activities associated with the tradition, such as repairing and storing musical instruments of various types. This was also the location for the interview which took place during the afternoon of 7 March 2020. As soon as I stepped into his music room it was immediately clear to me that

the internal surfaces and set-up of the place would be great for playing the tunes I was hoping to have with Terry at the end of our interview, and so it proved to be!

Terry's story is one of a life of continuously playing and learning, very much self-directed and



Figure 41 Terry Kirk

Source: T. Kirk

acquiring repertoire from multiple sources. At the time of the interview, Terry had just reached retirement age and was about to open a new musical chapter in his life, summed up by him as 'more music playing, more instrument repair and teaching locally'. To celebrate retirement, he explained his wife Yvonne had arranged a surprise party attended by musician friends from across North County Dublin: 'She set this party up ... I knew nothing about it. So, at least she was thinking I can play something', he said appreciatively acknowledging her lifelong support for

his playing. In relating his story with traditional music, his passion for it shone through:

if I couldn't play, I'd say ... it wouldn't be worth living. Do you know what I mean?' ... I play music every night of the week ... in the house now. I wouldn't sit down unless there was an instrument beside me ... if I was looking at the football, I'd have it on mute ... [t]hat's the way I'd be.

He also explained an added urgency to his playing now: 'the older I get, the less time I have to learn more tunes ... I'm up at the top of the mountain but I'm on my way down now ... I haven't enough time to learn all that I want to learn'. Terry played banjo before the fiddle, but his knowledge of instruments goes deeper to include accordion, concertina, ukulele and various strings. A fellow student who travelled home with him by train from school in Drogheda, played a 'Hero' harmonica in the key of 'C', was how he related the start of his musical life:

I was fascinated by the sound he could get out of it ... I don't know what class he would have been in, maybe third class or something. So, lo and behold I bought myself one of these

Heros and I started playing it. And your man says it goes blow, suck, blow, suck, blow, suck, suck, blow. That's the scale and that's the way I started off playing, playing on the mouth organ.

In his early teenage years Terry got a mandolin and began performing ballads with his sister: 'she was a good singer; all the family were good singers'. When old enough they would frequent the Cradle Rock Bar in Rush: 'now it wouldn't be traditional at the time, but it would be the ballads, what the Dubliners were doing . . . So, I would be playing the mouth organ and the mandolin at this stage'. About the mid-1970s John Garry from Ballyfermot, who was a friend of the Furey and Keenan families there, settled in Rush. Terry remembers him joining the ballad sessions: 'John then brought a banjo with him one night and he started playing the real McCoy, the real deal, traditional'. The occasion caused Terry to change direction in pursuit of music, including buying a banjo. John Garry also taught Terry how to read music, a skill he found useful in sourcing tunes in manuscripts, especially in the early stages of playing. Terry was about 30 years old (mid-1980s) when his father gave him a fiddle, an instrument obtained from Tom Doyle, known locally as 'Fiddler Doyle', Terry recalling 'I had a couple of tunes with him. Now I would have been young, he would have been probably in his 70s at the time. But he would have been playing an older style of music ... more like Siege of Ennis type thing ... [music] for céilís'. Terry reflects a function of the musician as playing for dancing, whereby simple and well-known tunes with a steady and clear rhythm were more appropriate to the demonstration of technical proficiency over a wide repertoire. The 'Siege of Ennis', typically danced to jigs, is one of a number of popular céilí dances, which also include 'The Walls of Limerick' (typically danced to reels or polkas), and '[The Stack of Barley (typically danced to hornpipes of barndances). These were popularised by the Gaelic League at the start of the twentieth century and latterly became a participatory activity at events such as weddings. Terry's reference to 'Siege of Ennis type thing' relates to the simple polkas or jigs normally played to accompany the dance. Examples of polkas include 'The Britches Full of Stiches' (Figure 42), 'Maggie in the Woods', 'The Kerry Polka' and 'An tSean-Bhean Bhocht' [The

Poor Old Woman]. Examples of jigs include ‘The Irish Washer Woman’, ‘Haste to the Wedding’, ‘The Connaught Man’s Rambles’ and ‘Trip to the Cottage’

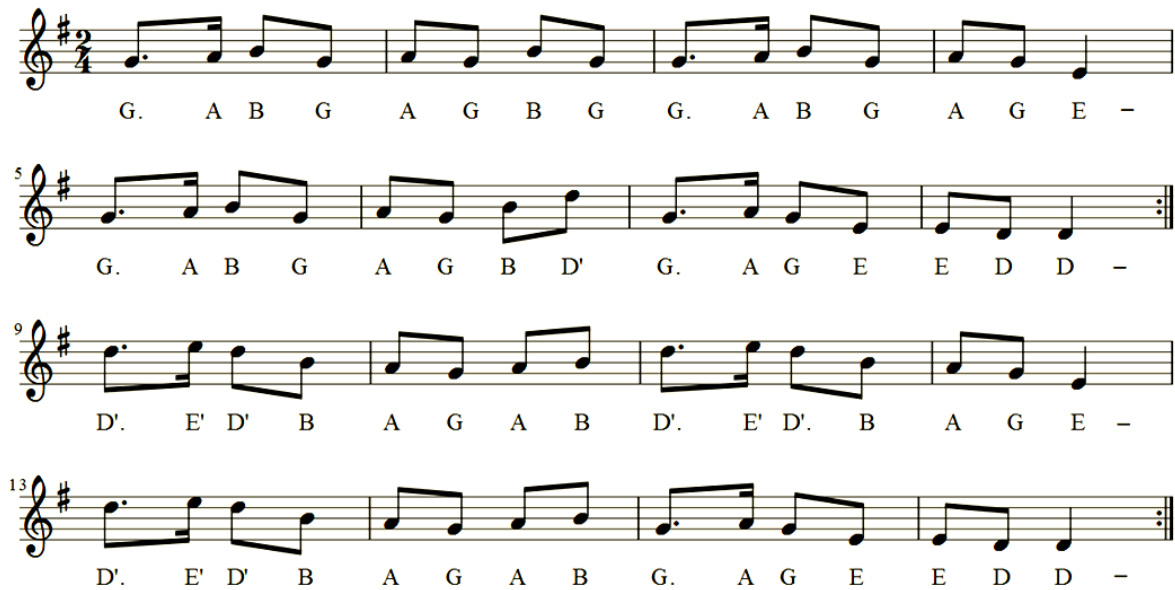


Figure 42 Britches Full of Stiches Polka

Source: Mullen and Rosell (2014, p.28)

Terry’s transfer from playing banjo to fiddle was unavoidable: ‘you’d go into a session, there’d be maybe two banjos or three banjos, and it’s too many. One banjo is enough in a session ... [Y]ou can have ten fiddles and actually ten fiddles played in unison is a lovely sound. But ten banjos? It’s a different story, do you know what I mean? ... [T]hat pushed me in the fiddle direction’.

To acquire repertoire, Terry recorded from players such as John Garry, box player Martin Quinn then playing in sessions in Rush and Skerries and Triona Tammemagi, a young fiddle player who joined the session in Rush in the 1990s: ‘I used to just go up to her for half an hour before we’d go down to the session on a Thursday night and we’d do a tune in her house’. Early in his playing Terry would also follow another route in his search for the music: ‘I used to go down the country to Joe Cooley, the Joe Cooley Festival ... I’ve missed about three years in the 36 that it’s on but I got to meet a lot of the players down there from the Tulla Céilí Band ... [t]he

old timers, P.J. Hayes and all that'. For him, attending smaller festivals was a natural extension to the learning process he had started with John Garry, although he had a different perspective on fleadhanna cheoil:

These festivals were only starting then ... Not the fleadhhs, I was never mad on the fleadhhs because it brings a lot of the wrong element.⁶⁶ I like these small ones. So, first year I went down it was absolutely [great] ... De Dannan were there and all, huge big names, do you know what I mean, and that's ... when the thing bit ... I was getting the real [thing].

In time, Terry would add visits to festivals in Strokestown and Kinvara to complete his annual trilogy of festivals in pursuit of music and linking up with musical friends: 'I like them because they're intimate, they're compact. You can see the players for real, you can talk to the players. You don't get gobshites all around you drinking and all. It's real music'. Terry prefers sessions with a limited amount of singing, which is the case for most pub sessions in Fingal today. Only a handful of singing only sessions are evident (such as in the SEAC and Howth and Malahide singling circles) and still less of sessions comprising equal time, what Terry termed 50:50 sessions, given to songs and tunes. Bill Haneman and James O'Mahony noted that it is members of the public attending sessions rather than the participants who press most for the inclusion of singing, touching on who the session is for. Terry shared with John Garry, Séamus Tynam, and James O'Mahony an interest in travelling to sessions beyond their immediate localities, including to Ballyboughal in the 1980s to play in O'Connor's Pub and in Skerries: 'We used to play every Friday night down at Joe May's, way back when Joe May's was old Joe May's, the old one', learning and playing together.⁶⁷ On his itinerary too was Man O'War. This occasionally brought them into contact with an older cohort of players. Among these were Paddy Seavers and Jimmy Gilsenan (section 4.3.1). Terry also knew the piper Chris Langan (section 4.3.1) whom he had occasionally played tunes with, holding him in high esteem as a

⁶⁶ 'Wrong element' here refers to individuals attending to drink alcohol with no apparent interest in traditional music.

⁶⁷ Refers to the period when the premises was under the management of a previous generation family member.

musician, pipe and reed maker and composer, although in the latter category he felt Chris's tunes were often complex, perhaps explaining why the tunes are heard less often in the locality. On Chris's piping style, Terry observed: '[h]e'd be a tight Séamus Ennis-y type. Maybe not even a Séamus Ennis, he'd be his own style'. Discussing Chris Langan led to an enquiry as to whether musicians in local pipe bands, St Maur's in Rush or the Black Raven in Lusk, would play traditional music in sessions in the town, Terry recalled a pipe major who: 'used to play a set of border pipes in the key of A. He was a beautiful player. He used to come down to us an odd time; he hasn't been with us recently'. Terry also recalled two brothers from Rush, Ado and Ray Lawlor on guitar and accordion respectively, both active in traditional music circles today. Terry explained that he gave Ray a lend of an accordion and taught him how to play his first two sets of tunes. Ray was awarded an MA in 2018 by DkIT for research into teaching the C#/D accordion in traditional music. Aside from the Lawlor brothers, it appears that very few pipe band members crossed over to engage in sessions playing traditional music.

Asked for a view on the strength of Irish traditional music in Rush today, including public interest in it, caused a moments reflection before answering: 'I would say it's way, way better than it used to be. But I don't know whether you could say the people, the listeners, whether they appreciate it anymore. Some of them probably do, you know. Some seem to understand what we're trying to do but it's hard [to judge]'. He regrets that in recent years traditional music does not seem to feature in local festivals or events not primarily associated with traditional music. Nevertheless, he believes there is some demand locally for lessons, making the point that he regularly gets asked to teach: 'I said no up to this but now when I have a bit of time on my hands, I'm going to start trying to put something together'. Terry continues to play each week in Martin's Bar in Rush. Sitting in Terry's music room surrounded by instruments of various types, many under repair, gives an inkling of the next chapter in Terry's musical life: 'I'm not going to make them [fiddles], no. Too old for that and it would take too long. No, just repair [and], I want to do tuning reeds on accordions'. Terry exhibits a passion about all aspects

of playing music. Having regard to his plans to repair instruments, teach students and play more music, one can only conclude that the next chapter in Terry's musical life will be the busiest yet. A constant enquiry of mine in the course of this research was to establish who the 'go-to' people for traditional music are in a locality, i.e. a person who would come immediately to mind as a source of assistance about playing, learning or finding traditional music locally. In this case it was obvious; as we tuned flute and fiddle to share a tune after the interview over a cup of coffee graciously prepared for us by Terry's wife Yvonne, I knew I was talking to such a person. Themes that emerge in talking with him include (1) a life-long commitment to learning, including constantly seeking new repertoire and improving personal playing style; (2) the value of experiencing playing a number of instruments to find the one that suits best; (3) the importance of personal interaction with strong players, not just in concert settings; and (4) building-up networks of contacts, including through traveling to sessions. Notable too is Terry's observation that a great many people don't understand traditional music, partly explaining a lack of public interest in traditional music, and that the music no longer features in local festivals. His recognition by local musicians as a 'go-to' person about traditional music in the area is also significant.

5.2.3 Sally Corr



Figure 43 Sally Corr

Source: S. Corr

I interviewed Sally Corr in her home in New Street, Dublin 8 on the afternoon of 18 April 2019. Although now living in Dublin City, Sally grew up near Ballyboughal, attended school and learned her music locally and became a regular player in the music sessions scene in the area. I first met Sally about the mid-1990s when she and others from the county occasionally joined a session I was playing in on a weekly basis in Duffy's Pub in Malahide. I

also met her from time to time playing in music sessions in Dublin City and occasionally in localities such as Kilmoon Cross near Ashbourne. Through these meetings I became aware of her presence as a strong flute player and singer. Later in the 1990s we both began playing on Sunday evenings in Hughes Pub in Dublin.⁶⁸ Although female musicians participated occasionally, such as the late fiddle player and historian, Maire Garvey from Mayo referred to by Christy Sheridan in section 4.3.1, Sally was the only woman among about eight men playing as a ‘resident’ there. Until the COVID-19 restrictions we continued to play in that session, although in the intervening years several women joined. A similar position pertained in the session I participated in in Malahide from the mid-1990s, where only one woman played regularly, Eimear Morris from Malahide, who would go on to perform on fiddle in the Riverdance show. Sally’s husband, uilleann piper, Noel Pocock also played in the Hughes session, together bringing much musical colour and repertoire. They also have a house near Strokestown, Co Roscommon, regularly engaging in music sessions, having also garnered reputations as significant musicians in the locality.

Sally said of her background in music: ‘There’s no big tradition of music [playing] in my family, but we were sent to music classes [and] in primary school we would have learned the tin whistle’. However, speaking about her father, Sally reported: ‘it’s only in recent years I’ve heard him sing and ... he has the ability to sing, just never got the opportunity. Coming from Leitrim, he has listened to music and always liked the traditional, not so much country, but traditional music would have been his thing’. Sally also learned, again in later life, that her maternal grandfather made his own fiddle. Her parents ensured their children were exposed to traditional music and attended music classes, steps that would create a strong foundation for Sally to pursue a life in which music making would become a constant. Sally learned tin whistle

⁶⁸ Hughes pub in Chancery Street, Dublin has been a central venue for the performance of traditional music in Dublin for more than 40 years. The pub closed when COVID-19 restrictions were introduced. The family of the late owner, Michael Hughes, have announced that due to his death the pub is to be sold.

and guitar in primary school, recalling the school principal, Séamus Tynan: ‘would just encourage everybody, whether they could play or not, to pick up the whistle’ and describing him as ‘the biggest influence [on her learning music]’. From about the age of 8 years Sally attended fiddle and piano classes with local teacher, Mrs Nulty (section 4.3.1), describing the Nulty family as ‘incredibly musical’: ‘I used to go across the fields, two or three fields, to Mrs Nulty in Ballyboughal. From our house there was a shortcut to get to Mrs Nulty . . . who taught a lot of families locally’. Sally recalled the Nulty family (mother and children) as a ‘very active’ céilí band playing at local events and festivals. Despite a background in fiddle playing, Sally is known today as a flute player and as a singer, although she says she never gave up fiddle—I observed an open fiddle close at hand during the interview. She described her fiddle playing experience as good: ‘but I don’t remember loving it’. Later, joining the pub sessions, it was to the whistle and bodhran she turned to first, remarking: ‘there was the same tunes week after week after week, a lot of them played, so it made it easier for people [to pick them up]’. She explained her transition to flute at about 19 years old:

I always played the whistle from the influence of primary school . . . Dave O’Connor said to me, ‘Here, come and talk to Tom [O’Shaughnessy] and try out a flute’ . . . Tom loaned me a flute for about six months . . . it might have been a metal top flute with a wooden mouthpiece. Wasn’t a fabulous flute to play, but it was a good start. So then after that I think I bought a Eugene Lamb flute.

The importance of accessibility to a good instrument suitable for the beginner to ease learning and confidence building is a common theme among players, including Bill Haneman. Sally said of this first flute: ‘I didn’t love the flute I had, but I’m very happy with the flute at the moment . . . If I had started out on [my existing flute] . . . it would have been so much easier’. The opportunity to participate in a session at a critical juncture in her life, providing a ready and welcoming channel for her back into performance, also seems to have been important for many interviewees. For Sally, chance too seemed to have played a hand:

my reintroduction to music would have been . . . after [a Macra na Feirme⁶⁹ meeting] my neighbour . . . said, ‘Come on, we’ll go down to Ballyboughal, there’s music there’ . . . And then as I stuck my head in the door, I saw Brendan Lynch, I saw the Maxwells were there, and I was waving at people I knew, and I said, ‘Wow!’

‘Friendly faces’ were sufficiently encouraging: ‘I took up the whistle again and I said I’ll learn a few tunes’. Sally maintained there was not any particular emphasis on traditional music in her house ‘I didn’t even know I liked traditional music, to be honest’. But it was present without an issue being made of it; ‘I just remember Saturdays on the radio if you were in the car and my parents were . . . dropping us off at Irish dancing or something. You know, you’d have listened, and you’d have heard Irish music, but I couldn’t say I loved it’. Sally described re-engaging with the music as a ‘reintroduction’, where ‘there was something about it that I sort of said, I like this scene and I like what I’m hearing . . . it was very easy to sit into’. Sally conveys a preference for less directed forms of learning in favour of personal exploration, less mediation and more absorption, describing her learning as ‘a bit of osmosis’ while appreciating her music friendly home environment. The finer points of developing style and repertoire would come through on-going personal exploration: ‘You just pick it up later on when you start to go to places like Miltown Malbay and the festivals’. But a quiet determination to explore issues of interest is evident. Knowing Sally as a singer over the years, I was surprised to learn she ‘wouldn’t open [her] mouth in those early sessions’, despite much experience in singing in secondary school and in a local folk group. She credits husband Noel as the person who probably encouraged her the most, bringing elements of technique and new repertoire to challenge and broaden her singing horizon.

Sally doubted that as a child she was aware of the mumming tradition, but for a dozen years or more she has participated in it as ‘Jenny Wren’. She admits there can be competition for places, but amicable resolution seems to be the order of the day: ‘I mean, you can swap and change

⁶⁹ National organisation for young farmers

characters . . . it's not like you couldn't double up as another character'. Although some participants in the Fingal mummers today have moved from the area, coming together at Christmas time helps keep a tradition alive and, importantly, acts as a glue to maintaining long established musical relationships formed within their community. Through mumming, Sally says she feels: 'a very, very fond and strong attachment . . . to Ballyboughal, Naul and those people that really you cut your music from [in] the first few years'. Sally professed reluctance to teach flute in the past, explaining that while she can read music she mainly learns tunes by ear: 'I didn't want to be asked questions about music and notation . . . now it wouldn't bother me so much'. Her frank answer touches on often ignored dilemmas in traditional flute teaching today—what constitutes teaching aurally, best technique and the use of keys to provide semi tones in place of cross-fingering on keyless instruments that can potentially limit students in their playing.

Addressing the fall-off in traditional music playing in Ballyboughal through players leaving the area and the closure of the local pub for a few years, Sally suggested musicians need to consider alternative approaches to acquiring playing venues, recalling personal experience of visiting locations in the United States where folk music remains strong: '[they] don't think around pubs, they think around where can we hold a bit of music, is it the local parish hall, the local school? Has somebody a key to somewhere, can you bring along a cup of tea if it's evening time, or a bottle of something?'. Likewise, she sees opportunities to re-engage the community in the music: 'make it easy for people to travel to a venue and home . . . [have] sessions like the American way they do things, like from maybe seven o'clock to half nine'. Without excluding the pub option, she suggests having a recognised meeting place such as a parish hall, school or a local 'arts house' to provide low-cost accessible space where traditional music and other art forms can be practiced: 'somewhere people can walk to or maybe a bus can pick them up and bring them back, maybe that's where the funding needs to go, to say that there's an easy way

of getting there ... A place like Naul is just the ideal', a point echoed by the Director of the SEAC.

Sally's concern to find practical ways of reinvigorating traditional music, even if it requires ambitious steps on the part of arts planners, reflects a life committed to community art. Sally and Noel are among the principal organisers of the 'Clé Club', a folk club that meets monthly in Liberty Hall, Dublin City to provide a venue for emerging artists from across the folk music and song spectrum. However, Sally's first venture in bringing the traditional arts to the community was as a member of a group over two decades ago (see Seán MacPhilibín, section 5.2.10) organising monthly concerts in Ballyboughal parish hall: 'we would have guest artists ... it wasn't profit making, it was to pay people to come and perform once a month ... I'd say like 60 to 100 people in attendance ... you'd have maybe three artists and maybe one of them would be paid, because they'd be the guest'.

Among themes discernible from the interview with Sally are the importance of (1) early childhood engagement with music; (2) visibility of music being performed regularly in local settings. (Sally came across a traditional music session when she visited a pub to socialise. Similarly, children seeing music being performed regularly is important); (3) having friendly and easy access to playing music on a regular basis, particularly from the late teenage years; (4) rethinking playing spaces (preferably within walking distance) outside of pub settings, and (5) the satisfaction and experienced gained from continuing to play into adulthood.

5.2.4 Jacqui Martin

Jacqui Marin is a traditional musician from Kilsallaghan, a village about five kilometres north of St Margaret's in south Fingal and close to the Dublin / Meath border on the western side of

the county. I interviewed Jacqui on 10 September 2019 in the afternoon in her home. Jacqui grew up in Kilsallaghan in the 1980/90s and still lives there. Although a multi-instrumentalist that includes banjo, bodhran and tin whistle, it is as a fiddle player that she is best known for



Figure 44 Jacqui Martin

Source: Jacqui Martin

today, despite only taking up that instrument in her teenage years: ‘there was a fiddle belonged to my grandad that was here ... and I never attempted to play it’. Her response to her first recollections of playing music was unequivocal: ‘I just don’t remember not having music’. She recalled her brother Tommy beginning the uilleann pipes when he was twelve years old and she then three. Various musical experiences served periodically to reenergise her interest in traditional music. But

what kept her playing then and since?: ‘Just the music itself . . . it just wasn’t something that was going to leave me really, I suppose’.

Jacqui’s grandparents on both sides were musicians. Her paternal grandfather, Tom Martin from Cavan, played fiddle: ‘my granny [Tom’s wife], her maiden name was O’Brien, ... would have grown up in St. Margaret’s..., [she] and her brothers played music’. Jacqui also explained a significant link to the late accordion player Dinny O’Brien and his children, including the late whistle player Denis (Donncha) O’Brien and noted uilleann pipers Michael O’Brien and John O’Brien from Artane. Dinny was her granny’s nephew who had come to live with the granny and her brothers when he was young: ‘he started to learn ... music with them. Her two brothers ... played [accordion and mouth organs respectively] ... [Dinny] went to school with my dad and his siblings who all lived on this road’. Jacqui’s maternal grandfather also played the fiddle but died at a relatively young age: ‘There’s some lovely singers on mam’s side of the family’. Critically, Dinny O’Brien and his family would maintain close musical links to Jacqui’s family

and were central to the Martin children learning to play, including Mick O'Brien teaching uilleann pipes to Jacqui's brother Tommy: 'they started classes locally in the hall down in Roganstown. I would imagine it was probably through Dinny that those classes were started... Mick was teaching the uilleann pipes'. Jacqui also reported: 'Dinny would come and play in the house here when ... my granny was alive ... every Christmas day they'd come out and they'd play music here. So, by the time I came along it was just natural to have music being played in the house'. Mick's wife Fidelma (née O'Connor) taught whistle in Jacqui's local primary school: 'I don't think I had even started school at the time, but my sisters would have been in the school, and she used to bring them home after the classes and she'd try and teach me. I think I was quite the reluctant student at that time'. Fidelma introduced Jacqui to playing tin whistle and bodhrán and later to attending Clontarf branch of CCÉ:

It used to be in Donneycarney on a Saturday night. ... we all went as well and I probably was about four, four or five when I started going along and joining in ... Fidelma used to get me to come in and sit in on the groups and I was playing the bodhrán from that age. And then she gradually taught me the whistle.

At about six or seven years old, Jacqui says, Tara Diamond (née Bingham), noted whistle and flute player, and her husband Dermie Diamond, fiddle, settled in a house about a mile from the Martin household: 'Tara taught me the whistle ... and Claire started learning the flute there. [W]e went to her for years... We continued going to the bands and groups on Saturday nights in Donneycarney, we always went there. Jacqui recalled that when tin whistle lessons provided by Fidelma O'Brien in the local primary school ceased there was no music taught there: 'I don't remember ever doing music in school. We did Irish dancing in school'. The situation was not any better when she attended secondary school in Swords:

[There] hadn't been enough students to make up a full music class so they stopped offering music as a subject. So, when I started school there, there wasn't music as a subject... And I didn't know any[body] else in the whole of the school that played traditional music.

There may have been other children in the school unknown to her learning traditional music, but Jacqui's comment 'I used to hide the [bodhrán], I never told anyone' might explain them also not broadcasting it. Coincidentally, my two daughters were members of the same music group as Jacqui in Clontarf and also went to extraordinary lengths to avoid friends becoming aware of them playing traditional music, a feature observed by many parents of children in the 'club' as it was known then. It seems for the children the club remained a safe and hidden space, a separate community structure. It also provided a conduit into the wider Irish traditional music world, Jacqui recalling her group recording with the Saw Doctors in the mid-1990s, a band from Galway then at the height of their popularity:

[We] were down in Powerscourt to record that programme with the Saw Doctors ... I told a couple of my friends, but sure they didn't know what I was talking about. They didn't know anything about Irish music ... I was playing the bodhrán at the time, they didn't know what it was, and then after that I kind of gave up. I never really would have talked about music much in school because nobody had the interest.

Attending Clontarf rather than the geographically closer Ashbourne CCÉ: 'we didn't want to change to Ashbourne because all our friends were in Clontarf', had a downside:

There's one local family ... who live over the road... I never knew anything about them until I'd say about two years ago, I met the eldest ... through sessions in town [Dublin City] ... I didn't even know he was local. I was probably playing with him for a year before I realised he was a neighbour of mine.

However, tagging along with her older brother Tommy going to music sessions in Ballyboughal and Oldtown brought Jacqui into contact with another musical cohort and much playing experience: 'they would have all been twenty and thirty years older than us ... I was fourteen or fifteen, I used to go down [to the session] and then we'd be up for school in the ... morning. But I loved going down'. Another downside to playing music distant from home as she matured was the attraction of local non-musical friends:

I got to that age fifteen or sixteen, I'd no local friends who played music . . . come the summertime I'd be more likely to go over to Swords and hang out with school friends. It was easier to hang out with school friends than to keep in touch with the people in Clontarf, it was nearer.



Figure 45 Jacqui Martin (fourth from left) playing in a session with her brother Tommy on uilleann pipes (second from left) in O'Connor's pub, Ballyboughal, March 1998

Source: Dave O'Connor

Jacqui ultimately stopped attending Clontarf and played less and less, eventually stopping altogether: 'I'd a gap of two years where I didn't play a note'. Before she stopped playing Jacqui had begun teaching herself the fiddle, even attending classes at Scoil Séamus Ennis in Naul: 'years before I actually took up the fiddle'. The catalyst for her turning to the fiddle was listening to the playing of Brendan Lynch in the Tuesday sessions in Ballyboughal:

I just loved the way he played the fiddle... he'd an unusual style of playing and I think that's when [it] kind of got me into it... I suppose I never really listened to a lot of fiddle playing and didn't take a lot of notice of any kind of particular recordings. [S]omething about his playing that got me into it, so I just took up the one that was here.

Attending sessions in Temple Bar with a friend who had been an Irish dancer also prompted her return to playing music: ‘she introduced me to musicians that my brother was also friendly with ... and that’s how I got back into it’. But she decided ‘I wouldn’t [start playing] unless I got [fiddle] lessons, so I did’. This time her playing was in Dublin City, and it produced another benefit, it brought her back in touch with her childhood musical friends from Clontarf: ‘we met up again, so I’ve been back in touch with a lot of them again. It kind of came back full circle’.

A happy recollection for Jacqui was her participation in mumming: ‘I used to love doing the mummers. There was always the Ballyboughal [Fingal] mummers ... they were brilliant. ... I think we did do a few Christmases with Ballyboughal but then we formed our own’. The Kilsallaghan mummers included Jacqui’s father, sister Clare and brother Tommy and a cousin from Balbriggan who sang: ‘because I was the youngest of any of the members and I wasn’t old enough to drink I’d be the one who’d be counted on to remember everyone else’s lines as the night went on. I can’t remember much of them now but ... I loved going out with them’.

Jacqui highlighted the age difference between herself and her sisters on the one hand and most of those they were playing with in Fingal. While intergenerational playing is important for transmission, having so few younger players in the mix can undermine the sustainability of a local tradition. Jacqui’s own experience summed up the dilemma: ‘after a while I wouldn’t have engaged as much, when I started to go places myself to play’. When it comes to encouraging children to play traditional music Jacqui, like Jim Grant, stressed the value of creating a social context for children to participate in, recalling her own experience in Clontarf CCÉ, but observed: ‘I’m not a fan of competitions... But in terms of kids, they need to be social ... They can’t go to a class on a Tuesday and not see another musician until the following Tuesday’. She stressed: ‘The music doesn’t mean as much to them if you don’t have somebody to play with’.

Jacqui acknowledges two other influences having contributed to keeping her playing: growing up in a recognised ‘musical family’ meant repeatedly being called on to perform in her locality at community events: ‘we would be the ones who would be called on ... “oh the Martin’s might

play at that or ring the Martin's they might know such and such". Even when she stopped playing for a period she says she was 'dragged in' to play, although she recalled: 'they knew we played Irish music but what they really wanted was for somebody to come along and sing a few ballads and it wasn't what we did either and I used to hate that because you'd try to explain to people that you can't do that'. The second was the ongoing influence of Dinny O'Brien. Throughout the interview Jacqui conveyed clear appreciation for the constant encouragement she got from Dinny, jokingly observing: 'he wouldn't have let us stop ... If you met him at a family occasion he'd be like, "What are you playing? Why aren't you playing?"'. Today, Jacqui performs regularly in sessions in Dublin, such as the Cobblestone Bar in Smithfield, also performing on their 2017 CD *The Thursday Sessions*. She plays abroad occasionally and teaches at workshops such as the Joe Mooney festival in Drumshanbo. She has taught on occasion at the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend. Although a working musician living in the locality, she says it's difficult to find opportunities to perform in the area.

Jacqui's extended family involvement has been central to her engagement with traditional music and, like Terry Kirk, her passion for the music shines through. Playing in sessions at a young age gave her unique experience and access to more experienced players. Other important themes emerging from this interview include: (1) the importance of children playing with peers in a musical and social group context and forming musical friendships, traditional music being first and foremost a social activity; (2) engaging in the wider traditional arts, like mumming [or dancing], enhances the music playing experience; (3) the absence of local musical friends and a critical mass of visible (local) players and performance opportunities undermines the development of a wider local culture of playing; (4) Like Terry Kirk, Jacqui saw her close playing proximity to strong players like fiddle player Brendan Lynch as being critical to her musical development; and (5) the value of experiencing different instruments before settling on her main choice and the need for engagement with the music beyond a single weekly class.

After the interview we chatted about past days as members of Clontarf branch of Comhaltas. Jacqui being close in age and sharing a friendship with my two daughters in the ‘club’ at the time, we enjoyed recalling people and events from back then. For a final tune together that afternoon, it being my call, I could not resist playing a set of reels opening with ‘The Traveller’, a much-liked selection at the time by the ‘Under 12 Grúpa Cheoil’ [Under 12-years-old music group], of which the three girls were members of together. ‘Oh, I remember that set’, she exclaimed cheerfully upon hearing the first bars!

The Traveller



Figure 46 The Traveller Reel

Source: O'Neill's *The Dance Music of Ireland*, tune no. 719, p.126

The version of ‘The Traveller’ played by the Clontarf group was sourced by a local teacher from O'Neill's *The Dance Music of Ireland* , further signifying the use of available published sources to expand local repertoire.

5.2.5 Carol Keane

The interview with Carol Keane took place in her house in Strand Street, Skerries on the evening of 4 February 2019, in the parlour seated by an open fire and a large pot of coffee to hand. My first significant engagement with Irish traditional music in Skerries was through attending sessions and events associated with the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend. When I became



Figure 47 Carol Keane

Source: C. Keane

acquainted with some of the musicians there, I learned of Mary Keane (section 5.2.6), and main organiser of the event, known for her drive and creativity in organising activities to promote the traditional arts, of which the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend was just one. Then, as I got to know Carol, Mary's daughter, I realised she shared with her mother the same deep love of traditional music and self-drive to make things happen.

Carol had yet to be born when the nascent Irish traditional music scene in Skerries was emerging. She received tuition first on whistle and then on fiddle locally, going on to develop into a much-admired fiddle performer and teacher in the town today. Carol represents a new generation of players in Skerries, an indigenous cohort with shared repertoire and approach to playing that developed from the contributions of the many players who had settled in the town. Mary, Carol's mother, an Irish dance teacher, had an important early influence on Carol, who explained:

my first experience in traditional Irish music that I remember and know about is through Irish dancing . . . I would have been four up to the age of nine . . . that's when I learned what a reel, jig, hornpipe, even slip jig [was], the difference between them and how to listen out for them, which is really interesting because it was nothing to do with instruments . . . then fast-forward a few years, at the age of twelve, I got it into my head that I wanted to learn fiddle and I'd

stopped the dancing a few years at that stage but obviously the music was still in my head. I was still interested.

Carol recalled an initiative in the local GAA club to set up a fiddle class, complementing a whistle class there which she had been attending, as a catalytic moment in her music life: ‘I said I wanted to go. I arrived down, they handed me a lovely Skylark fiddle ... I'm still playing!’. Carol says she attended the group fiddle class for about three years, initially given by Tom Garland, then Siobhán Bhreathnach and finally Triona Tammenagi. She subsequently attended Triona in Rush on a one-to-one basis: ‘I made massive strides with her because it was the first time I actually had a real focus ... [on] what to practise and how to do it’. Carol commented:

I wouldn't say [I had] a grá straightaway, no, it was very difficult. Didn't come naturally to me ... I could hear all the dances that I'd learned, all the different types of tunes and music. I knew what it should sound like and all I was doing was singing like a cat that was dying ... I persisted.

If a ‘grá’ [love] for the music was initially in short supply, the musical road Carol travelled clearly was a transformative process, as evidenced by her mother Mary, who described Carol's reaction returning home from playing in a session a few years later: ‘I used to bring her down [to the Pier House] as a teenager ... that place would be packed with musicians ... and when I'd collect her about midnight or whatever in the car she'd be buzzing and I'd go, ‘What's up?’, and she goes, ‘The tunes mam, the tunes’. Carol's telling of the same event in the Pier House conveys both her passion for the music and her perseverance in learning it: ‘I got to 17 and I needed an outlet. So, mammy drove me down, my chaperone ... and I sat in and I met [various named musicians] ... [T]he very first time ... shook like a leaf but played two tunes all night, way too fast, no style, no rhythm, nothing. And then went home chuffed with myself’. She described the experience afterwards as: ‘unbelievable ... and I couldn't even tell you their names by the end of the night’. The players she met that night have remained close friends, Carol remarking: ‘That was the start of it ... that was the beginning of a beautiful trad relationship between myself and all the lads’. Notable, too, was the welcome Carol received when she first

attended the session, broadly speaking the same individuals who had welcomed Bill Haneman (section 5.2.7) into the session some years before her. Of the factors most influencing her desire to continue playing, Carol suggests two in particular: her participation in the music group *Inis Rua* and subsequently in getting involved in playing in sessions in the town. Like many parents of young musicians, Mary brought Carol to lessons and festivals, such as the annual Scoil Séamus Ennis in Ballyboughal and the Willie Clancy Summer School in Co Clare, but in Carol's case, this extended to her mother actively creating opportunities for her and other children in the community to develop their music, including establishing the *Inis Rua* group (section 4.3.2) for teenage musicians. Carol said of *Inis Rua*: 'Anyone who could play a few tunes already. It wasn't a lesson. It was an opportunity for young people to come together'. Mary described *Inis Rua* as 'bridging a gap', but perhaps it bridges two gaps: connecting students learning in different settings and keeping them interested until old enough to join in local sessions of their own accord.

A teacher in a local primary school, Carol has established herself as an important fiddle teacher in Skerries. She performs at a weekly gig in the Snug Bar with her husband Alan, an All-Ireland champion banjo player, and regularly attends other sessions in the town. She was asked about seven years ago to 'help out' in establishing a monthly adult slow session on Sunday afternoons in Joe May's Pub, recalling those who approached her saying: 'they don't have the confidence to go into just an average session ... they wouldn't have enough tunes'. Carol is still associated with the session, reporting average attendances of between fifteen and twenty-five players but, surprisingly, few living in Skerries: '[they] come from as far north as Dundalk and all the way down to south Dublin'. Several of the musicians—the age spread is from circa forty-year-olds to late sixties—in the session also participate in a monthly slow session in the SEAC under the direction of accordion player Paudie O'Connor. Carol explained that they want more opportunities to play: 'that's the reason they came to me ... it's a confidence building thing ... it's all about the support they get from each other sitting around and playing music'. But Carol

does not see herself as the teacher: ‘I’m a facilitator, that’s all. I oftentimes think I get more out of it than they do, meeting all these people and figuring out where they’re from and they have local tunes that I wouldn’t have heard of before’. There is also evidence of a shared learning purpose in the group and a sense of democracy in terms of what tunes the group should learn, a CoMP structure (section 4.6.7): ‘we’re still trying to figure out a common list that we can all play which is one of the hardest things I’ve had to do ... because what I think is common, based on my trad music . . . exposure isn’t to someone from a different area’—see section 4.4.4 on repertoire commonly played in Fingal. On the question of teaching traditional music in primary schools in the area, Carol said her school included teaching tin whistle to all students for a set period. While she felt most schools in the area included some ‘very basic introductory level’, she regretted it was becoming increasingly difficult of late as ‘the curriculum has become so overloaded’.

Since 2019 Carol has taken on a prominent role in organising the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, describing herself as being ‘in the background from the beginning’. Engaging the community in the festival is difficult, according to Carol, often relying more on the support of visitors from outside Skerries. Despite challenges ahead, Carol remains upbeat about the future of the festival. She also remains positive about the future of traditional music playing in the town, more positive than other interviewees. Perhaps her younger age is a factor here. The picture Carol paints is one of a quiet, on-going embedding process involving younger players:

a lot of people who have been learning since I started learning have given up, but the few who have kept going are in turn trying to pass it on to other people, so they are around ... and helping to keep it going in Skerries.

The teaching base is also wider: ‘there are a couple of music schools popping up around Skerries in the past few years, not just in trad, but in trad and other genres’. Whether these, together with several traditional music teachers working out of their own homes now, collectively serve as an alternative to the presence of a larger, single location-based teaching organisation is

interesting. While lacking a profile of a single body, the geographically wider dispersal of teachers throughout the community might have greater success in securing a deeper embedding of the music within the community as against it being pigeonholed to a single location, reinforcing the music's status as a minority art form.

Once again, passion for playing Irish traditional music shines through in Carol's telling of her story. Her engagement extends to teaching and playing facilitator / organiser roles representing an important energising asset in Skerries today for the sustainability of the music. Themes common to other interviewees are also notable: (1) family support to enable Carol to engage to the fullest in learning and playing the music; (2) the value of performing and socialising through the music in *Inis Rua* in her teenage years; and (3) the importance of access to local session playing with strong players as her playing matured. Carol's facilitation of the adult slow session is a reminder of the significant and growing interest of adults in learning to play traditional music.

5.2.6 Mary Keane

Carol's mother, Mary Keane, is originally from Limerick and settled in Skerries with her husband in 1981. Traditional musicians in Skerries associate her with establishing and running



Figure 48 Mary Keane

Source: Mary Keane

the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, first held in 2002. But she also successfully organised traditional music classes and performance activities for children. I interviewed Mary on the afternoon of 5 September 2019, upstairs in Joe May's Pub, in a room closed off to other customers. We sat looking out over the harbour in Skerries. The only

distraction, just as we sat down to talk, was the arrival of some fishing boats back into port,

each closely followed by flocks of seagulls loudly asserting their expectation of a share of the cast-offs from the catch. Two seals also joined the queue, taking up well practiced positions, also eagerly expecting their share of the spoils.

Mary recalled the absence of Irish traditional music in Skerries when she first arrived: ‘there was a small little bit of dancing, ... which I discovered years later, a group that used to come together [called] Siamsa Tire, but it had finished in the early eighties ... I didn’t come across a trad scene; I came across a set dancing scene’.

Mary’s seamless inclusion of business concepts during the course of the interview, such as goal setting, planning, budgeting, and accountability in explaining her traditional music projects was significant. So too was her description of the leadership skills most useful in the activities she engaged in, for example, she described placing the leader ‘in the background’, all suggesting a familiarity with management practice models described in Heifetz and Linsky (2002, p.22). It emerged she had organisation and management training and experience gained working initially for the Revenue Commissioners and subsequently as a private sector management consultant, giving her a professional edge in her pursuits. Mary is also a participant in the traditional arts, as an Irish dancer and qualified dancing teacher and, more recently, as a concertina player. These give her perspective on matters like transmission and achieving excellence in performance that, in combination with management know how and strong personal ‘drive’, represented a significant asset to an embryonic traditional arts sector striving to make its mark in an evolving community.

Hearing music in the home is also Mary’s starting point for her interest in music generally but traditional music in particular: ‘being allowed up late as a toddler with my mum to listen to the radio and the trad programme on a Saturday night’, and subsequently being permitted to watch céilí dancing on television. Although other music genres were heard in her home, Mary describes her bond with traditional music as ‘[i]t was just infectious for me’. Mary explained: ‘my mum put me on the back of her bike when I was four, I think, and she took me into Celine

Penny ... a great Irish dancing teacher in Limerick ... And I started dancing ... to traditional Irish music. Dancing would remain the focus of Mary's attention, performing in events and competitions in childhood and adolescent years, eventually qualifying as an Irish dance teacher: 'Unfortunately, I didn't get to learn music as a kid, it just wasn't an option for us at the time but later on as an adult I was brave enough to start trying it, which now that I'm retired from a lot of things, I have more time to practice'.

In tandem with her children learning traditional music in the local GAA club, Mary started teaching set dancing to local children: 'Carol and a few of her buddies were bored, as they told me, and I started teaching them set dancing near the community centre'. Within a short time, Mary reported, word had gotten round, and the number of children involved had swollen. The object was to have fun and socialise through dancing. As the set dancing matured Mary began addressing the children playing music together. In 1996, about two years after she started the dancing, Mary says she pursued an opportunity to introduce a traditional music element into a local arts festival, *Spotlight on Skerries*, where she ran an afternoon traditional music workshop to which an unexpected '40 odd' children turned up.⁷⁰ Mary described the scene:

the music that came out of that hall that afternoon was just incredible. There was traditional music there [in the community] but the opportunity for those children to come together to share their music, that aspect was not there. That's what I spotted and that's what drove me in January 1997 to opening the door of *Inis Rua* Set Dancing to music ... [T]hey were all learning their music from tutors, but I noticed they didn't come together to play ... I said to them one day ... whoever has an instrument bring it in and we'll have a few tunes after the dancing'.

As she steps back from running *Inis Rua*, Mary says there were fourteen teenagers (May 2019), ranging from thirteen years to eighteen years playing together as 'best ... buddies'. This latter point is a significant and recurring motif driving Mary's interest: 'the social interaction ... is

⁷⁰ *Spotlight on Skerries* arts festival, running from 1992 to 2000, featured a wide range of arts activities but did not include traditional music until the children's event organised by Mary Keane.

for me the essence of what the traditional music does for young people growing up. It's just, there are some kids in that group, and they would never have made those friends and ... they're still playing'. For a period of twelve years to 2011, Mary arranged to bring the young players in *Inis Rua* and their families to attend the Willie Clancy Summer School in Co. Clare: 'unknown to them [this] was exposing them to a far bigger stage [music environment]'. Mary informed me that: 'for several years ... [t]hey would have played in their own little session but they learned to stand at the periphery and listen and learn and that was my way of, I suppose, getting them to realise there's so much more you have to learn'. The call to participate in sessions by listening at the periphery rather than sitting in might have seemed counter intuitive to many of the parents in the group, and perhaps to most parents bringing children to such festivals. But this approach puts the spotlight on learning by listening, an often-overlooked facet in transmission today. Another initiative, undoubtedly that for which she is best known, was to establish the annual Skerries Traditional Music Weekend twenty years ago and still held annually in May. The Spotlight on Skerries festival ceased in 2000, and with it the traditional music workshop that Mary had organised. Eager to keep the workshop event going, Mary sought support from FCC for a weekend of workshops and events, presenting them with detailed plans and costings. FCC supported the project and have done so since. Mary's objective was to introduce traditional music from across Ireland to young players, including bringing in recognised exponents as tutors. She explained: 'I felt that [the local music scene] needed to be opened up and that more exposure needed to be created ... It never becomes stale. . . [Y]ou have to liven it up ... It almost demands that, and in a way it creates the interest for people'. Mary's actions fostered positive tension within the local music ecosystem, ushering in a process of renewal that is integral to the sustainability of the music, resonating with Titon's first principle of diversity underpinning music ecosystems. Like Mags Maxwell (section 5.2.8), Mary stressed the importance of on-going learning to traditional musicians, and the need for ambition in stretching beyond expectations, a state of never being satisfied: 'you never stop

learning. That to me is the essence of traditional music. You never stop learning. You're always learning something else'. In Mary's case, like Seán MacPhilíbín (section 5.2.10), this includes striving to achieve goals of benefit to the community as well as personal.

In establishing the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, Mary said she also wanted to reach out to the wider community by presenting a mix of quality musicians in sessions who could exhibit music from different regions of the country, rather than a general mix of playing styles and tunes. To select the session players and concert performers, Mary called on expert advice, such as Paudie and Aoife O'Connor and the late Muiris Ó Rócháin, then leading the organisation of the Willie Clancy Summer School, eventually building up a trusted group of contacts over time. Given the high level of planning in organising the event, Mary was at pains to point out the importance of ensuring spontaneity by relying on the players to create the event, asserting: '[t]here is no plan, the players are in place, but you hand the mantle over to them and you let it happen'. I suggested to Mary an oxymoron 'planned spontaneity' may be apt here! This, too, calls for having players with appropriate skills in place to create the desired atmosphere. Mary said she wanted to incorporate local players in performances with the invited guests, including assigning them to play in the prearranged sessions. It also involved providing opportunities for local players to perform in support of headline acts in concerts during the festival, although she described the process of achieving a mix of headline and local performers as a 'balancing act. Very difficult in the early years'. Both Jim Grant and James O'Mahony observed local musicians sometimes felt excluded from the festival, particularly in the early years. The initial reluctance of local players demonstrates the importance of Titon's principle of interconnectivity, with the potential downside of failure to transfer music skills and repertoire to the local traditional music community, an outcome avoided when Jim, James and others joined the sessions and created an important and enduring bridge. The festival organisers are all volunteers, Mary described requiring a working period of over six months in advance to organise it and two months after to finalise accounts and prepare documentation in support of

drawing down public funding. Of the work involved, she identified: '[t]he finance was a huge headache ... it is very difficult ... it's hard graft'. The financing process had to be started anew each year', Mary describing herself and a colleague as: 'two beggar women ... I wore out shoe leather' visiting local businesses to elicit sponsorship to supplement door receipts and public funding. She described some of their efforts as akin to drawing blood from a stone but: 'there were the few staunch businesses ... who rarely got anything out of the trad weekend, but they gladly supported you because they could see you were bringing visitors to the town'. Mary complimented FCC in financially supporting the festival and on the workable business arrangements they operate.

It was no surprise that Mary's views on measures that might be taken to further develop traditional music remained steadfast to the principles and objectives she had pursued over many years: (1) make the music visible and attractive to young people, (2) focus on quality playing and the value of listening, and (3) provide opportunities for young people to play together in a fun setting, focusing less on institutional arrangements in favour of the music. Enabling every child to hear the music and try out instruments should be part of the action plan, a view widely shared by interviewees, including the establishment of a local instrument bank to enable them to obtain an instrument of their choice. Mary believes an ability to acquire an instrument is still a problem for many families today, while in regard to transmission: 'I always feel that something should be taken to a quality stage ... it doesn't matter how long it takes'. Mary also stressed the need to cater for 'a huge surge of adults back to learning music ... Wonderful to see'. Her personal drive in promoting traditional music in the community, drawing on her professional financial and administrative management, networking and collaboration skillset and experience, resonates well with the public policy heritage management approach favoured by Titon of 'positioning culture workers within communities to work collaboratively both as students of community scholars and music practitioners, and simultaneously as teachers who share their skills and networking capabilities to help the local musical community' (section

2.4.2). Yet, while Mary and her team overcame many fundraising and interpersonal challenges each year to stage the festival, a parting response by her to my enquiry about her involvement in any future project is telling: 'I'm burned-out, Maurice'. Reliance on the good will of volunteers as the foundation for the development of arts generally within communities has paid dividends, as in this case, but there are consequences, both personal in relation to the individuals involved and more generally in relation to the sustainability of local art forms. Cotter (2016) addresses the central position of volunteerism in the development of traditional music in Ennis, Co Clare in the 1960s, highlighting that: '[key local activists] and the others who took financial risks along with the many committed members who contributed hours of unpaid labour . . . were driven by a motive to do what they could for the greater good' (p.141). She acknowledged in particular the personal sacrifices made by key individuals in the transformation of the traditional music scene in Ennis, the evangelists in Michael Gavin's terms, people who played a central leadership role similar to that performed by Mary Keane in Skerries: '[individuals] who sacrificed time with their families, who worked hard and who volunteered for the 'common good'. They had talents and skills and, possibly in conscience, were driven to help in any way they could' (p.9).

The importance of people to inspire and lead developments promoting traditional music, the evangelists, shines through in this interview. Mary also demonstrates the necessity of lead persons having appropriate organising and management skills, i.e. having the capacity to successfully deliver an event or activity and the creativity in the first instance to recognise the need and envisage an outcome. Other themes emerging here include: (1) music must be visible and attractive to engage young people and transmission must involve peer group social interaction; (2) the importance of traditional music being heard in the home and teaching children to listen to what is being played by established exponents; (3) creating tension in a local music system is an important element in its sustainability; and (4) reliance on voluntary

efforts over protracted periods can be a significant weakness in community endeavours over the longer term.

5.2.7 Bill Haneman

Bill Haneman is prominent in Irish traditional music circles in Skerries and beyond as an uilleann piper and instrument maker, which he now works at full-time. Originally from North Carolina in the United States, Bill and his wife moved to Ireland and settled in Skerries over twenty years ago, mainly, he says, ‘for domestic reasons’, but admits that: ‘I definitely had in mind a dream of learning the pipes’:



Figure 49 Bill Haneman

Source: B. Haneman

Traditional music is now enormous if not the biggest part of my identity . . . the central principle of my life is centred on traditional music . . . of the many kinds of music that I love, traditional music is the one that I chose to dedicate myself to primarily.

I interviewed Bill on 6 March 2020 in his workshop in his home, in Barnageeragh, Skerries. We sat around a high worktable in the ‘clean room’ section of his workshop, a small room separate from the main work space filled with machinery and wood shaving neatly swept into a corner, tools and gauges and wood long dried and ready for the craftsman’s hands. Although this was the first time visiting his workshop, Bill’s ‘clean room’ was a place I had already imagined, being interested myself in the sister craft of wooden flute making. Resting on the high worktable were partially completed uilleann pipe reeds and an assortment of sections of pipes and hand tools. Against the walls were benches with more parts of instruments in the

process of completion and metal working components; then another table with plans and schematics for various instruments, historical and technical books on the history and making of instruments and yet more tools and charts hanging on the walls. A press with a glass door contained prized instruments and chanters acquired over the years by someone very committed to the uilleann pipes, while a discreetly placed music system and collection of CDs significantly weighed in favour of piping came as no surprise. Sitting at the workshop table, a great treat was the unimpeded view out to sea, especially the exceptionally clear view that day of the mountains of Mourne to the northeast, extolled in ballad over a century ago by celebrated and still commemorated visitor to the area, Percy French.⁷¹

Like Terry Kirk, Bill also points to serendipity to describe the many unplanned musical experiences he has enjoyed that led to him to placing Irish traditional music at the centre of his personal and working life: ‘It wasn’t [something] that I was going in search of. But ... something caught my attention and I said that’s music. That’s what I want. That’s the sound ... and over the years that happened many times’. It seems that from his earliest days Bill was attracted to music making despite, he says, as a child having been advised by his piano teacher of four years to quit. Bill concluded: ‘I guess the question is how do you find the music that engages and captivates you? And why this music instead of another music?’ A combination of parental encouragement and his own curiosity led Bill to experiment with different instruments and music genres in his formative years, explaining that to engage children in any music genre they need to: ‘hear music that speaks to them ... they hear the sound that grabs their attention’ through exposure to different musical sounds. Bill traces his interest in Irish traditional music back to his youth in North Carolina, where an encounter with an Irish person introduced the

⁷¹ Percy French (1854-1920), born in County Roscommon, was a noted singer/songwriter of many humorous and satirical songs—see Valley (2011, p.288). French was a regular visitor to Skerries. In 2008 a memorial seat was unveiled in Red Island, Skerries at the spot where it is reported he was inspired to compose one of his best-known songs ‘The Mountains of Mourne’. On clear days there are unimpeded views from Skerries north-eastwards to the Mourne Mountains in County Down.

music and the uilleann pipes to him through recordings of the Bothy Band. His ‘captivation’ by the sound of the pipes was to grow in tandem with his exploration of the concept of community-based music making, describing it as playing ‘music for fun’. Bill first tried tin whistle and flute, eventually acquiring a practice set of pipes in 1989, but progress in learning was slow initially. However, a move to Seattle in the mid-1990s changed the picture: ‘there was actually a pipers’ club [there]. And those were folks who were very ... supportive of one another and lots of novices and people helping each other learn. So, that was when I finally started to make a little bit of progress’. Encouraged by the Seattle pipers, Bill says he came to Ireland in 1996 ‘ostensibly a holiday but I was there for the Willie Clancy summer school ... [t]o improve my piping’.

Positive experiences of visiting Ireland contributed to a decision by his wife and himself to move to this country in 1997 to take up work opportunities: ‘I definitely had in mind a dream of learning the pipes ... it seemed to me that this was the place where I would do it’. Bill also places their decision to locate in Skerries in the realm of serendipity, both in terms of making their home in the town and in finding a local traditional music. But it was the warm reception from local musicians he highlighted as being critical to him progressing on the pipes: ‘Very quickly, I was brought in ... and they encouraged me to ... play ... the folks at the session ... were insistent that ... I play the pipes ... I might not be playing the pipes today if it hadn’t been for this constant encouragement. I could play maybe three sets of tunes up to any standard. I played the same three sets of tunes every week’.

In explaining his swift progression from novice to very competent piper, including serving as the resident pipe teacher in the SEAC in Naul for several years, Bill stressed both motive and process, not surprising given his background as an engineer: ‘the big thing was the motive, the motive to do it and the joy in doing it and the confidence ... that what I was doing was worthwhile. And that was the social element that brought me in’. In relation to process, he explained: ‘By and large I think it’s the passage of time ... the nature of piping is mostly hard

work and ... it is a kind of an individual pursuit, as much as I love playing socially'. No doubt the passage of time was a factor, but it masks the many hard hours of dedicated and structured solo practice required of any enthusiastic musician, recreational or professional, and clearly a feature of Bill's approach and invariably unseen to the public enjoying a session. His 'process' also included: '[listening to] lots of CDs . . . [and] the Heather Clarke piping tutor'. He also downplayed a suggestion his self-drive was a central element: 'I'm not so single minded that I think I would have done it without encouragement ... That was the turning point for me ... having some kind of local context to put it into ... [I]t wasn't just something that I did, you know, with the door closed and in isolation'. Bill drew attention to an often overlooked and undervalued source of tunes and knowledge for the novice, that arising from chance meetings and exchanges with 'run of the mill' players: 'over the years ... I stopped [to listen to] various traditional musicians, usually not famous ones, just whoever happened to be doing the thing that I wanted to hear at that moment'. The shared enjoyment from playing and learning in a friendly environment is the glue that holds sessions together often over many years. In Bill's case he is still playing with many of the musicians he met when he was first invited in to play in Skerries sessions. He also remarks: 'A significant fraction of my repertoire is from local sessions, things that people play here. A fraction of it, a small fraction, would be things that I was taught in more of a ... teaching structured environment early on'.

Bill now works full-time as an uilleann pipe maker and repairer. Recently, he has also experimented with making wooden flutes suitable for playing Irish traditional music

I was always a little bit of an armchair instrument maker ... I had in mind that maybe in my retirement I would make an instrument or two ... [I]t was something that I was very curious about, it fascinated me and so I thought of it in that context ... I started messing with it as a hobby and pretty soon, I had more work than I could possibly finish. [I]t was a hobby that got out of control.

Service to traditional music was another driver of Bill's interest in instrument making. Popular instruments such as fiddles and accordions are easy to procure, but pipes and flutes are not mass

produced and can be difficult and expensive to acquire. As it turned out, the demand for instruments and repairs caused Bill to compress a five-year plan to launch himself as a full-time instrument maker into three years.

In long running sessions rules can evolve to guide the conduct of activities. Bill explained that: ‘there are always unwritten rules [but] [y]ou might not know what they are’. This should not be interpreted as a form of ‘we know them when we see them’ since sessions I attended in Skerries during this research suggested a high level of democracy, with the task of starting sets shared between players. The number of times tunes were played generally followed a set pattern, or everyone followed the pattern set by the player starting the set. Despite Hamilton’s (2011, p.611) observation that musical behaviour in a session is: ‘largely controlled by the relative status of the people playing, with the higher-status musicians exercising more control over the way it develops’, there was no session leader(s) per se evident in the Skerries sessions, such that the form of democratic process exercised by the participants collectively provides the necessary framework for the operation of the session. A question thus arises of how to deal with musicians disturbing the flow of the session. Bill explained:

it’s always a very tricky business to try and keep things on the rails if someone comes in who is for one reason or another kind of at cross purposes ... I think most of the people in the local session have the view that more than likely it’ll sort itself out ... [U]nless something becomes a persistent issue, we just wait for it to right itself.

Another area of conflict addressed by Bill is the extent to which singing is accepted in the session. The views of Terry Kirk and James O’Mahony have already been referred to and with which Bill would generally concur. However, Bill likes to have some songs included, invariably from the folksong idiom, giving by way of example the singing of local singer and songwriter Paul Kelly: ‘if Paul is with us in a tune session ... we’ll insist that Paul sing because we really love the songs’. However, even here there is an important caveat: ‘One of the unwritten rules is never two songs in a row’. Bill says he and his musician colleagues appreciate the playing environment and strong local music community they enjoy:

We recognise that we are really lucky to have a good healthy vibrant community of musicians within ... easy access of our own homes locally. [W]e also recognise it is great to have venues where we can just drop in and play and we're not going to be, you know, given the side eye or shown the door. Where the publicans will actually shut off the piped music while we play, you know, these are not things to be taken for granted.

In addition to highlighting the importance of convenient and accessible playing venues, Bill offered views on several issues that impact on the wider traditional music ecosystem, including the value of the music to the wider community, the importance of fostering a non-competitive environment for young players focused on enjoyment and views on how to promote the music in the town, which are addressed generally in chapter six. Bill remains a strong supporter of the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, seeing it as having helped consolidate a non-competitive music culture in the town and providing benefits to students and musicians. But he also believes that to get the most out of an event like the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, there needs to be a strong cohort of players and learners there already, a pointer for the promoters of the Fingal Fleadh concept. Although several interviewees regretted the apparent low level of interest by the wider public in traditional music, Bill's perspective on this is nuanced, believing that many people do not understand what is going on in a traditional music session, they expect singing but do not understand why the players are sitting in a circle: 'musicians seem [to them] not to be engaging with their audience ... [This] makes perfect sense if you think of the musicians as entertainment ... there for the benefit of the audience'. But musicians playing primarily for themselves do not see themselves as part of the entertainment.

Bill highlights two issues of particular concern to him regarding transmission; firstly, the availability of quality instruments for learning: 'it's one of the things that limits the ability of the ... musical community and the number of people, particularly kids, who can participate' - illustrating the point that a suitable entry level 'practice set' of pipes will cost in the region of €1,000-€1,500. While acknowledging the presence of some schemes such as that operated by

Na Píobairí Uilleann,⁷² Bill calls for a wider application of loan schemes in terms of population reach and instrument type. The second issue relates to the value of traditional music to wider society. The music itself and the craft of pipe making, for Bill, are art forms less about an individual, more about community in which striving, enjoying and achieving is for a greater good: ‘It . . . means an enormous community of people working together to do something of intangible good’. Artistic excellence is one aspect of the tradition recognised as important in sustaining interest in the music, but Bill believes it is not enough:

the local community aspects are enormously important . . . I do think that that’s an element that gets forgotten . . . the recognition that’s given to traditional music in Ireland is usually in the context of tourism, arts, export, performance . . . [T]he really important stuff is not what gets onto the recordings and not what makes it into the tourist brochures and not what people come to Ireland to observe as spectators. But it’s what happens in the local community . . . and it’s something that people do that’s not just work. I mean humans like to express themselves.

Bill’s positioning traditional music as being central to his life is an important reminder of the attraction to participate in playing traditional music that is shared by the consultants to this research. Participatory performance, posited by Turino, is the key objective for all where players serve both as performer and audience, where the emphasis is on community over themes such as tourism or commercial presentational performance. His full-time involvement in instrument making is also an important reminder of the complexity and richness of the traditional music ecosystem. (Other pipe makers associated with Fingal are Kevin Thomson in Malahide and Eugene Lambe, originally from Malahide and now living in Co. Galway). Further issues emerging from Bill’s interview that characterise the environment he plays in include: (1) the importance of a local visible, socially attractive playing community; (2) learning from and exchanging tunes with peers (as against relying on external sources); (3) a disconnect between

⁷² Na Píobairí Uilleann is a private company limited by guarantee. In 2019, 65% of its income was from public funding from the ACI. It also earned €5,700 in income rental under its pipe rental scheme. The organisation’s annual report for 2019 indicates that it had 116 sets of pipes in its loan inventory (p.18), see <https://npudocuments.s3.amazonaws.com/Annual+Report+2019.pdf> (accessed 16/12/2021)

the public's knowledge of traditional music playing and the interests of local players; and (4) the needs of children in terms of early access to playing the music in group settings (shared with Jim Grant, Jacqui Martin and others).

With the interview over, it was time to examine some boxwood stock drying for periods spanning many years and prepared for the lathe. The wood stock and machinery in the workshop were of special interest to me and even here Bill was generous in imparting knowledge, while in truth I could only admire the skill of the craftsman and the exceptional quality achieved in his finished pieces. We settled back in the 'clean room' for one last critical task, to play some tunes together. Bill invited me to suggest a set and I chose a selection of jigs 'The Ship in Full Sail' (Figure 50) and 'The Rolling Wave', both traditional tunes, celebrating the wonderful sea views out in front of us.

The Ship in Full Sail



Figure 50 Ship in Full Sail

Source: Author

For our final set of tunes, Bill drew from his glass fronted press of prized instruments a chanter made by 'M. Egan' in New York about 1850. About to launch into another traditional favourite 'The Sailor on the Rock reel', I remarked that between him playing the 150-year-old Egan

chanter, which sounded as good as the day it was made, and me playing a ‘Rudall and Rose’ flute made in London in the 1820s, the combined age of the instruments of over 340 years was a fitting salute to a genre of music that also had much longevity on its side.

5.2.8 Margaret (Mags) Maxwell

Mags Maxwell was born and grew up in Ballyboughal, living there until she moved to Kilkenny to attend college. She initially played tin whistle as a child and started playing concertina while living in Kilkenny. She returned to live in Ballyboughal again in the late 1980s for a short period. She now lives in Dublin City. I interviewed her on 11 September 2019 in her house close to Smithfield near the City centre. Despite being a musician and singer of note, she asserted: ‘I’m still learning it’ to describe her relationship today with her chosen instrument. The theme of on-going learning is important to her: ‘We’re always [learning]... no end to it’, in a sense making the process of ‘constant endeavour’ the final destination. For Mags, never-ending learning is a life sentence willingly consented to.

But her story is more than about playing music. She has ventured down other avenues of traditional singing, set dancing and musicking, not simply as complementary activities, more like sequential explorations of each in turn to broaden the creative canvas and ferment interest in yet further exploration. One such endeavour was her pursuit in recent years of a third level qualification in traditional music studies. But performance remains at the centre of Mags’s musicking, playing regularly in sessions, including in the Cobblestone Bar in Dublin close to where she lives, listening to players of note, and attending traditional arts festivals and events. Mags



Figure 51 Mags (Margaret) Maxwell

Source: Mags Maxwell

and her husband, George Thurlow, remain much appreciated guests in singing circles and music

sessions. Describing Ballyboughal of her childhood, Mags observed ‘people were mainly working-class people and farm labourers. It was a small village ... church, school, a tech [technical college]’. Like other interviewees, music heard in the house on the radio was an early influence:

My parents didn’t play any kind of instruments ... but they were lovers of the music ... Everything that was on the radio they would have listened to, but my mother especially loved traditional music and her father would have played melodeon. He lived in Corduff which was three miles away. But we never encountered our grandfather, he died long before we were born.

Mags said she learned traditional music on the tin whistle in primary school, recalling John Canning from Connemara and a Mrs Fox teaching them: ‘they were kind of outsiders coming in with music’:

we learned to play tin whistle and we learned to play guitars and we learned to play melodicas ... And we always loved music and we always knew traditional music was there, but we weren’t involved in any way as such in traditional music bar to play the whistle in school.

She also sang, performing in school concerts that included playing traditional tunes. Hearing Irish music was not confined to school, Mags explained: ‘we also had a travelling dance teacher who came to the village to teach Irish dancing. That was a big thing, every Saturday morning. We went there and we would have heard tunes there’. Mags did not keep up playing the tin whistle, but after she and her sister Mary became involved in a traditional music session in her late teens her appetite to re-engage was whetted, only this time it was on the concertina. The session was in O’Connor’s Pub in Ballyboughal, about 1979 or 1980, Mags describing this step as ‘our real engagement with traditional music . . . we went to that because there wasn’t much else happened in our village. . . we said we’ll go and we’ll listen to this and see what’s happening’. So, we went in there and myself and my sister sang’. Although she ascribes attending the session as a revelation, her participation in traditional singing in folk clubs in Dublin would also play an important part in her formation as an artist:

when we were in secondary school, we used to skip into town actually to go to the folk clubs . . .
 there was a place called Coffee Kitchen in Molesworth Street, that was a lovely folk club and . . .
 we spent a lot of years going to the Meeting Place [in Dorset Street, Dublin]

But she stressed her attraction to the music session, signalling her desire to move from ‘attending’ to wanting to be ‘part of’ the music scene, to be a participant: ‘Oh gosh I loved it. I just thought this was the best thing ever because we loved music in general, but we loved the tunes’. Mags’ desire to be a participant in the music making, an aspect integral to Turino’s concept of participatory performance, was again demonstrated when explaining why she began to learn the concertina:

[the desire to play] was definitely coming from out of that session that was started in Ballyboughal. I really loved [it]. I said, ‘I really want to take part in that’, even though I did take part by singing but I really wanted to play the music, I wanted to play the tunes. And I loved them, and they were all in my head because I was hearing them so often . . . and I thought I really have to do something about this.

The aspiration to play tunes thus became Mags’s overarching objective, a desire to experience the ‘buzz’ of performing the music as Carol Keane described when she first attended sessions in Skerries. As noted in section 4.3.1, while Mags observed that many local musicians were initially reluctant to participate in the session in the early 1980s, several young players in her age group from the village and its environs had no such reticence, including herself and her sister Mary, Sally Corr, Brendan Lynch, and Mrs. Nulty’s children, including Gerry and Martin, suggesting a strong showing for a small village. This local cohort, in tandem with other musicians who had settled in the village would collectively prove to be important in energising the local traditional music scene and playing leading roles in starting up activities promoting traditional arts in and around Ballyboughal. Difficulties would eventually arise in maintaining the music scene in Ballyboughal from a failure to replace this cohort when they gradually dispersed for education, employment or for social reasons. Mags’ highlighting the role of local players supplying musical contributions to community events before the 1980s, although generally not playing in pub sessions, is important. These players contributed to maintaining

some linkage between the wider community and traditional music and their playing for ‘big’ social events suggests that they were regarded to some degree as the leading community musicians in the eyes of the local population.

Given her strong association with the area, I asked Mags if she recalled as a young person seeing Séamus Ennis around her village or Naul. Confirming she knew of his existence as an important traditional musician, she recalled: ‘he used to drive through the village from time to time and he always wore this big hat, and we knew he played uilleann pipes ... we did actually encounter him playing but only ever once ... in the village’. This took place in O’Connor’s Pub in Ballyboughal, Mags describing his playing as ‘unbelievable stuff’. The event Mags described was most likely the annual Ballyboughal bales afternoon, involving music played outside O’Connor’s Pub sitting on bales of hay. Martin Nulty described the same event, equally amazed at the quality of Ennis’ playing, but Martin would go a step further because, at the prompting of his mother (Terese Nulty), he as a thirteen-year-old joined Ennis and played on two occasions with him. It seems a rare honour, but it again helps demonstrate the strength of the musicianship in the village before 1982, the year Ennis died.

Moving to Kilkenny to attend college, Mags said she joined a local session in Thomastown that proved to be a pivotal step in sating her desire to play traditional tunes, describing the session as: ‘similar to what was happening in Ballyboughal ... I couldn’t believe it ... and then I said. ‘I’m going to take the concertina now and I’m going to learn it now for real, so I did’. However, when Mags returned to live in Ballyboughal towards the end of the 1980s she was disappointed to find the session scene had changed, now popular with participants travelling from further afield, but with a crucial difference, one also familiar to Terry Kirk and James O’Mahony. Mags reported: ‘It went away from the lovely tunes that were being played and songs that were being sung to a kind of ten guitar session, which really wasn’t what it was meant to be’.

A new avenue of interest opened for her, already referred to in section 4.4.2, in which she and her sister started set dancing classes in the village, which led to the establishment of a new

session on Thursday evenings more to her liking. The players in this session included herself, her sister Mary, Jimmy Noctor (accordion), Johnny Noctor, and Gerry Murtagh and Denis Collins, flute players; Mags reporting that the session ran for many years. She also engaged in the mummers in Ballyboughal (section 4.3.3) and continues to do so. Mags had an early involvement in the establishment of the SEAC, being a member of the first board: ‘the idea in the beginning was a place to play traditional music, but also to encompass the Irish language, encourage people to ... get involved in music and the language and all kinds of things. But I think it’s kind of turned into like more or less just a venue for events’. She said she had doubts over the years about the will by FCC to proactively support traditional music in local communities, or at least their policies are not clear. Like many of the interviewees to this research, Mags is a very strong advocate for engaging children early on in traditional music. In addition to supporting the concept of young people learning and performing with peers, she stressed the importance of music in the home—hearing it on radio, leaving an instrument out of its case so that it is readily accessible by a child. She also stressed the importance of exposing children to Irish culture, music, song and dance, in schools from a very early age, including access to instruments.

An overwhelming desire to play the music rather than being a passive listener is a key feature that stands out in Mags’ telling of her story. The desire to participate in playing is common to the interviewees, often calling for travelling distances to learn (Terry Kirk, James O’Mahony) and exploring different instruments to establish a personal choice. Another key theme is the importance of links between traditional music and other cultural elements such as language, dance and mumming. This brings to the fore, in the context of the current remit of the SEAC, a perceived trade-off between centres focused on the performance of arts versus centres where traditional music is promoted in a wider Irish cultural context. Under the organisation’s constitution, CCÉ branches operate on a similar music in culture philosophy. Mags herself has been a regular performer in the Cobblestone Bar in Dublin City and remains a strong advocate

for the preservation of that premises as a hub where traditional music and other Irish culture activities can be pursued. The importance of continuous learning within the tradition and making it as easy as possible for children to engage in traditional music in the home and in school, both widely shared themes by interviewees, are also notable.

Mags drew her story to a close by relating how her then very young son, seeing his mother play concertina, made his own cardboard ‘accordion’ because he wanted to play that instrument. However, when his mother told him that he could start on the whistle or another instrument when he was six years old, Mags said her son replied: ‘I don’t need to learn any instrument, I can lilt hundreds of tunes’. Cawley (2013b, p.96) reported on the importance of enculturation processes in music, including where non-musicians in families are involved: ‘Although often overlooked, I argue that these experiences need to be recognized as potentially important to learning and enculturation processes. Musical interactions are never fully absent in families comprised of non-musicians, and therefore can play a significant role in musical development’. Now an adult, Mags continues to enjoy playing tunes with her son, both still playing and still learning. As I travelled home after the interview with Mags, I called to my late father’s house to take plant cuttings from his garden. A very keen gardener, he had shown me years before how to prepare and tend to the seedlings. Then, as I wrote up notes from my interview with Mags and her advice to engage young children in playing traditional music, I recalled my father’s simple advice on how to grow beautiful plants—create the right conditions when they are seedlings to get the best blooms!

5.2.9 Jim Grant

Flute player Jim Grant and his wife, Siobhán Bhreathnach, fiddle player and harpist, settled in Skerries over forty years ago. I interviewed Jim on 22 January 2019 in the evening in the kitchen in their house in Skerries. Afterwards, I joined Jim and Siobhan playing in their weekly Tuesday evening session in Joe May’s Pub. I first became acquainted with Jim when my wife and I participated in a set dancing class also attended by Jim and Siobhan in Na Píobairí Uilleann in

Henrietta Street in Dublin in the 1980s. Jim is held in high regard by traditional musicians throughout Fingal and by flute players further afield. Hallmarks of his musicianship include a constant personal exploration of performance technique, knowledge of the playing styles of recognised exponents, and engaging with a range of repertoire sources. Unusual for flute players in the Irish tradition, Jim uses all eight keys on the simple system flute and plays an eclectic repertoire, including more recent compositions. Being an admirer of his playing style, proficiency and dedication, about twenty years ago I approached Jim to teach flute to my son Eamon who, at the time, was exhibiting a keen interest in the instrument, in the belief that Jim would be well positioned to guide Eamon in playing and in challenging him with a stimulating repertoire. Although initially a little reluctant to accept the task, I sensed a concern for Jim was to be assured of Eamon's personal motivation and commitment to the learning—neither teacher nor pupil disappointed.

Jim hails from Artane in Dublin and learned to play traditional music in a CCÉ branch then operating out of Ard Scoil Rís, Artane. His main involvement today in playing traditional music in Skerries is participating in the session on Tuesday evenings in Joe May's Pub; a session, Jim



Figure 52 Jim Grant

Source: J. Grant

says, that has been ongoing for about fifteen years. While he 'sporadically ... drops into' other sessions taking place in Skerries, respectively, on Thursday evenings in the Snug bar and Sunday evenings in Joe May's pub, Jim and Siobhán play in a Sunday afternoon session in the Cobblestone bar in Smithfield in Dublin. Although a player with a very wide and eclectic mix of repertoire,

Jim said he enjoys playing tunes from the

Donegal style repertoire (see section 4.4.4), and he is noted for it among his fellow musicians

in Skerries. More particularly, Jim said he had less interest in music played by groups or ensembles in favour by far of solo performance. By way of examples, Jim cited fiddle players Tommy Potts from Dublin and Bríd Harper from Donegal and concertina player Tony O'Connell from Limerick, each exhibiting such features as strong articulation, ornamentation and variations and attractive tune selection and settings in their playing.

Jim being a scientist by occupation, I was keen to capitalise on a relatively detached, analytical reflection he can bring to issues, although it is clear this does not detract from the passion he exhibits in playing and discussing traditional music. His assessment of the strength of the local traditional music scene, the community of musicians involved, and the wider public interest in traditional music was invited, and he also provided views on local transmission and the impact of the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend.

He described the community of traditional musicians in the town as 'a very localised scene', explaining that most centre their playing in the town, with few travelling elsewhere in the county, such as to Naul or Balbriggan, on a regular basis to participate in sessions. As to the general state of traditional music scene in the town today, he suggested that outside of session playing and during the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, opportunities for playing or hearing the music in the town, such as at local concerts or festivals, are generally quite limited. His perspective of the state of the music conveys an uncomfortable reality: 'in general terms Irish traditional music in Skerries is very limited . . . [i]t is very small, and almost unnoticed by most people'. If some interviewees conveyed a slightly more upbeat perspective in regard to community awareness of local traditional music, most would concur with Jim's assessment of the small scale of the tradition in absolute terms in relation to the size of the population of Skerries today. However, Jim's observation that the traditional music scene in Skerries is limited should not be interpreted as him being overly pessimistic. Responding to a suggestion I made that the local music scene was 'gloomy' in some respects, he pushed back against this view saying: 'I'm not sure if gloomy is the right way to put it. It is a very minority sport and

people are finding each other in Dublin [City] rather than here, say. Excepting musicians who have kids playing, it's not going to grow'. This is a valuable clarification; the fact that there is only a limited number of people interested in the music in a locality should not automatically be equated with a poor outlook for the tradition, but the final caveat is not encouraging in terms of embedding the tradition more widely in the community and in many ways this defines the real challenge in achieving growth in interest in the tradition. Throughout the interview Jim was careful to weigh his words and not state a position without consideration of the evidence and, in the context of the qualitative aspects of this research, this is very helpful. Thus, when responding to a question on the visibility of FCC in supporting traditional music, he replied 'I'd say no, but I'm not sure how fair a statement that is because I'd have to be going to or have some awareness of things that are going on in order to evaluate them'. Yet, even this reply is useful as it begs questions as to whether the visibility of the Council's efforts is due, for example, to a lack of publicity about what they are doing or because anything it is doing is not perceived to be of benefit to local traditional musicians.

Although there was very little traditional music evident when Jim and Siobhán first arrived in Skerries, the town was not without its exponents for the traditional arts, Jim adding:

Shortly after we arrived first, we found that there were meetings on a Friday night in one of the local hotels. They might have called themselves the Siamsa group or something like that. They were local people predominantly interested in dancing, but they did like music, and occasionally in that circle some others from elsewhere in the North County would arrive to play music.

Jim acknowledged some successful teaching initiatives in recent years, such as that of the *Inis Rua* group (section 4.4.2) and was aware of individuals teaching today, such as Carol Keane, but feels there are continuing limitations in relation to formal transmission opportunities. As the popularity of the music developed from the 1980s, so too did the practice of students from Skerries travelling out of the county for music lessons: 'I know people have gone far afield ... to Tony Smith [in Ashbourne] . . . [and] into Clontarf [CCÉ in Marino]. It's seeking out through

the network of other musicians where is a good place to go'. It is important to recognise that sometimes parents will seek out the services of particular teachers irrespective of distances to be travelled. If demand for classes can be regarded as a proxy for interest in the music then, although based on empirical observations, Jim's observation that '[w]e never get approached by people wondering "where can I get lessons?"', we don't even get those queries' is informative and may be disappointing. It can convey a sense of how little traditional music is embedded within the wider community, but perhaps also of the absence of readily available information about the tradition in the public domain. Jim continued: '[w]hen we ran the lessons, we used to get some kids in, but there was no great sense of interest by the parents in a more general sense'. This raises an issue of 'payback' or 'benefit' to the traditional music community from organising such classes, which might have been expected to lead in time to additional players and perhaps a wider interest in the music in the town, but a further comment from Jim gives an indication of how limited the dividend was: 'I was involved in giving lessons for a long time. But even that seemed a little futile . . . There were very few people came through. There are a few people still living around the town who learned during in those years and who still play, but only a handful'.

To encourage more young people to engage in traditional music, Jim cuts to what he sees as the main stumbling block: 'There isn't any fundamental demand, there isn't any expectation by parents that their kids should be involved in these things'. For him, the solution is a tried and test one, one that has already had some traction in Skerries:

The only thing that's going to catch or give any sort of momentum is if you have a strong social scene for kids playing together . . . It's the social scene, particularly if they are involved in band playing with friends . . . [t]hat's an ideal function of Comhaltas, say, or one of those organisations.

Despite the upsurge in playing traditional music in Skerries since the 1980s a CCÉ branch was not formed in the town. Several informants have commented on this (section 4.6.5). Mary Keane establishing *Inis Rua* helped to a degree to fill that void, Mary and others reporting many

young players in Skerries today played in *Inis Rua*. A question arising is whether the presence of any organisation like CCÉ would of itself be sufficient to generate wider interest in traditional music. Within the broader ecosystem framework, the availability of suitable and accessible spaces and infrastructure would also be a factor.

Jim has led organised sessions during the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend: ‘the weekend ... brings in largely people from outside ... They would be the majority of the people attending, apart from the concerts which would get more of a local attendance, but the sessions certainly and the céilí events would be drawing people from outside’. Besides the economic benefit of having visitors to the town, drawing in people interested in traditional music as performers or listeners serves to bolster Skerries’ reputation as a place for traditional music. Jim’s overall perspective on the event, already alluded to in section 4.4.2, viz. ‘it certainly serves the musicians. It is pretty high powered. I doubt if the local people . . . would have had any appreciation of how high powered it is’, points to a fundamental strength of the Weekend event, something that can be built on benefitting traditional music, musicians and the community.

With the interview completed, I joined Jim and Siobhán for their Tuesday evening session in Joe May’s Pub. On the night there were seven players, comprising flutes, fiddles, an accordion, uilleann pipes and concertina. The session was held in the front bar, a small, intimate setting. In addition to the musicians, there was seldom more than half a dozen customers in quiet conversation. The appreciation shown for the music performed and the snippets of conversation exchanged intermittently between customers and players suggested these locals had some interest in the music. The music did not disappoint. Strong players all, the repertoire moved effortlessly through sets from all regions of the country, from composer to composer, and all music forms were given an airing – reels, jigs, slip jigs and slides, hornpipes, barn dances, flings and Carolan tunes. The pace was lively but never forced. Players took turns leading out sets, and in between each, as well as social banter, there was much discussion on the tunes themselves, where a version came from or who made the stand-out recordings of them. The

knowledge displayed by all musicians was impressive, but for those most elusive questions on the music, the who's who or the repertoire, there was a subtle acknowledgement by all that Jim would be in the background to fill in any remaining blanks.

Key themes emerging in the interview with Jim Grant include: (1) children can best learn in a social /performance group scenario; (2) how to engage members of the community with no association with traditional music if the view that current approaches to promoting traditional music are unlikely to widen interest much beyond existing musician families is correct; (3) Skerries Traditional Music Weekend has a significant positive impact on the local playing community; and (4) public knowledge about traditional music is very limited.

5.2.10 Seán MacPhilbín

I interviewed Seán MacPhilbín in his house in Ballyboughal on 16 December 2018. Seán has lived in Ballyboughal for over forty years. His wife, Phil Maxwell, a sister of Mags Maxwell who contributed to this research, is from the village. One of my earliest interviewees, Seán was recommended to me by many in the traditional music community in Fingal as a 'must be spoken to' person on account of a widely acknowledged reputation for having played a central role in fostering a revival in the practice of traditional arts in Fingal. I had been aware of his activism in the field for many years. In the course of our conversation, which stretched over a number of hours, I was conscious of learning about Seán as an individual involved in the practice and promotion of the traditional arts, and I also wanted to draw on his knowledge about these arts more generally in the county—the players, the events, the traditions, the locations and his observations on the circumstances of these. This section reports on aspects of his personal engagement with traditional music while information that Seán provided in relation to traditional arts more generally in Fingal is reported on in other chapters, particularly chapter four.

Originally from Rathfarnham, Dublin and a traditional musician whose parents were lovers of traditional music and song, Seán says he started visiting Ballyboughal about 1979 and would

have been a regular attendee at gigs and sessions in Dublin City before that. Seán situates his interest in traditional arts in wider community culture and heritage contexts. His endeavour to establish the Séamus Ennis Traditional Arts Centre in Naul, for example, was also linked to his efforts to have relevant examples of vernacular architecture retained, of which the house in Naul developed into the arts centre was one such example (see section 3.3). His engagement with traditional arts has multiple facets to it—as a performer, an advocate and activist, and as a leader of various initiatives supporting transmission and performance within the community, in every sense Michael Gavin’s evangelist. Seán’s proposal to develop the SEAC in Naul was ultimately brought to fruition in 2001, and also saw him taking on the full-time management of the centre for several years.



Figure 53 Seán MacPhilibín

Source: S. MacPhilibín

Seán recalled the first sessions in O’Connor’s Pub about 1979 in Ballyboughal, describing them as: ‘a popular approach to traditional music. It wasn’t driven relentlessly by tunes ... but would have had a mix of [songs] ... You’re looking at certainly a twenty-year period of high activity in that session on a Tuesday night’. The Tuesday session featured other attractions: ‘you’d regularly have a set or a half set danced at it and you would get traditional songs and recitations’ while a subsequent session developed there on a Thursday night, described by Mags Maxwell above, was mainly of tunes.

Section 4.3.3 above describing the Fingal mummers identifies Seán as the person mainly responsible for the revival of the tradition in Ballyboughal. He explained that his first encounter with mumming was on St Stephen’s night 1979 or 1980 when he saw the Sword’s mummers:

‘I simply didn’t know what they were. My background would have predisposed me to what I thought was a different tradition [to elsewhere in the country], but I now consider it the same tradition, the tradition of the wren boys. The same, with a different expression’. His was as much a reaction of disbelief that such a tradition could still exist in Fingal. Seán’s fascination with mumming led him to talk to older people in the area, leading him to uncover much about traditional music playing and other traditional arts practiced locally in earlier decades, offering by way of illustration the presence of open-air community dancing celebrating the festival of Lughnasa until the late 1950s, and crossroads dancing in St Margaret’s in south Fingal, in addition to information on mumming, past musicians and musical events.⁷³ Seán reported:

I began to uncover a kind of a network of social and community expressions of tradition and traditional music and indeed traditional dance... [In] the ritual of the mummers [there] was always traditional music involved with it and indeed traditional dance, where they would have finished their mummers performance with a half-set.

Mags Maxwell’s description of the start-up of set dancing in Ballyboughal in 1984 is in section 4.4.2. Seán’s telling of the event adds two important elements: a by-product of the set dancing was the return of playing traditional music for the sets and Seán situated the revival of mumming and set dancing with the endeavours of a network of people: ‘[In 1984] we started our own local mummers’ group out of the local tradition *[It] was our first venture out* (author’s italics)’. Establishing the mummers would prove to be the first of many initiatives with the overall objective, Seán explained, of fostering engagement and enjoyment of the traditional arts across the community, initiatives that would include set dancing, the formation of Scoil Séamus Ennis in 1994, and the opening of the Séamus Ennis Traditional Arts Centre in 2001. These were part of a continuum of activities, the result of which was the creation of what Seán called a ‘scene’ where: ‘people were dancing . . . in the locality . . . to traditional

⁷³ Seán reported he had located the two places in North County Dublin, in Kinsealy and the Grallagh, Garristown in Dr Máire MacNeill’s *The Festival of Lughnasa* (republished 2008, Four Courts Press). He also, informed by Din Farrell of St Margaret’s, crossroads dancing continuing in the area until the 1950s, at the crossroads near a little church called Chapelmidway.

music or listening to traditional music or hearing it in pubs in a rural area of County Dublin. . .

I think that in itself is significant'. This scene eventually included more than 50 musicians playing in the various sessions. Seán reported the small network organised: 'gigs and concerts and sessions and house sessions and set dances and mummers balls' in the hall in Ballyboughal, describing the village as: 'the real heart in the centre of the traditional arts upsurge ... Naul wasn't actually, it was less receptive historically'.⁷⁴ Seán's use of the term 'scene' correlates with Bennett (2004, p.223) who says the term has: 'long been used by musicians and music journalists to describe the clusters of musicians, promoters and fans, etc. who grow up around a particular genre of music'. Straw (1991, p.379) defines 'scene' as: 'actualiz[ing] (sic) a particular set of relations between various populations and social groups, as these coalesce around specific conditions of musical style'. Bennett considers Straw's (1991) definition of a scene to constitute 'a far broader and more dynamic series of social interrelationships' than earlier descriptors of music within local settings, such as 'community' and 'subculture'. While scene in this instance may be broad enough to encompass the immediate population and interactions involved, considering the reasons ascribed by Seán to the decline of traditional music in Ballyboughal after 20 years of uplift, a more comprehensive concept as both descriptor and analytical framework is required, and the concept of 'ecosystem' is, therefore, more useful here. Higgins (2012) provides three broad concepts relating to the practice of music making in community contexts: (1) music of the community, (2) communal music making and (3) intervention between a music facilitator and participants. Taken together, the various initiatives pursued by Séan and his colleagues to develop a traditional music scene, including mumming, sessions, music school, set dancing and local concerts, provide the fullest expression of all three

⁷⁴Individuals involved at the outset in the network, according to Séan, included Ger Griffin, Mags and Mary Maxwell and himself. Others including Sally Corr and Dave O'Connor also assisted.

of Higgins's community music concepts, encapsulating what Higgins (2012, p.4) observes as a community's identity, traditions, aspirations and social interactions (see section 2.5).

The establishment of Scoil Séamus Ennis in 1994 by Seán and Oldtown fiddle player Ger Griffin represented another pivotal step in fostering engagement with the traditional arts. This included weekly instrumental classes involving up to 120 students and holding an annual weekend of traditional music centred in the villages of Naul, Oldtown and Ballyboughal that included an outreach programme to local schools. Explaining the idea for the festival in 1994, Seán said he felt it was important to commemorate Séamus Ennis and that there were local benefits by emulating established events elsewhere: 'I would have been aware of the Willie Clancy summer school of course, but my mother was one of the initiators of ... Daonscoil Ossaraí, basically the Kilkenny folk school'. Seán said the idea for the SEAC in Naul was his in late 1994. The occasion was the final day of the first Scoil Séamus Ennis at which officials of the newly formed FCC in attendance asked for suggestions to develop arts in the community. Seán reported recommending developing the centre as a means of preserving an example of vernacular architecture on the site and to assist in community formation in the then changing villages of North County Dublin through fostering the traditional arts. During construction, Seán reported, a collection of handwritten music scores for Naul Fife and Drum band, who had occupied the building in the early twentieth century, was found: 'all traditional tunes ... a mixture of reels, jigs, schottishes, marches, and airs', a reminder of earlier engagement with traditional music locally. Instead of promoting traditional arts primarily in aesthetic or art form terms, an attraction for Seán was the potential 'value added' to the local community from different ways of presenting and engaging with these arts: '[It] would involve as many of the local players in as meaningful a level as possible, where they would play in social and communal contexts and pub sessions'. To encourage a fuller social and community engagement with the traditional arts: 'specific events, let's say for senior citizens, where it'd be more like an old-style house session, which we had in the halls in Ballyboughal, the community hall in Naul

and the SEAC were organised'. He contends achievement over the years included successfully integrating various components of the traditional arts and the creation of a local listening audience outside of the pub scene:

the pub session was a tyranny of its own and it became the only place, almost the exclusive domain for traditional music . . . it was really important to create other spaces for the music in the locality outside of the pubs because lots of people don't go to pubs.

The value of the pub as a venue for traditional music is not being dismissed, it is a case of creating options. Seán himself highlighted the importance of the local pub in Ballyboughal in helping underpin the nascent traditional music resurgence: 'the O'Connor family ... were very receptive of and encouraging of the music in the pub. And certainly, it would have been good for business, but it wasn't about that. They were genuinely very hospitable to the music'. Although Seán withdrew from managing the SEAC, he continued to run Scoil Séamus Ennis as the centre and the Scoil had always operated as separate entities. However, over the past few years Scoil activities have had to be curtailed due to his personal work commitments. While continuing to participate in sessions on a regular basis, Seán remains actively engaged in the mummery and several initiatives associated with music and song in local schools.

There are no regular weekly sessions taking place in Ballyboughal today, Seán attributing the decline to the confluence of continuing demographic change, the exodus of younger musicians, changes in the pub culture and spaces for sessions and the changed remit of the SEAC. He sees these issues as collectively serving to significantly undermine the local traditional music ecosystem, but for him demographic change in the village has been particularly important. While he sees possibilities for contributing to the development of the new expanding community through the traditional arts, his hope raises a perennial issue—a concern that no person or organisation appears to be playing an evangelist role to make things happen, again raising the question as to whether actions to counter changes in the fortunes of the status of an

art form in a community must rely predominantly on an internal or ground-up community response, or is there a role for intervention? See chapter six in this regard.

Several significant themes in this research emanate from the interview with Seán: (1) things do not happen without the inputs of strategic drivers, including evangelists, community backing, vision, creativity and determination; (2) the target audience for promoting engagement with the traditional arts is the wider community, not a subset of musicians or others, e.g. commercial, vested interests; and (3) sustainability of a music ecosystem in any community needs on-going attention, including addressing negative impacts such as significant demographic change. This again raises the question of whose function, if any, is it to highlight such negative developments particularly having regard to the scale of the ebb in engagement experienced in Ballyboughal; do, or should, relevant official bodies have a role in such circumstances. These points are examined in chapter six.

5.3 Conclusion

Although each of the ten stories presented here relays personal experiences, there is much that is shared or common among them despite interviewees being drawn from different age cohorts, geographic locations and musical trajectories. The stories of other interviewees identified in Appendix 1.1 also bear many similarities to those reported on in this chapter. Regular engagement with traditional music constitutes a significant and important component in interviewees' personal and social lives, whether through playing for personal pleasure, participation in public performance or as organisers of activities or events. It represents a significant commitment by each person to the music as an art form, a key aspect of Ireland's unique cultural heritage and a community asset. Engaging in playing the music invariably encompasses dedication to continuous, life-long learning realised through home practice, performance in sessions and elsewhere, listening to recordings, and attending festivals, workshops, and concerts. The interviews demonstrate the complexity and richness of the tradition—encompassing musicking in its many facets posited by Small (1998), such as players,

listeners, teachers, organisers, instrument makers and much more; yet importantly, engaging in traditional music should be seen first and foremost as a social activity that enriches the lives of individuals and the community.

There is much that those interviewed find attractive about traditional music in Fingal today, for some it is access to participate in challenging music playing, others lean towards the social aspects of performance occasions while contributing to community benefit is important too. Many players are comfortable in their local personal playing circumstances, for some this can involve seeking engagement outside the county. Others are less sanguine about the place of the music in their immediate community and in meeting challenges to ensure its sustainability. In this regard, several recurring themes representing impediments to the practice and future local development of the art form emerged in the interviews, including transmission issues, the availability of suitable performances spaces, visibility of the music to the wider community, the varying needs of young players, fragmentation in what otherwise might constitute a traditional music community, engaging the wider community in the art form and, not least, addressing negative impacts of demographic change. The importance of developing public policies that secure the sustainability of traditional music as a vibrant local participatory art form are addressed in chapter six but, given that challenges to be overcome can be different depending on location and context, such policies need to be wide-ranging in nature and locally targeted. There is no single context that might be considered the most beneficial to fostering traditional music, such as having a parent who plays. But early awareness of music in the home, either heard from a parent or other relative playing, on the radio / television, through Irish dancing classes or other means is significant; the sound of the music is embedded and normalised in children's lives from an early age. However, parents who are engaged in traditional music are more likely to seek opportunities for their children to learn and play. Providing access to classes and instruments is important for transmission, but to secure wider access within the community, enabling children and young people to regularly hear and engage with traditional instruments

and the sound associated with them is vital. Weekly instrumental classes need to be complemented by regular session playing with peers in a fun, non-competitive environment. Access to engaging with music from the late teens, including the transition from being a child learner to adult player, is an important theme emerging. Without access to attractive local places and opportunities to play many young players disengage. Players such as Jacqui Martin and Mags Maxwell were fortunate to find opportunities to return to playing through getting involved in session playing, while Carol Keane described being re-energised through crossing the threshold from child learner to playing in a local adult session. Jacqui and Carol reported that most of the younger people who had learned with them in their early years have stopped playing, with only a minority continuing to play into adulthood. The online survey reported on in chapter four suggests a high portion of female musicians do not perform in the community. Personal attendance at sessions across the county during the research confirmed, with the exception of sessions run by CCÉ branches for children, most players are in an older (50+) age category. Few opportunities to play at events within the community was also reported.

Securing suitable performance locations for the recreational player can be problematic, Fairbairn (1994, p.569) making the point that: ‘the [Irish traditional] musical process is integrated into a societal drinking environment’. Although pub sessions remain the main outlet for recreational players, not everyone welcomes that position—Seán MacPhilibín referring to reliance on them as a tyranny. They can be unsuitable for players under 18 years of age. Proximity of sessions to home is important for many players. Evidence of players eschewing travelling beyond their immediate locality to play was noted, while Sally Corr highlighted approaches in other traditions, including playing in local non-pub venues. In more urbanised areas, pub owners are less willing to accommodate recreational player sessions. Linking tourist and commercial opportunities to sessions involving recreational players can bring economic benefits to pub proprietors and local communities—see for example Kaul (2009) on traditional music and tourism in Doolin, Co Clare and Kearney’s (2013(ii)) critique of a pub session in

East Cork—but it can also create environments which are noisy and difficult to play in. Narratives on the presence of traditional music in a community are often set in contexts of commercial opportunities and tourism and less so on personal and community social and cultural benefits. Such benefits include the formation of social networks, providing music contributions to community events and local employment through, for example, teaching. The value of playing traditional music needs to be recognised as an important pursuit by individuals, of benefit to them and the community, and not only regarded for its value to tourism, job creation or other commercial interests.

Interviewees, including those whose stories are not presented in this chapter, willingly contribute significant voluntary effort, especially through performance and transmission activities, in support of community activities and promotion of the art form. However, the personal contribution of those involved in organising traditional music activities and events such as festivals, workshops, transmission, etc. can be very significant yet critical to the survival of the art form. Observations by Mary Keane, that she was burned-out after many years of running the Skerries festival and Jim Grant, regarding disappointing outcomes in terms of dividend to the traditional music community from the provision of instrumental classes for children, are telling in terms of the burden being carried by volunteers involved. Reliance on voluntary efforts to such a significant degree, particularly in relation to those who carry the greatest voluntary burdens, also represents a significant risk to the continuity of music activities and therefore to the sustainability of the music ecosystem. In explaining his third principle underpinning music ecosystems, that of interconnectivity, Titon draws attention to the inevitability yet importance of continuous change and disturbance to the system and consequently the value of developing resilience in the ecosystem (section 2.4.2). In this regard, the contribution of blow-ins to the music tradition in Fingal noted in chapter four, Mary Keane's determination to liven-up the music in Skerries by introducing external performers and the various activities promoting revival and transmission based on ground-up endeavours by Sean

MacPhilibín and others all serve as reminders of the importance of actively and continuously fostering new endeavours as a necessary ingredient both to advance the development of the practice of the music and to counter set-backs due to changing environmental circumstances.

The next chapter examines public policy and support measures in place and their impact on the Irish traditional music ecosystem framework in Fingal, including having regard to issues emerging in this and previous chapters that impact, positively or negatively, on the practice of Irish traditional music in Fingal. For ease of reference, these issues are summarised in table 9 following, presented within Schippers and Grant's (2016) five-domain music ecosystem analytical framework. Some issues relating to regulations and infrastructure (domain number four) are not included as they are considered in the next chapter.

Table 9: Issues impacting the performance of Irish traditional music

Domain	Issues
1. Systems of learning music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuition is generally available on the eastern side of the county but very limited on the western side. The SEAC, six CCÉ branches, individual teachers and some general music schools provide tuition. • Initiatives establishing teaching entities were mainly driven by individuals within the community. • Creating environments where children meet with their peers to play and socialise around the music is essential. • Children need to hear and try traditional instruments at a young age. • A significant portion of adult male musicians responded in the online survey to being self-taught, although the trend appears increasingly towards attendance at classes as the primary source of learning.

2. Musicians and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small cohort of older local musicians made an important contribution to the upsurge in playing traditional music from the 1980s. • The presence of ‘evangelists’ and musicians settling in Fingal was essential to supporting the upsurge in playing from 1980. • Evidence of the tradition embedding in Fingal is limited; musicians who settled in Fingal still constitute a significant portion of players. • Continuing demographic change has reversed traditional music progress in some locations. • Recreational participatory playing per se and how musicians’ view session playing is not understood by the wider community. Conflict exists between recreational playing needs and playing for tourism initiatives. • The traditional music community in Fingal comprises small groups often with little knowledge of, and interaction with, each other, including branches of CCÉ, networks associated with particular sessions and organisers of music events. Excepting CCÉ branches, there are no cross-group information sources common to a significant number of interests. • Attendance by members of the public at sessions in pubs is limited. Musicians generally believe interest by the wider community in traditional music is low. Recreational musicians often prefer to play in venues where attendance by the public is low to minimise the impact of the audience talking over the music. • Although playing in pub sessions is the principal outlet for many recreational musicians, a high percentage of female musicians do not play out in sessions or other public spaces. • Beyond the pub session, there are few opportunities for adults to engage in ensemble recreational playing outside the home. Many learners discontinue playing in early adulthood. Most musicians playing in pub sessions observed during this research were in the 50+ years age bracket.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for young people in their late-teenage years to play with others is critical in transitioning playing from childhood classes to playing as adults in their communities.
3. Contexts and constructs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While few links / little interaction are evident between the wider community and the traditional music community, responses to the online survey suggest the wider community is positive towards the music. • Except for a slow session and transmission in the SEAC and some schools being used for transmission purposes, public buildings are generally not used for participatory performance.
4. Regulations and infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard information on engagement by the public with the arts at county level is not available, resulting in reliance on national data sets for official decision making. • Reference to difficulties in securing public house access in urban areas and to the sometimes unattractiveness of such venues has already been noted. • (Observations from chapter six yet to be included in this domain).
5. Media and the music industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National narratives lauding the strength of traditional music ignore the absence of engagement in many locations and problems facing recreational practice. • Paid session gigs can reduce session playing opportunities by recreational players. • Although limited in number, festivals and events featuring traditional music can simultaneously provide opportunities for remunerated presentational performance and accommodate workshops and recreational playing. • Acquiring and sharing repertoire sourced through the ready availability of material on various forms of media has been very important to recreational musicians in Fingal.

Chapter 6: Public Policy and Irish Traditional Music

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines public policy to support and promote Irish traditional music with particular reference to music making within communities. The chapter identifies official organisation structures, legislation, policies and measures currently in place and these are reviewed with the objective of determining if these arrangements and measures are adequate to address challenges to the practice and development of traditional music in Fingal identified in this research. The Arts Council of Ireland (ACI) and Fingal County Council (FCC) are central players in determining the direction of public policy, respectively, nationally and in Fingal. The Arts Act 2003 is the primary legislation setting out the roles and functions of the official bodies and policies, plans and support measures are in place for the development of the arts at national and county levels.

The chapter commences with a short explanation of concepts in policy making, many of which are drawn from the field of business management, to provide contextual information on decision making processes relating to arts.⁷⁵ Key decision makers within the arts policy formulation framework are identified and extant legislation and official policies and strategies relating to the music are critically reviewed. The chapter considers how issues perceived to negatively affect the practice and development of traditional music performance by recreational musicians in the county can be addressed by current official policies and strategies. The chapter will demonstrate that current official actions are mainly focused on the development and support of the professional, semi-professional and aspiring full-time artist as the basis for fostering engagement in the arts by the general public as well as the promotion of excellence in

⁷⁵ Footnote number 3 provides information on my experience at senior management level in the Irish Civil Service in the formulation and delivery of public policy, including the preparation of legislation, in several spheres of government activities and at EU level. My academic and professional qualifications in the area of business are also identified.

performance and sustainable employment for arts practitioners. It will also demonstrate that official strategies and plans do not set out a sufficiently well-articulated national vision for arts in the lives of citizens and communities.

Recalling Turino (2008), I make a critical distinction between participatory and presentational performance within Irish traditional music. Although actions undertaken by the ACI and the local authority, along with those of other bodies such as Creative Ireland and Music Generation, can have a positive impact on the development of local traditional music, such as in providing support for transmission services, workshops, festivals, and the dissemination of repertoire (e.g. through support for recording), the challenges identified that impact on participation by recreational musicians in communities cannot be addressed by the present support measures alone. At a macro level, this includes the absence of leadership within communities to encourage engagement and participation in the music, not least in larger scale urban areas, including those comprising newly established and rapidly growing communities evident in parts of Fingal today. At a more local level, challenges include recreational musicians not having ready access to attractive performance opportunities and spaces and the absence of younger traditional musicians playing out in the community. Meeting these challenges requires a new vision for the performance of traditional music within communities, one that is integral to national arts policy, which recognises the role of the recreational musician playing in local contexts and also takes a wider, ecosystem approach reflective of Schippers and Grant's five-domain framework to ensure the sustainability of the tradition at all levels. Although not the focus of this chapter, official policies and legislation not directly related to the arts sector can also impact in a cross-cutting manner on traditional music, for example, legislation restricting access by children under eighteen years of age to public houses. Policies providing for investment in competing art forms will also impact heavily on the level of funding available to support traditional music.

6.2 Policy formulation and legislation in the arts in Ireland

6.2.1 Concepts and terminology

Clarity on concepts in policy making and terminology used are critical in analysing policy formulation processes and legislation. The requirement to develop policy for any sector of society arises from the desire to target the expenditure of public money voted (approved) in the Oireachtas (Parliament) to achieve a stated governmental purpose. Approved funding is then expended either directly by a department of state with responsibility for the policy area in question or, as is the case in relation to the major portion of Irish Government expenditure including the arts, allocated to an executive agency with a remit set out in legislation to undertake specific functions operating under the auspices of a Minister and a department of state. In the case of Irish traditional music and arts generally, it is the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (hereafter referred to as the Department of Arts).⁷⁶ The ACI is the principal agency and recipient of funding from the Department of Arts to implement arts policies and local authorities are also important actors in the delivery of arts services within their geographic areas of authority, including as sources of public funding. Section 6.3 below provides more details on the roles of key organisations.

Policy at governmental or national level is usually expressed in broad terms, leaving implementation agencies to formulate and promulgate the detail. Quinn (1998) reflects this in

⁷⁶ R Alvarez-Antolinez et al (2007) observed that from about 1980 rearrangement of functions between state departments following a general election trend has been a feature in Ireland. They noted various reasons for this restructuring, including political responses to public concerns and meeting demands for new public services (pp.18-20). They also highlighted a conclusion in an Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) report in 2005 that politically motivated change gives the impression to the public that something is happening now, a feature the OECD noted is common across members countries. Restructuring of departmental responsibility for arts and culture services in Ireland has generally involved associating these remits variously with a broad range of functions including the Irish language, tourism, sport and heritage, functions not immediately associated with larger mainstream economic and social portfolios. Arts has not always been specifically mentioned in the title of the Department despite it being within its remit, for example the name of the organisation between August 2017 to September 2020 was the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Inclusion of a function in the title may serve to convey a higher political priority being accorded to the function, although it is arguable that a shorter, more easily remembered title increases the standing of all functions as a collective whereas a recitation in the title of multiple remits emphasises their separateness, their lower political priority for the time being and, not least, of an organisation with responsibility for several small, disparate remits.

her review of Irish public policy in the arts when, drawing on Hague *et al* (1992), she explains policy as: ‘a broad concept signifying more a course of action rather than a solitary decision. It is a programme involving a series of decisions and thus, is designed to affect larger sections within society and to cover greater areas than a single decision could’ (p.13). Where agencies have been established to deliver services, the major challenge as identified by Alvarez-Antolinez *et al*: ‘is about ensuring that government policies are fully implemented between the centre and the periphery’ (2007, p.36). To facilitate an agency in undertaking its remit, they stress: ‘balancing coordination and subordination is an essential feature of modern government structures in view of the ‘fragmented’ nature of service delivery across many organisational forms’ (p.23). Balancing coordination by the centre can be more complex where agencies, particularly local authorities, have multiple sources of funding while responsibility for determining the use of the funding lies with the agencies themselves.⁷⁷ In the case of traditional music, funding can be provided through the votes of several state departments. In addition to funds provided to the ACI by the Department of Arts, funding targeted at the arts by FCC can be sourced from central government through the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage as well as from its own fund-raising sources such as local rates and service charges, while funding to schools where traditional music is taught is provided by the Department of Education. The multiple sources of funding renders expenditure nationally difficult to quantify and coordination problematic.

It is also important to be clear on terminology being used. Literature on the subject is substantial, particularly in the business management arena. Quinn (1998, pp.12-39) again provides guidance on terminology and, as noted previously, I also bring significant personal experience from my time as a senior manager in the Irish Civil Service in policy making and

⁷⁷ An illustration of local authority funding is at: <https://www.audit.gov.ie/en/find-report/publications/2016/central-government-funding-of-local-authorities.pdf> (accessed 10/10/2021)

implementation. Popular designations of official documentation include policy, strategy and plan or action plan.⁷⁸ The terms can be understood in different ways and used interchangeably. The term ‘policy’ is most often used as a high-level statement of direction that will be followed to achieve a desired outcome or strategic goal. ‘Strategy’ normally defines the key actions that will be taken to achieve a desired outcome. Hill and Jones (2004, pp.1-31) state that strategy is the outcome of a formal planning process in which targeted actions are identified, involving processes of formulation and implementation. More detail is expected in action plans where outputs, performance indicators and timelines for achievement are set. Best practice calls for clarity in goal setting underpinned by targeted actions that are measurable and reviewed, and this is a key issue in determining the value of policies, plans or strategies, irrespective of the nomenclature used in identifying them. Applying some management concepts, for example, goal setting and assessing value for money, can be problematic in the arts arena.

It is important to recognise difficulties internationally in policy formulation and assessing outcomes in the cultural arena. Belfiore (2021, p.3) argues that evidence proffered to underpin cultural policy, frequently framed in terms of economic impact analysis such as job creation and tourism outcomes as a means of securing public investment, is often unsuitable due to: ‘the lack of transparency, verifiability, and reproducibility of the impact calculations of which “evidence” is the result’. She also argues that policy-relevant research is itself highly political, citing Scullion and Garcia (2005, p.120) who contend that: ‘what the cultural sector really wants from research is the killer evidence that will release dizzying amounts of money into the sector’ (p.8). In Ireland’s case concerns, supported by political stakeholders, for positive economic outcomes such as careers of artists and building audiences, are strongly interwoven into extant cultural policies. Belfiore suggests that recent developments in policy theory involve closer

⁷⁸Examples of the use of these terms include the ACI’s ‘Traditional Arts Policy and Strategy 2018’, ‘The Arts Council Strategy 2016-2025’ and FCC’s ‘Arts Plan 2019-2025’.

association between evidence and policy making where the focus is: ‘less on research as a source of “evidence” and more on the role of ideas, values and beliefs in shaping the processes of policy formulation and change’ (p.7). Establishing targeted goal setting and related outcomes assessment processes in policy formulation in the cultural arena have to be part not only of academic inquiry but also play a meaningful role in political arenas. This includes addressing pressing policy lacunae identified in this research relating to recreational participatory performance within communities and the unavailability of hard information to support the evidential framework.

6.2.2 Arts legislation

The primary legislation governing public provision relating to the arts in Ireland is the Arts Act, 2003. The objective of the act as set out in its short title is ‘[t]o promote the development of and participation in the arts’.⁷⁹ The 2003 Act updated earlier arts legislation (primarily the Arts Act, 1951) by redefining the role of the ACI and updating provisions relating to governance and the operation of the Council. In general, the 2003 Act does not specify or place restrictions or conditions on the types of services that may be provided in promoting the development or participation in the arts. However, the Act specifies the roles of the key state actors in the provision of arts services, respectively, the Minister for Arts, the ACI and local authorities, as follows:

- Section 5.1 provides that the Minister for Arts shall promote the arts both inside and outside the State and may give directions to the ACI for such purposes.
- Section 9 sets out the general functions of the ACI that include (a) stimulating public interest in the arts, (b) promoting knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts, (c) assisting in improving standards in the arts and (d) advising the Minister and other public bodies on arts issues.
- Section 6.1 provides that a local authority (1) must prepare and implement plans for the development of the arts within their functional areas which take account of

⁷⁹ Act number 24/2003. Arts Act 2003 (irishstatutebook.ie)

Government policies relating to the arts, and (2) may provide financial or other assistance as it considers appropriate to individuals or groups for the purposes of (a) stimulating public interest in the arts, (b) promoting knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts, and (c) improving standards in the arts.

Similar to the ACI being the agency responsible for the development of the arts, the Irish Sports Council is responsible for the development of sport in Ireland. An important difference in the framing of legislation governing arts and sport is the inclusion of specific reference to public participation in the latter. The functions of the ACI (section 9 of the 2003 Act) neither refers to public participation nor provides guidance on what ‘stimulate public interest in the arts’ might encompass. However, the Irish Sports Council Act of 1999 makes it clear that the Sports Council’s remit covers both amateur and professional sports, including public participation in sport. Section 6 of the 1999 Act sets out the functions of the Sports Council, which include: ‘(a) to encourage promotion, development and co-ordination of competitive sport and the achievement of excellence in competitive sport, (b) to develop strategies for *increasing participation in recreational sport* (author’s italics) and to co-ordinate their implementation by all bodies (including public authorities and publicly funded bodies) involved in promoting recreational sport and providing recreational facilities, and (c) to facilitate, through the promulgation of guidelines and codes of practice, standards of good conduct and fair play in either competitive sport or recreational sport’.

A significant point is that the Sports Council of Ireland, in conjunction with sports’ governing bodies and Local Sports Partnership networks, have programmes in place to actively encourage engagement in recreational sport. The programmes are multifaceted, targeting both coaches to deliver sports services and participants to engage. An example of the approach can be found in the reply to Parliamentary Question number 33495/21 taken on 22 June 2021 (at Appendix 6.1) regarding Government plans for encouraging participation in sport in schools. It describes several initiatives targeted at encouraging all children to participate in recreational sport,

including for example teenage girls where the drop-out rate from sport can be high. A variety of programmes are in place to encourage adult participation as well.

The ACI states that it understands arts participation: ‘to include a broad range of practice where individuals or groups collaborate with skilled artists to make or interpret art. Arts participation is a core value across all areas of the Arts Council’s work, as we are committed to increasing public engagement in the arts in Ireland’.⁸⁰ In November 2021 the ACI announced a consultation on musical policy, the Council stating clearly the focus of policy: ‘This survey is for completion by professional artists, music groups, organisations and individual practitioners working in and with music’.⁸¹ No reference is made to recreational music playing. Without specific reference to recreational participation in arts legislation, mirroring sports legislation, it is unlikely the necessary priority and funding will be accorded to what should be a national core policy goal.

6.3 Key decision makers

6.3.1 Introduction

The roles specified in the 2003 Act for the key actors highlighted previously (the Minister/Department for Arts, the ACI and FCC) are structured to provide for a cascade in policy formulation and delivery, from national level to implementation on the ground based on congruent policies and actions—in theory the Minister sets national policy, the ACI prepares and implements national action plans to deliver policy and local authorities translate national plans to local delivery contexts. However, boundaries particularly between the roles of the Minister and the ACI can be blurred such that the main source of national arts policy is the ACI. Part of the reasons for this may relate to long-standing concerns within arts communities (nationally and internationally) of the necessity to ensure arms-distance engagement by government in

⁸⁰ Arts Council website: <https://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Arts-participation/> (accessed on 31/12/2021)

⁸¹ ACI consultation on music policy, at <https://survey.alchemer.eu/s3/90404066/Music-Policy-Survey> (accessed on 31/12/2021)

determining the direction of the arts to avoid artistic expression and creativity being compromised. The focus in recent times of the Department has been on developing and undertaking governance of agencies and public bodies associated with the arts.⁸²

6.3.2 The Minister and Department of Arts

A core task of the Department of Arts is the provision of annual funding to the ACI who, under the 2003 Act, independently decides the finer details and distributes funding to arts categories and recipients of its choosing, including annual grants to local authorities to deliver national arts objectives. The Department itself also separately provides funding for capital works to arts bodies. Although the ACI is the designated national authority for promoting the traditional arts, the national picture is more complicated as the Department also directly funds CCÉ, a private charitable organisation with a network of branches whose objectives include the transmission and performance of traditional music. In 2020 the annual operating grant to CCÉ amounted to €2.01m while €1.85m has been allocated to it for 2021.⁸³ (This sum does not include any funding awarded to CCÉ branches from time to time by local authorities or other bodies funding local arts). The Department directly funding CCÉ at national level arguably dilutes the ACI's 'national' traditional arts remit and places overall responsibility for co-ordination on the Department's shoulders. Furthermore, the Government's *Creative Ireland Programme*, launched in December 2016 (see section 6.4.1), is also funded separately to the ACI. This programme has the potential to have an important impact on local community-based traditional music. Such disparate funding streams raises the spectre of difficulties in policy co-ordination nationally in the traditional arts (and other art forms) and to different approaches to policy formulation being adopted, a point alluded to by O'Flynn (2016) and in a Capacity Review of

⁸² Discussion with Department official on 3/6/2021.

⁸³ Annual operating grants cover day-to-day operations and are distinct from capital grants awarded for major once-off investments, such as infrastructure and technology development. The €2.01m awarded in 2020 comprised €1.61m annual operating grant and €0.4m in respect of COVID-19 business stabilisation funding. Information provided by the Department of Arts on 14/6/2021

the Department of Arts published in June 2019.⁸⁴ Drawing on Klammer et al (2006, pp.11, 29), O'Flynn reported that: 'compared with most other member states in the European Union, Ireland has a highly centralised system of arts and culture organisations', but he also asserts that: 'policies for music in Ireland are articulated through a variety of government departments and other statutory agencies that do not share the same conceptions interests and goals' (2016, p.45). The 2019 Capacity Review concluded: 'there is scope to enhance ... complementarity both in terms of the development of a single vision for the Department's current funding strategy and enhancing the links between the ICLH and the Cultural Infrastructure Pillar under the Creative Ireland Programme'.⁸⁵ The Review recommended that the Department needs to expand its policy-making capacity: 'to increase its overall number of staff with policy-making capabilities, including formal strategic and analytical skills, and consider the possibilities for establishing a central research function' (p.34). This touches on several issues concerning how policy relating to arts is formulated, including what the policy is seeking to address, and who formulates it—the Department, the ACI or other bodies? It also allows for gaps emerging in the provision of services, in this case the practice of traditional music within communities, to be identified.

6.3.3 The Arts Council of Ireland (ACI)

The ACI describes itself as the Irish government agency for developing the arts, asserting '[w]e work in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policy makers and others to build a central place for the arts in Irish life'.⁸⁶ The current board (as of September 2021) of the Council

⁸⁴ Department of Arts Capacity Review: file:///C:/Users/Home/Downloads/119258_72685293-a14e-4b88-a66f-0fe7f473bdaa.pdf The review concluded 'Throughout the review, the different policy approaches to culture, creativity and the arts were emphasised, as were the respective roles of the Department and the Arts institutions in developing policy. Opportunities for clearer delineation between the responsibilities for high-level policies and internal sectoral policies were highlighted as an area warranting further review'. (p.39)

⁸⁵ ICLH - Investing in Our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018 to 2027.

<https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2019/12/FINAL-PLAN-FOR-WEBSITE.pdf> (accessed 17/08/2022). ICLH is the Department of Arts major sectoral programme under the Project Ireland 2040 for investment in culture, the Irish language and national heritage.

⁸⁶ Arts Council website: <https://www.artscouncil.ie/about/> (accessed 12/09/2021)

comprises twelve people, at least seven drawn from the professional arts world, including one traditional musician, and the remainder from business and public management, intercultural relations and communications. Biographies on Council members on its website do not identify anyone as having specific involvement in community arts *qua* recreational or amateur artists.⁸⁷

The ACI has a small team assigned responsibility for the traditional arts.

In 2020 the ACI received €80m in exchequer funding from the Government, up from €75m in 2019.⁸⁸ However, much of this funding is allocated as recurring expenditure to national recipients such as the Abbey Theatre and traditional music organisations like Na Píobairí Uilleann and the Irish Traditional Music Archive, such that the amount of discretionary money available each year to the Council for distribution can be relatively small. An extra €20m was allocated in 2020 to the Council by Government to protect jobs and livelihoods in the arts industry due to COVID-19 impacts on employment opportunities, reflecting the fact that a significant focus of the Council is on developing sustainable employment in the arts.⁸⁹ Through the provision of funding to local authorities the Council can implement national arts policies and influence the direction of policies at community level being pursued by the local authorities. The ACI's annual report for 2019 shows that collectively local authorities were awarded €1,848,985, of which FCC with 6% of the national population received €28,330 or 1.5% of the total allocation for the category. The four Dublin local authorities collectively received €178,183, equating to 9.6% of the national allocation.⁹⁰

In 2016 the ACI and the County and City Management Association (CCMA), an umbrella body representative of the local government management network in Ireland, agreed a ten-year framework agreement, titled *Framework for Collaboration*, to harmonise the implementation

⁸⁷ Biographies of Arts Council members are at <http://www.artscouncil.ie/about/Who-we-are/> (accessed 12/09/2021)

⁸⁸ <http://www.artscouncil.ie/News/Arts-Council-Budget-2020/> (accessed 12/09/2021)

⁸⁹ Statement by Arts Council at <http://www.artscouncil.ie/News/Arts-Council-welcomes-additional--20-million-support-package-for-2020/> (accessed 14/09/2021)

⁹⁰ Annual Report 2019.pdf (artscouncil.ie) (accessed 12/09/2021)

of national strategies for the arts across the country and to provide a conduit for the voice of local government to be heard in policy making. The agreement provides for the preparation of three-yearly action plans focused on a limited number of key actions overseen by joint ACI / CCMA / local authority representatives.

6.3.4 Fingal County Council (FCC)

Local authorities are obliged under the arts acts to prepare multi-annual arts plans and FCC's plan for 2019-2025 is in place. The Arts Office within FCC is responsible for the development and delivery of the county's arts programmes. The bulk of local arts funding is provided from within a local authority's own resource supplemented by grants from the ACI. Fingal Arts Office informed me it generally spends about €150,000 to €200,000 per annum on the traditional arts.⁹¹ Financial accounts for Fingal's largest arts centre, the Draíocht, for 2019 show total income of €1.56m and total grants received of €754,000 coming from three main sources—€503,000 from FCC, €150,000 from the ACI and €60,000 from Creative Ireland.⁹² The published accounts for 2020 for the SEAC show total income of €490,000 (€553,000 in 2019) and grants received include €280,000 from FCC, €50,000 from the ACI and €21,600 from Creative Ireland.⁹³ The board of the Draíocht centre comprises six members, none of whom declare a specific involvement with traditional music. Their biographies show engagement with various art forms, business and community development interests. The composition of the board of the SEAC shows eight members, the biographies for two of whom indicate a direct involvement in Irish traditional music while other members have experience variously in arts, communications and community interests. Representatives of FCC Arts Office are also members of the SEAC board. Seeking to have all art forms separately represented on a board may neither be practical (given the variety of art forms involved) nor desirable (to avoid

⁹¹ Provided by email from Fingal Arts Officer to author on 15 October 2018

⁹² https://www.draiocht.ie/content/files/Draiocht_2019_audited-accounts.pdf , pp.13,18 (accessed 13/9/2021)

⁹³ <https://www.tseac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/S338-Seamus-Ennis-20-Final-Accounts.pdf> (accessed 13/9/2021)

constant division among the board members in deciding priorities), nevertheless it is critical that some board members have a significant knowledge and understanding of the traditional arts and their local circumstances. The position of the Draíocht centre board in this regard is not clear from their published biographies of the members of their board.

6.4 Policies for promoting traditional arts

6.4.1 National policy framework

Four Government programmes are important in framing extant national arts policies:

1. *Project Ireland 2040*: is an overarching national development framework to improve the quality of life for everyone based on the themes of wellbeing, equality and opportunity. The framework guides public investment in all spheres of society, taking account of social, economic and cultural development needs, including recognising the centrality of arts to achieving better social and economic outcomes.⁹⁴
2. *Investing in Our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018-2027*: is the Government's sectoral plan under the *Project Ireland 2040* programme for investment in culture, the Irish language and national heritage. It provides for investment of €40m during the ten-year period of the plan in local arts and culture infrastructure nationally.⁹⁵
3. *Creative Ireland Programme*: encourages citizens to engage in the arts to foster creativity in society. Launched in 2016, the programme is overseen by an Office under the Department of Arts and separate to the ACI. It situates the provision of arts services within a wider community creativity context. It includes objectives targeting access to music for all children and provides for each local authority preparing a creativity action plan, the content of which can overlap with a county arts plan. The programme is built around five pillars, including (1) enabling the creative potential of every child, (2) enabling creativity in every community and (3) investing in creative and cultural infrastructure.⁹⁶
4. *Culture 2025*: is a framework launched in 2020 that defines the scope and direction of Government policy in the whole cultural field. The framework indicates that policies

⁹⁴ Project Ireland 2040 <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/09022006-project-ireland-2040/> (accessed 13/9/2021)

⁹⁵ Web site: <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2019/12/FINAL-PLAN-FOR-WEBSITE.pdf> (accessed 15/9/2021)

⁹⁶ Creative Ireland Programme is at [Creative Ireland - Creative Ireland Programme](#) (accessed 13/9/2021). Fingal's Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018-2022 is at [Fingal's Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018-2022 | Fingal County Council](#) (accessed 13/09/2021)

and implementation plans in specific areas will be drawn up, stating that: ‘The fundamental purpose of *Culture 2025* is to ensure a unified and coherent approach to cultural policy across government and to planning and provision across the cultural sector’.⁹⁷

In response to the launch of *Project Ireland 2040*, the ACI published a ten-year rolling strategy in 2016, titled *Making Great Art Work*, which identifies the following development priorities: (1) supporting the full-time artist, (2) building audiences and public engagement with arts, and (3) investment in arts infrastructure based on spatial and demographic planning.⁹⁸ The ACI also published several short sectoral policy papers linked to the ten-year strategy, including *Traditional Arts Policy and Strategy 2018*.⁹⁹ Under cascade decision making structures, the ACI’s three development priorities should be reflected in local authorities’ county arts plans and, for its part, FCC has published its Fingal Arts Plan 2019-2025 which reflects the national priorities.¹⁰⁰ In general, the traditional arts have very little visibility in these policy documents, from national to local. No distinction is made between traditional and other art forms or between traditional artists and others. There are limited references to voluntary, amateur and recreational playing roles, important in traditional music communities and the starting position for Finnegan’s (1989) study in Milton Keynes. For example, the ACI’s strongest commitment in its ten-year plan is that it will support amateur practice through its advice and advocacy programmes (p.26). The focus on full-time artists and audience development may leave the ACI open to criticism that they perceive their role as primarily an artist development agency ahead of community arts.

⁹⁷ Culture 2025: A national cultural policy framework, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, (accessed 13/09/2021) (p.4)

⁹⁸ ‘Making Great Art Work’, <http://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Traditional-arts/Overview/> (accessed 13/09/2021)

⁹⁹ *Making Great Art Work: Traditional Arts Policy & Strategy 2018*, Arts Council of Ireland website, http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Trad_Policy_2018.pdf (accessed 13/09/2021)

¹⁰⁰ Fingal Arts Plan 2019-2025, <https://www.fingal.ie/arts-and-culture/fingal-county-council-2019-2025-arts-plan> (accessed 13/09/2021)

Taken together, the national framework policies seek to provide a foundation for embedding arts and culture features into national and local planning decision making by official authorities, including providing indicative budgets for projected expenditure over the lifetimes of the policy plans. However, the timeframes associated with the policy frameworks are lengthy, extending well beyond the maximum period of five years allowed under the Constitution of Ireland for the life time of a parliament, such that incoming governments not wishing to be tied by the actions of previous governments invariably introduce new policies. Nor do they set out a sufficiently articulated government vision for arts in the lives of citizens to contextualise and guide the preparation of more detailed actions. Thus, for example, the ACI's ten-year strategy, prepared in the context of *Project Ireland 2040*, is focused on the three areas of the Council's choice identified previously with limited reference to the position of the recreational artist in a community context.

6.4.2 National policies for traditional music

Traditional Arts Strategy

The Department of Arts says it has not issued any policy papers relating to traditional music since the enactment of the Arts Act in 2003.¹⁰¹ However, the ACI published a traditional arts strategy in 2005, adopting at the time a definition of these arts as: 'any creative expression that is based on, or arising from, our own repertoire, style or structure, in whatever form, including music ... song ... dance ... and oral arts such as storytelling'.¹⁰² Reflecting its priorities of maintaining its long-established focus on artists, developing audiences and arts infrastructure under its ten-year strategic arts strategy, the ACI identifies its approach in relation to developing the traditional arts as: 'funding strategically important organisations ... encouraging individual artists to embark on challenging and innovative projects ... endeavour[ing] to create

¹⁰¹ Response of Department on 9/04/2021 to my written enquiry

¹⁰² Report of the Traditional Arts Committee to the Arts Council 2004. The Arts Council adopted its recommendations in May 2005

opportunities for traditional arts practitioners, support[ing] key performance players, and consolidate[ing] the traditional arts infrastructure'.¹⁰³ In its 2018 *Traditional Arts Policy and Strategy* the ACI declares: '[t]his policy paper sets out the current policy and strategy for Traditional Arts as it aligns with the key objectives and desired outcomes of *Making Great Art Work*. It outlines how the Arts Council's priorities and cross-sectoral strategies will be delivered across Traditional Arts over the next three years'.¹⁰⁴ The 2018 strategy doesn't deviate significantly from the 2005 strategy, although there is a little more detail on the *raison d'être* for the policy, with the ACI saying it: 'views the individual traditional artist as the cornerstone of the traditional arts. The primary concern with individual traditional artists is that they get the relevant support to develop and progress their careers as artists' (2018 policy, p.2). This strategy does not take account of any wider contexts in which traditional music is practiced, including recreational and unpaid performance. The ACI's statement reinforces the notion of the traditional arts as purely an art form, just another music genre and paradoxically outside of a community setting. In the context of a formulation claimed to promote the traditional arts *per se*, the explicit prioritisation of the career artist excludes, by default, amateur or recreational players who would also have regarded themselves as an integral part of traditional music within society. Notably, as already observed, musicians interviewed for this research generally had little awareness of the ACI's traditional arts strategy. The increasing focus on the professional side of arts in general has been commented on by, among others, Winter and Keegan-Phipps (2013). They pinpoint a 2007 conference held in a business conference centre attended by 'folk activists, promoters and media folk' where the term 'folk industry' was first promoted in Britain, making the point that:

¹⁰³ <http://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Traditional-arts/Overview/> (accessed 15/08/2021)

¹⁰⁴ Arts Council of Ireland Website

<http://www.artscouncil.ie/publications/?&Year=2018&Keyword=Traditional%20Arts%20Policy#search> (accessed 15/08/2021)

This embracing of the idea of a folk industry is interesting, not least because it appears to contradict the established ethos of English folk which has traditionally spoken of itself in terms that draw on discourses ranging from the resolutely amateur to the philanthropic to the explicitly anti-commercial, all feeding into a sense of authenticity that is so fundamental to the idea of folk' (Winter and Keegan-Phipps, 2013, p.25)

The absence of the place of the amateur or recreational side in its own right in the ACI strategy, in effect seeking what Winter and Keegan-Phipps (p.39) describe as reconciling the commercial or professional aspects with the folk ethos, suggests a poor augury for the development of the traditional arts in Irish communities. While the 2018 strategy does include reference to developing public engagement with the traditional arts, the Council provides a notable caveat, saying it will 'invest in activity that ... contributes to the creation of artistic hubs that help sustain year-round opportunities to participate in and appreciate the traditional arts' (p.4). Then, in explaining what it means by 'participation', the ACI again places the professional artist at the centre of the activity, declaring:

[it] understands arts participation to describe a broad continuum of arts practice where professional artists collaborate with individuals or groups (non-arts professionals) to make or interpret art. The practice involves a mutually beneficial two-way engagement that values the different ideas, experiences and skills of all involved.¹⁰⁵

The ACI launched a programme to support, it asserts, the amateur artist in music, theatre and musical theatre (which would include elements of the traditional arts), seeking proposals by 28 October 2021 under its Amateur and Voluntary Pilot Scheme, with the objective of:

support[ing] theatre and musical-theatre national amateur and/or voluntary resource-and-support organisations for programmes that develop, by working with professional artists, the performance and technical skills of local-organisation members through training, mentorship or other innovative ideas. It envisages that such programmes could be centrally organised'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.artscouncil.ie/Contact-Us/FAQS/Arts-participation/FAQs/#24399> (accessed 24/9/2021)

¹⁰⁶ Arts Council advertised the scheme in their Newsletter of 8 October 202 and details are at: [https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Main_Site/Content/Funds/2021%20Amateur%20and%20Voluntary%20Practice%20Pilot%20Scheme%20Guidelines\(1\).pdf](https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Main_Site/Content/Funds/2021%20Amateur%20and%20Voluntary%20Practice%20Pilot%20Scheme%20Guidelines(1).pdf) (accessed on 10 October 2021)

It could be argued that the ACI's understanding of 'participation' resonates with the third context exemplifying community music identified by Higgins (2012, p.4), see section 2.5, that of active intervention between a music leader/ facilitator and participants. However, the published scheme suggests that such a link to the community music idiom posited by Higgins is not axiomatic. Higgins himself stresses the broad social context of his third category: 'there is an emphasis on people, participation, context, equality of opportunity, and diversity' (p.4). Furthermore, providing for circumstances in which the arts locally are amateur artist led is not articulated by the Council, while their overall strategy and scheme are also silent on the practice of those arts and artists in the community. Communities do not always want or value engagement with professionals. They may prefer unmediated support to do things themselves and can often be very capable.

A significant disadvantage with the ACI's 2018 traditional arts strategy is that despite being described as a three-year plan, no detail or specific commitment is provided in relation to any actions designed to deliver the policy. Actions relating to harping are a possible exception, where reference is made in the 2018 (p.4) strategy to implementing a recent Council supported report on this art form by Quinn (2014). The absence of specific deliverables is a feature of all extant published arts plans and strategies of the ACI and, as will be noted below, of FCC as well. Recalling the distinction made between 'policy' and 'plans' in section 6.2.1, the ACI's traditional arts document falls into the category of a high-level statement of policy rather than a plan targeting specific outcomes. Aside from meeting legislative obligations of the ACI and local authorities to publish plans, these documents may serve as a useful communication medium to inform the public in very general terms of the type of actions being pursued by the issuing authority, but are of limited value in targeting specific outcomes, and ergo in managing and measuring achievement. An example of a non-specific action included in the Council's 2018 traditional arts strategy is the statement: 'In the area of young people, children & education (YPCE), over the next three years the Arts Council will work with the YPCE team to review

current traditional arts provision for children and young people' (p.5). It may be that councils have other management/planning tools or plans at their disposal not in the public domain, but exploration of this is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The general nature of the published policies, coupled with an absence of location specific hard information on participation in the arts at community level identified in chapter four raises questions concerning how the level of demand for services can be adequately gauged and addressed. It can also hamper the ability to pursue informed ground-up strategies for the development of the arts, such as Titon's preferred arts management approach identified in section 2.4.2.

Arts Council's DEIS support scheme

In tandem with the publication of its first traditional arts strategy in 2005, the ACI established its DEIS scheme to fund artists and organisations in the traditional arts through small scale grants. The scheme comprised two elements, the DEIS scheme covering all activities except recording which was provided for in the DEIS Recording Scheme. This fund remained in place until 2017 after which, the Council reported in its annual report for 2018: 'The DEIS Award came to a conclusion ... and was restructured as Strand 1 of the Traditional Arts Project Award, taking effect in 2018' (p.23).¹⁰⁷ The following information (table 10) relates to projects approved nationally and in relation to Fingal under the DEIS and DEIS Recording Schemes for the years 2014 to 2017 inclusive.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Annual%20Report%202018.pdf> p.23 (accessed 15/9/2021)

¹⁰⁸ The information was obtained from the following sources: (1) the Arts Council published details of grant recipients at: <https://www.artscouncil.ie/funding-decisions/> (accessed 11/10/2021), (2) the Council's Annual Reports for the years 2015-2018 respectively which includes details of grant recipients, and (3) information provided to this researcher by the ACI by email dated 21 November 2019

Table 10: DEIS projects approved for Fingal

Year	Total no. of awards nationally	Total amount awarded nationally €	No. of Applications from Fingal	Amount sought by Fingal applicants €	Fingal Projects Approved	Amount awarded Fingal projects €	Scheme
2014	34	191,947	N/A	N/A	1	5,400	DEIS Recording
2015	37	233,575	1	7,715	1	4,000	DEIS Recording
2016	36	225,245	2	17,450	1	9,000	DEIS Recording
2017	32	271,016	1	4,450	1	4,450	DEIS Recording

Over the four-year period 2014 - 2017 one DEIS project per year was approved for a Fingal based applicant, all in respect of recording material and all in respect of established artists. No awards were received by community organisations, but as the Council does not publish details of individual applications, it is not clear if there were any applications made by any such groups. (Data supplied by the Council indicates there were six applications from organisations for grant support under the DEIS scheme between 2015-2017, of which two were ineligible and the remaining four did not receive an award). Artists and organisations in the traditional arts are also eligible for funding under other schemes, but as Council financial allocations are not published by music genre or type it is not possible to determine from the published material the total per annum allocated to traditional music.

All children having access to learning music

In 2008 a subcommittee of ACI reported that '[a]rts provision for children and young people both in and out of school is arguably the single greatest fault line in our cultural provision' (p.3).¹⁰⁹ Progressing the objective of access to music for all children, even in aspirational terms,

¹⁰⁹http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Points_of_alignment_English_2010.pdf (accessed 11/10/2021)

does not feature in the ten-year strategy published in 2016. As noted above, there is a reference to review current traditional arts provision for young people and children in the new traditional arts policy and strategy published by the Council in 2018 but what that means or how it is intended to be undertaken is not set out. In 2016, the same year as the ACI launched its ten-year strategy, the Government launched its *Creative Ireland Programme*, which includes reference to every child having access to learning music within a local stakeholder partnership context. In addition, Music Generation, a partnership between philanthropic and community interests and Government (the main funding partner via the Department of Education) established ten years ago, also has a remit to provide access to learning music for all children. A partnership initiative involving FCC and Music Generation is about to commence, with details yet to be finalised, which can include traditional music (position at 14/1/2022).

Given that the various agencies and organisations associated with providing access for children to learning music are public bodies and all espouse the value of partnership while disbursing funding that is overwhelmingly from the public purse, the question of the nature of consultation between them in preparing their respective strategies and programmes is important. A pressing issue is to establish the collective impact of the strategies and plans of the various public bodies promoting the arts and creativity agendas at local community level, verifiable periodically by independent audit. Such a review process should enable assessment of policy and expenditure outcomes, identification of specific locations / communities where engagement with the arts remains low and to inform future actions, bearing in mind that the programmes straddle arts and education sectors. Provisions in the recently launched *Culture 2025* framework programme provide for better co-ordination in the plans of all public arts, culture and heritage programmes and the recommendations in the Department of Arts Capacity Review, previously referred to, for enhanced policy making capacity, are relevant but they primarily relate to enhanced co-ordination at a strategic level. Comprehending how the pieces of the jigsaw fit together at local level is an issue, albeit complex, that needs to be addressed.

6.4.3 County level policies

Reference has been made in section 4.6.1 to FCC's description of traditional music being strongest on the right-hand side of a diagonal line drawn from Baldoyle in the southeast to Garristown in the northwest of the county. Research in this project largely supports the Council's perspective. The presence of families with an interest in traditional music and the inflows of musicians settling in the area are key factors in this and, as already noted, the Council says it focuses funding support for traditional music in this area. However, the low visibility of traditional arts in Dublin 15 and its environs raises questions about providing access to the traditions for at least half of the population of Fingal, including the appropriateness of current national and local strategies and methodologies to promote and support traditional music in these circumstances.

FCC states in its current arts plan: '[o]ur primary wish is to grow Fingal's cultural capacity by retaining and attracting creative practitioners to live and work in Fingal' (p.16). The development of cultural quarters in Swords and Balbriggan, along with Draíocht in Blanchardstown, to provide major arts infrastructure in the three largest population centres are core elements in the county plan. Again, the traditional arts have no explicit visibility in the plan, the content of which is also articulated at a high or strategic level and generally does not include information on arts needs assessments or the extent of public participation in the arts in the county. (A similar situation pertains in strategies and plans of the ACI where no information is provided on assessment of needs or public participation). The Fingal arts plan reports an extensive prior consultation process, asserting: 'the overall consensus from this consultation demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with the existing arts programmes and access to the arts' (p.39). Notably, there is no envelope of funding associated with the Fingal plan, which provides that specific actions and funding under the plan will be determined annually within the Council's budget, making the point that: 'appropriate funding is required over the lifetime of the plan, in order to implement the goals and objectives. Additional staffing resources ...

may be sought to support the delivery of the plan' (p.40). This suggests that actions under the plan will be determined annually, running the risk of piecemeal actions and failure to adopt a longer-term strategic approach.

A key determinant of an authority's approach in providing arts services is the overall level of resources available to it and the priority a Council attaches to arts in comparison with other local services objectives, such as the provision of housing and roads. Invariably, a range of issues will influence such decisions, including taking account of national arts policies, the potential for creating local employment in the arts, the expected contribution of the arts to local tourism endeavours and the value to amateur arts from having professional artists visible and performing in the community, to highlight but a few. How a local authority interprets its role and obligations under the relevant legislation will also be a key determinant in shaping its approaches and methodologies supporting the arts. Two issues have particular relevance here: (1) How authorities define what is meant by promoting 'engagement' with the arts, which in turn raises a question of how much emphasis should be placed on promoting and supporting personal participation in the arts by members of the public through, for example, actively participating in playing music or singing in a choir as distinct from simple attendance as an audience member at an organised arts event, reflecting Turino's distinction between participatory and presentational performance. Both elements, direct participation and passive engagement, are important and of course are not mutually exclusive. (2) Where there is evidence of low levels of participatory traditional music making in a location (or a marked downturn in the practice of music in an area due to changing demography), what role if any can or should a local authority play to counter the situation? To restate the second question, what role do official bodies have in ensuring the presence and sustainability of traditional music within local communities. Questions were put to FCC on these issues and its replies are presented in the next section.

Noting the Arts Council's focus on developing full-time artists and audiences and Fingal's stated primary aim 'to grow Fingal's cultural capacity by retaining and attracting creative practitioners to live and work in Fingal', it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that measures to promote the professional artist, including audience engagement, take priority over community-based measures. Furthermore, whether or not a local authority views itself as having a roll in sustaining a traditional music ecosystem, it certainly has an influence on it through its wider promotion of the arts. A strategic priority in Fingal's current arts plan is to develop major arts hubs centred in Balbriggan, Blanchardstown and Swords, locations where significant growth in populations have occurred in recent years. This has the potential to greatly enhance the arts offering in the county, depending on what arts services are delivered from them. However, there can be potential risks in an approach that involves much centralisation of arts services delivered in hubs in particular in relation to the practice of music by recreational players and the visibility of traditional music within community spaces outside of the arts hubs.

6.4.4 How Fingal County Council views its role in supporting traditional music

FCC provided responses to questions reproduced in Appendix 6.2 that I addressed to them on their role and related issues. (Similar sets of questions were addressed to the Department of Arts and the ACI). FCC first explained its general approach to supporting and fostering arts:

all arts interventions on behalf of Local Authorities are dependent on available resources, both financial and in terms of staffing both of which are constantly in a state of flux, there are also always enormous demands made on arts offices in County Councils . . . There are limits to everything, and no ideal scenario exists, where you can deal with all the demands made. Our approach has been to consult with the public we work with and then write a long terms (sic) strategy and implement [it] in a partnership with the people of Fingal.¹¹⁰

Fingal Arts Office currently has a total of four staff, limiting the Office's capacity and scope for action. Staff in the SEAC also play a significant role in promoting the traditional arts. In

¹¹⁰ Email response of Fingal County Council on 28 April 2021

determining the provision of services, the Council explained how requests for assistance in the first instance play a catalytic part:

Your questions on the playing of musical instruments, is (sic) too narrow . . . it's like asking what are we doing to support the making of stained glass, the answer is nothing directly, what we are doing is promoting the arts broadly and giving opportunities for people to get involved, if someone wants to learn to make stained glass, then we will find a way to support that.¹¹¹

FCC's reply highlights an important distinction between it and the ACI's DEIS scheme in that upon a demand for services being made, the Fingal Arts Office will seek to sate the demand within resources available, while the DEIS scheme involved a simple competitive process. FCC also elaborated on its contribution to traditional music as follows:

Fingal County Council has prioritised the promotion and development [of] traditional arts... They have invested heavily in them over the last 30 years. In the case of playing traditional music, we have a dedicated art centre and staff in the Seamus Ennis Arts Centre, an instruments' bank, grants awards and bursaries to traditional festivals, scoils (sic) and events, and long term in depth (sic) experience, so amongst all that support if you want to learn a musical instrument we will not only help you we will give you an instrument and also teach you.¹¹²

FCC says it places strong emphasis on working with existing stakeholders in planning services provision. This too is important particularly where the stakeholders are clearly identifiable and have agency. Interest groups such as branches of CCÉ, *Rinceoil* in Rush and Skerries Traditional Music Weekend would fall into that category. But in the absence of voices to articulate demands and engage in the necessary two-way dialogue, lacunae develop involving continued low visibility of the music and the absence of mechanisms to reverse the situation. The following question was addressed to FCC, recalling the management approach recommended by Titon, and the reply is reproduced after it:

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Question addressed to FCC:

Informants to the research highlight the importance of early leadership in motivating and driving the uplift in interest in traditional music in those areas where it is now considered strong, and that in most instances those involved were ‘outsiders’ who had settled in the area. Has the Council considered funding / supporting any type of ‘ground-up’ capacity building to foster playing the music, such as the appointment of community traditional music facilitators, particularly in those areas of Fingal where there has been significant population churn and increase?

FCC response:

‘Fingal County Council has not received any requests over the last 30 years, from the public for the funding or the appointment of *community traditional music facilitators* [italics in original]. We have that need covered, we know our arts communities very well and are confident we know and are aware, all those individuals and groups, who are or wish to get involved in the traditional arts. We will continue to ensure that they have every opportunity to do so, through the range of supports we offer. Although broader participation is always desirable, I am happy with the level of participation in the traditional arts in Fingal, which is due in no small part to our decades long development of the sector combined with considerable financial investment with a range of other supports, information and advice ... We are known for always having operated a ground up approach to supporting the traditional arts, that is how Seamus Ennis Centre was built 22 years ago and has operated successfully ever since. This was only achieved through partnership with *local* [italics in original] people and their sharing of their knowledge and experience of traditional music and customs in Fingal. We continue to develop those relations and networks. It continues to be a great success, which has led to the vibrant traditional music scene in Fingal that exists today’.¹¹³

It is clear FCC has successfully worked with locals to create ground-up developments such as the SEAC and festivals associated with traditional music. But even in these cases, crucially, the Council successfully built on demands locally articulated in the first instance. The marriage of the Council with local people with drive and capacity was also critical. The presence of

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

activists, the ‘evangelists’, with ‘capacity’ was a critical ingredient that resulted in developments taking place more often in wealthier areas of the county as a result of the involvement of local people who already possessed skill sets valuable to leading and delivering projects. However, it is also clear Fingal pursues an approach to supporting the arts that parallels national methodologies. The next section considers existing policies and programmes having regard to issues identified in this research impacting the practice of Irish traditional music in Fingal.

6.5 Appraisal of current policies and supports

6.5.1 Overview

The conclusion sections in chapter four (section 4.7) and chapter five (section 5.3), respectively, provide summaries of the current state of the practice of Irish traditional music in Fingal today and key themes emerging from interviews with informed exponents of the music relating to both impediments to the practice of the music and measures that would support its development. Many of the issues emerging have arisen as a result of changing social circumstances, for example in the reducing availability of suitable spaces for participation and an ebb in local playing due to changing demography. Some arise because of the absence of suitable national and local policy priorities being pursued, for example the overriding focus on the professional artist but little or no attention given to the recreational player. Approaches adopted by official bodies in determining service provision and in implementing supports schemes, including that they are ‘demand-led’, also play a part. To the above should be added three critical elements: the first, already mentioned, is the general absence of hard information on participation in recreational playing traditional music in the county; the second, highlighted by Quinn (1998, p.25), is the absence of real debate at national and county levels on the quality and direction of arts in society; and thirdly, the sectoral response to the publication of *Project Ireland 2040*, should have prioritised the need for a fresh, critical look at how arts are engaged with and

encouraged in communities. How then can recreational playing be promoted and supported as a core element of national and local arts?

6.5.2 Recognition of recreational music making

A new vision is needed

There is a need to articulate a clear vision for the practice of traditional music in twenty-first century urban and rural community settings in Ireland. The vision should acknowledge the role of recreational musicians and how they can participate in the music within their local communities, taking a life-cycle perspective (next paragraph). Developing measures to actively encourage and support public participation and engagement in the music are part of this. In tandem, there is a need to explicitly recognise the development of recreational participatory performance in official strategies and plans promoting the arts in a similar manner to promoting public engagement in recreational sport. Articulating a vision for participatory performance of traditional music at community level would be a significant contribution in pursuing *Project Ireland 2040* community development objectives.

A life-cycle perspective of the practice of traditional music is important

Through viewing strategies through a life-cycle lens, the perceived importance of issues or challenges relevant to a particular music scene can change. For example, in those parts of the county where the music is considered strong, learning opportunities are generally available, but participatory performance opportunities for the local recreational player can still be very limited or unattractive leading, for example, to fewer younger adults participating in playing in the community on a regular basis. One can learn to play locally but being able to continue participating there as a life-style choice can be problematic for all age cohorts. Life-cycle considerations can most effectively provide the framework for developing pathways back to playing music for those who have stopped playing. Characteristics identified by Higgins (2012, p.5) for community musician practitioners, in particular those relating to (1) learning to play the music, (2) engaging with other local traditional musicians and (3) being able to experience

opportunities to play that are attractive and engaging, are a good frame for the concept of a life-cycle perspective being identified here. The coming together or synthesis of such elements to create a sustainable music culture is at the core of an ecosystem approach. Framing policies and identifying actions to achieve a life-cycle outcome will inevitably present new challenges, but the achievement of interlinked goals in local settings of accessibility and learning, opportunities for participatory performance, better alignment of traditional arts activities and community social activities, the promotion of personal creativity and artistic endeavour and other economic and social benefits that flow, for example, from transmission, sustainable tourism and use of public spaces. Failure to foster a life-cycle view impedes both the creation of a visible association between learning and playing as a community endeavour and a culture of local music playing. Myers et al (2013), for example, advocate learning as a life-span endeavour, defining access to music as beyond simple availability: ‘it is about acquisition of knowledge, understanding, and skill, which, logically, ought to further engagement, make music experience more meaningful, and inspire continued learning’ (p.133). They also stress benefit to society from this approach: ‘Envisioning music learning as a lifespan endeavor (sic), rather than as something that occurs during childhood and adolescence as a precursor to lifelong participation, is consistent with the concept of a learning society’ (p.135). Fostering a life-cycle context can also bring wider presentational music performance opportunities through widening the audience base.

Failure to articulate impediments

Failure to articulate the need for more attractive participatory performance options is but one manifestation of a general silence within local communities about the circumstances of traditional music. Although one of long-standing, this issue has not been articulated in the first instance as a social demand, nor is it on the radar of official bodies with responsibility for the arts, although, ironically, there are echoes of it in FCC’s comment regarding not receiving any requests over more than thirty years from the public for the provision of community traditional

music facilitators. This scenario is not particular to Fingal. Part of the explanation for issues not being articulated may be found in Quinn's (1998) conclusion over twenty years ago that there was very little real political dialogue on arts policy in Ireland (p.27), where arts are seen as secondary to or on the fringe of the real business of Government (p.53), rendering them beyond what she described as the normal policy formulation pathway where social demands are articulated into political demands leading to policy development (pp.11-39). Official records since then suggests parliamentary debates have covered a variety of issues relating to music in general, including on the development of the music industry, arts institutional arrangements, supports for organisations involved in transmission and the provision of music education for children in particular. What is absent is a clear articulation of specific arts goals for society, references to Irish traditional music are very limited and issues identified in this research have not been articulated. The Crossroads Conferences in 1996 (with the theme Tradition and Change in Irish Traditional Music) and in 2003 (with the theme Education and Traditional Music) promoted discussion on an array of issues relating to the advancement of the music, while the development of traditional music within third level educational curricula has also enabled much dialogue on the music. So too has Talty's (2020) report in relation to resources, challenges and opportunities in traditional arts, but again its focus is mainly on the professional sector needs.

A new vision for Irish traditional music in communities should in particular articulate the desired standing and visibility of the music within local settings, the practice of recreational playing and how to engage public interest. While the position of career / professional musicians is relevant also, the focus on the recreational player in this dissertation and the need for a new vision for this element of the tradition is to reflect that it has been substantially excluded from national narratives on the music to date and that they have a central role to play in a more developed community traditional music context. Public debate as part of formulating the vision should address what is needed to foster long-term sustainable music ecosystems within local

communities, including addressing Titon's fourth music ecosystem principle of stewardship (section 2.4.2). As part of developing new perspectives on the practice of traditional music at community level, including participatory performance, official bodies must review their tool-kits needed to foster both ground-up and top-down approaches, depending on the circumstances of individual communities.

6.5.3 Public participation in traditional arts

Current data collection is limited

The ACI's national survey on attendance, participation and engagement with the arts 2018 is focused on collecting data that reflects the Council's three key priorities underpinning its ten-year plan for promoting and supporting the arts.¹¹⁴ Involving over 1,000 respondents across the country, the information collected includes data on attendance at different types of events and on attitudes to the arts services provided, including traditional arts events. Yet, although broad ranging, the national survey does not extend to collecting information on the extent of interest in relation to arts at county or local community levels or in respect of the involvement of recreational musicians. The survey serves as a useful feedback mechanism to the Council on public attitudes and engagement with events and activities, but it does not facilitate a deeper critique of service need versus provision. The ACI also utilises arts relevant information from official sources including the national longitudinal study of children and young people in Ireland *Growing up in Ireland*.¹¹⁵ As noted previously, there have not been any surveys undertaken to date to assess interest and involvement in traditional music in Fingal or in selected locations within the county. Although national surveys are important, the absence of in-depth information on local contexts leaves significant gaps in knowledge with potential knock-on information deficits in arts services planning. For example, information gathered in this

¹¹⁴ ACI's power point presentation on artcouncil.ie. [PowerPoint Presentation \(artscouncil.ie\)](https://artscouncil.ie) (accessed 12/10/2021)

¹¹⁵ <https://www.esri.ie/growing-up-in-ireland> (accessed 12/10/2021)

research facilitates identification of barriers to engagement with traditional music in Fingal and how it could be developed, information that is valuable in planning the delivery of arts services, including targeting areas of need. Both the ACI and FCC rely to a significant degree on demands made for funding to inform public funding priorities.

Tackling the absence of traditional music

Despite traditional arts being regarded as secure in Ireland today, acknowledging and tackling the limited presence of the music in locations such as Dublin 15 is important. Irish traditional music could not be considered endangered in the context described by Grant (2014). However, reasons why music considered endangered should be supported, according to Grant, includes for the sake of diversity, culture, people's individual and collective identities and for social cohesion and well-being. These reasons all have relevance here, not to suggest that the music itself is endangered, but rather to put the spotlight on the potential loss to those communities where the music has low visibility (pp.7-10). Grant (p.9) also cites Baumann's (1992, p.15) view, also pertinent here, that: 'the protection of music as a living tradition is . . . a cultural and political necessity'. An ability to benefit from and have access to the traditional arts is important and relevant to all communities, a point highlighted in the *Framework for Collaboration* agreement between the ACI and local authorities (section 6.3.3): 'We have produced this agreement to make clear our respective commitments to arts development and, in particular, to strive for equality of access to and engagement in the arts by all those living in Ireland' (p.10). Underpinning the presence of traditional music on the eastern side of Fingal are families involved in the music, enabling early access and interaction with the music for young family members. An important question is whether existing official measures to promote engagement with the music serve as a sufficient surrogate to the part played by the family in fostering interest and hands-on engagement with the music. This in turn raises issues about the efficacy and appropriateness of a demand led approach in all circumstances, touching on how to provide equality of access to the traditions for all children. Interviewees expressed similar perspectives

on the importance of early engagement for children with the music, ready access to learning (i.e. not having to travel far from home to learn), children being able to play locally with their peers and the availability of venues for participating in playing traditional music aside from public houses.

Addressing the absence of traditional music requires a strong focus on the creation of scenarios of enticement to engage and participate in the music. Enticement has to extend beyond offering facilities or access (e.g. transmission and instruments) to incorporate facilitation. An EU report in 2012 that examines best practice in promoting wider public participation in culture stressed the importance of the simultaneous application of both demand and supply measures, providing a push-pull impact, particularly in areas of low engagement with arts.¹¹⁶ This accords with the role played by evangelists in energising traditional music in various guises in Fingal highlighted in this research, whether in starting up sessions or establishing branches of CCE, music schools and festivals. Mullen (2016, p.14) noted that in the early years of DEIS the ACI maintained a corps of local advisers to assist in the development of project proposals at ground level, but this approach was discontinued about 2011.

The literature identifies many issues that affect a person's engagement with the arts, generally common to many art forms, including the importance of ease of access by public transport highlighted by Whiting and Carter (2016), recalling also that this is a point highlighted by the Director of the SEAC. Adopting an ecosystem approach encompasses understanding and addressing the non-musical impacts as well as the artistic related elements impacting on a music system, many of which, like public transport, are outside the remit of local authority Arts Offices. This highlights the importance of pursuing the incorporation of cross-cutting issues within arts plans and strategies linked to cross agency commitment to delivering measures.

¹¹⁶ Report on 'Policies and Good Practices in the public arts and in cultural institutions to promote better access to and wider participation in culture': conclusions pp. 107 & 108: EU report omc-report-access-to-culture_en.pdf (accessed on 29/9/2021)

Differentiating strategically between ‘demand’ and ‘need’

The allocation of public funding by the ACI and FCC often takes the form of support schemes in which interested parties who meet set criteria are invited to apply, submitting proposals into a competitive decision-making process. Procedures to assess and rank applications are in place. This method of service delivery is used widely by official arts bodies and in other sectors of Government. It is a convenient and transparent administrative process to pursue, and schemes can be tailored over time, including adjusting the quantum of funding available and the target audience, to reflect funding demands being made and other priorities of funding bodies. However, such demand-led approaches are open to criticism that well-established groups, artists or geographic locations with a strong (traditional) arts presence or infrastructure are in a stronger position to attract funding, in contrast to locations where an art form is weak, where champions are thin on the ground or in the absence of any form of established group such as a community of musical practice described by Kenny (2016). Government schemes relying on competitive processes to distribute funding often include special provisions for disadvantaged areas, such as in the delivery of education services.

FCC’s explanations on how it supports public participation in traditional arts, reflecting practices adopted by the ACI, have already been alluded to, in summary: the Council promotes arts broadly rather than any particular type or form, responding as best it can to specific demands. In the case of traditional music, it targets funding where it believes there are known exponents of the music; it says it knows the traditional arts community in Fingal and is satisfied with the current provision, confirming also that there has not been a demand for community traditional music facilitators. In an environment of limited resources, relying on parties most interested in the art form identifying themselves is understandable. Yet the clear weaker manifestation of participation in traditional music in Dublin 15 must be seen as disappointing. Explaining why this is the case requires a deeper understanding of local interest, knowledge of, and attitudes to traditional music—part of the general deficit of hard information on traditional

music at community level identified in this research. Anticipating why it should continue to be the case is a different matter, raising fundamental questions about the nature and ambition of official actions to promote art forms in circumstances such as observed in Dublin 15 relating to traditional music. These include to what extent ‘need’ should be considered relevant in the absence of a demand for services being articulated and whether the state should proactively encourage recreational performance engagement of traditional music in communities where it can be shown to have a very small footprint and low visibility, also raising the issue of whether traditional arts should be treated differently to other art forms in public policy so that every child gets an opportunity to experience participation in art forms unique to Irish heritage and culture?

Given the extent of the dichotomy between east and west Fingal in terms of engagement with traditional music, official bodies responsible for public funding of arts, starting with the Department of Arts, need to consider these and similar strategic questions in the first instance as part of policy formulation, which in turn will guide action programmes determined by the ACI and FCC. These issues also have currency in the context of achieving arts and culture objectives of *Project Ireland 2040*. The Department should also consider the need for specific provision in legislation for broad public recreational participation within community contexts in the arts similar to sport, whether structural or functional adjustments are needed in regard to existing official organisational arrangements to successfully develop participation in traditional music (and other art forms where relevant) at community level, and how interagency co-ordination will be addressed in practice (see section 6.4.2). Reflection on these strategic issues is also pertinent to the process of elaborating a new vision for the place of traditional music in communities previously referred to.

Responding to significant demographic change

The major demographic and social changes experienced in Fingal over the past four decades have had a profound impact on the county and on the delivery of local public services. Ongoing

change in communities is a feature that must be contended with more than ever today and an acceptance that one-size fits all approaches to problems, including fostering traditional arts in the community, is too limiting. Titon (2020, p.157) argues that ‘flow and flux’ is a better descriptor of the prevailing situation pertaining within music ecosystems, such that in place of a traditional culture/heritage management methodology widely employed today, an adaptive management approach is required in which resilience strategies are implemented to manage on-going disturbance and change. As already noted, Titon’s preferred approach includes engaging and working with people in the community in ground-up initiatives, specifically targeting desired outcomes and evaluating progress. In business management literature Heifetz and Linsky (2002) distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges, associating technical work with routine management and adaptive management with leadership: ‘What makes a problem technical is not that it is trivial; but simply that its solution already lies within the organization’s (sic) repertoire. In contrast, adaptive pressures force the organisation to change, lest it decline’ (2002, p.18). Thus, making instruments available to prospective musicians is a technical challenge, while encouraging and facilitating young adults who learned to play as children to continue to engage with the music in their communities requires an adaptive perspective.

Although adopting Titon’s recommendation would be a significant step in music ecosystem management, interrogating the case for adaptive management is beyond the scope of this research. However, from my own personal managerial experience, I am aware that a fundamental requirement in pursuing adaptive management in the first instance is acceptance of the need for and value of changed ways of working that entails flexibility and creativity, clarity on strategies and plans, and the availability of relevant information to inform decision making. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic itself provided salutary evidence of the importance of developing resilience in arts communities. Although the presentational arts in general have been very negatively impacted on during the pandemic it is important to note that

almost all traditional music teaching groups in Fingal demonstrated resilience by delivering classes online while the SEAC delivered online both transmission and performance events on a regular basis.

6.6 Conclusion

To address the challenges identified in this research to the practice of Irish traditional music in Fingal requires a new vision for the performance of the music within communities and new approaches to achieving the vision. The vision, along with practical measures to deliver it, must address in particular the ability of recreational players to perform in local settings; the availability of suitable performance spaces; learning and performance opportunities for young players; the visibility of the music to the wider community and how the local public could be engaged in the art form, including fostering the music in areas and communities where the music has very low visibility; and, not least, addressing negative impacts of demographic change. Existing official support policies for traditional music are mainly directed at the full-time musician, on building audiences and on the provision of infrastructure, while little attention is given to the recreational side. Acknowledging the role of the recreational player and promoting research and narratives to explore the future of participatory music as distinct from presentational music in communities is a necessary first step. The absence of detailed information on the state of the music at community level is itself a major impediment to addressing the challenges highlighted in the research. Primary legislation covering the arts differs significantly from sports legislation. The ACI is tasked in legislation with stimulating public interest in the arts, leaving to the Council to define what that should involve, while in the case of sport the promotion of amateur participation is specifically provided for, attendant upon which the Sports Council of Ireland has adopted policies and schemes encouraging the public of all ages to engage actively in their chosen sport.

Current published policies and plans for the development of the arts promulgated by the ACI and FCC are all expressed in high-level terms, focused on the needs of the full-time artist and

commensurate with the needs of the professional arts community, in which wider community engagement is mainly through attendance at presentational style events. In general, the plans contain little by way of targeted actions, while traditional music has very little visibility in them. The ACI's *Traditional Arts Policy and Strategy 2018* provides some narrative beyond its parent current ten-year strategy about the value of the traditions and challenges facing the full-time artist, but again little is provided on issues affecting recreational involvement in the tradition in the community. Fingal's current arts plan is couched in similar high-level terms, again with no specific commitments provided for or provisions in relation to traditional music. Issues perceived as impeding the development of traditional music are not articulated and no funding envelope is identified. It is, thus, difficult to see how national themes of wellbeing, equality, opportunity and creativity underpinning *Project Ireland 2040* or like programmes are being adequately addressed in the published official plans and documents. While full-time artists and infrastructure are priorities, the extent to which these policies alone can lead to wider public participation in the arts is not evident.

A significant weakness in the present public arrangements for promoting arts is that issues impacting traditional music are not articulated and debated publicly resulting, among other things, in the lack of a clear vision for the role and development of traditional music involving recreational players in twenty-first century urban and rural community settings in Ireland. Such debate must be political in nature and its absence represents a significant lacuna and needs to be addressed as a priority. There is also a need to adopt a more active approach to encouraging participation in the music in those areas where the visibility of the music is low. Supply side measures like providing significant arts infrastructure, funding festivals, tuition and instruments are important in fostering arts in modern society. But demand side measures such as the presence of facilitators are also critical to fostering participation, as pointed out in an EU report and demonstrated in all locations in Fingal in the past four decades where traditional music has flourished.

Policies formulated without associated specific delivery strategies are directionless, can mask challenges and scale of delivery required, obviate the need to state ambition and render impact measurement meaningless. Titon's recommendation to adopt adaptive management strategies, including engaging and working with people in the community in ground-up initiatives, specifically targeting desired outcomes and evaluating progress, could represent a significant step forward in developing arts management across the board in Ireland. Understanding the development of traditional music within a sustainability context, including adopting a life-cycle perspective that simultaneously comprehends learning and having practical attractive opportunities for performing the music in public with others remains a vital outcome to be achieved.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the research project and how it was undertaken, starting with recalling the research questions, academic approach and methodologies adopted. In relation to research outcomes, the chapter recaps key conclusions regarding the practice of traditional music in Fingal and how interviewees experience the music in their lives. Challenges to the practice of traditional music identified in the research are recalled, shortcomings in official policies and measures to address the challenges are outlined and recommendations are advanced to resolve impediments and develop the music ecosystem. Relevant literature has guided and informed the research throughout, identified in chapter two and at key points in subsequent chapters. This chapter concludes with observations on the contribution of this research to literature and on further work to augment and elaborate on this project.

Irish traditional music in Fingal today is in a considerably stronger position than was the case forty years ago when an upsurge in interest in the music in the county, mirroring a national trend, became manifest. Despite many challenges attendant on the practice of the music today, the collected musicians, groups and interested public represent a strong foundation upon which to promote new measures to widen public engagement with the music and underpin its sustainability as an integral and valued community art form. The research underscores two overarching challenges in this regard: addressing the absence of the music in significant areas of the county and fostering a life-cycle perspective to develop the practice of traditional music in communities. Almost unique among counties in Ireland, Fingal has an arts centre that prioritises the traditional arts while the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, serving as an occasion for musicians from across the county to come together, is one of the few such festivals held annually on the east coast of the country. For convenience, Appendix 7.1 summarises

issues emerging in this research that impact or influence the practice of Irish traditional music in Fingal presented within Schippers and Grant's (2016) five-domain music ecosystem analytical framework.

7.2 This research project

I undertook this research project to establish the current practice of Irish traditional music in community life in Fingal. A number of relatively strong but localised pockets of traditional music playing exist today, mainly on the eastern side, much of it developed over the past forty years. In other locations, including some heavily populated areas on the western side, engagement with and visibility of the music is much less. Drawing on Titon (2020), I adopted a music ecosystem approach, complemented by the application of a five-domain analytical framework posited by Schippers and Grant (2016) to guide analysis of the circumstances and forces shaping the practice of the music in the county, which I found to be a most useful research tool. My experience of living and playing traditional music in Fingal also brought an important dimension to the project, involving undertaking research in my own backyard, so to speak, an insider undertaking a role more often associated with an outsider. As noted in section 2.3.1, I wanted to adopt both emic and etic perspectives to optimise my research outcomes. The project challenge was phrased in the context of three interconnected research questions:

1. What is the physical and social infrastructure for traditional music in North County Dublin?
2. Who are the stakeholders in the networks that support music making in the area?
3. How can funding and other supports be best used to consolidate and develop music making and participation in traditional music in the area?

An important aspect in addressing the questions, in effect constituting a fourth one, was probing the interconnectivity and interplay of the questions to gain a deeper, system wide perspective of traditional music. The research project has answered the questions posed. A résumé of the

responses is provided in the next section. To help ensure successful completion of the research, I undertook a programme of personal learning at the outset.

The project involved a mix of desk-based research and in-depth fieldwork, entailing both quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Interviews with key members of the Irish traditional musical community—individuals actively involved as players, event organisers, teachers and policy makers—provided critical information to the project through shining a light on lived experience of the music. Support data, gathered mainly through desk research, observation, selected readings and an online public survey, provided valuable background and contextual material. Reflecting Finnegan’s (1989) seminal work on amateur musicians, the emphasis in this research, grounded in fieldwork, is on what people do in engaging with Irish traditional music. Readings in ethnomusicology, the primary field of research, and other fields including music ecology and community music served to frame and inform the project. The adoption of a music ecosystem approach, advocated by Titon and others, facilitated gaining an understanding of traditional music practice in Fingal and assisted in analysis. The imposition of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions during the course of the project afforded me an opportunity to experience both face-to-face and online interview processes.

7.3 Fingal and Irish traditional music

Historical references attest to the many social changes, upheavals and events that have shaped Fingal over millennia. The past half century has seen profound changes in terms of population growth and lifestyle. The surge in interest in playing traditional music in recent decades was reinforced by the presence in communities of some local players who had continued a long tradition of Irish music playing in the county. The upsurge has levelled off, while a decline in engagement in some locations once noted for the music is evident. The visibility of the tradition in significant parts of the county remains low but recent developments in transmission opportunities in some of these locations are positive.

Responding to the first research question (physical and social infrastructure), the presence of the SEAC in Naul and the continuation of events such as the annual Skerries Traditional Music Weekend are important today, serving to sustain and strengthen a series of localised communities despite ongoing demographic change. Although of greater physical size, the Draíocht arts centre in west Fingal has a limited profile in relation to Irish traditional music. The establishment of Scoil Séamus Ennis in Ballyboughal and the promotion of traditional arts activities associated with the Scoil from the 1990s were pivotal in propelling the uplift in the practice of traditional music. The migration of musicians into the county has been critical to all of these developments, and there is some evidence within transmission processes of the tradition being embedded. The SEAC, six branches of CCÉ, some general music schools and individual teachers along with festival workshops provide instruction in instrumental playing and together represent a significant enhancement to transmission opportunities compared with twenty years ago. The Skerries Traditional Music Weekend provides an opportunity for traditional musicians in Fingal to meet where, otherwise, low levels of contacts between the different cohorts of players are evident. The revival of mumming in Ballyboughal and surrounding areas also remains a positive feature today.

In regard to the second research question (stakeholders and networks), the traditional music ‘community’ in Fingal comprises many small groups generally associated with, respectively, session networks, social circles, CCÉ branches and music schools and geographic locations. While horizontal links between the disparate groups are weak, stronger vertical connections exist linking groups to the broader traditional community, such as CCÉ branches to the parent organisation and branches from other counties, or links to nationally recognised festivals and events. Although there is evidence of recent steps to promote traditional music in areas of high and growing populations (e.g. Dublin 15, Swords and Balbriggan), the dominant position of low visibility and engagement in these areas remains, raising questions about the efficacy of

current approaches to promote the music and the relationship such communities have with Irish traditional music today.

On the third research question (use of public supports to develop traditional music), extant policies and plans of the ACI and FCC primarily address the needs of professional artists, infrastructure provision and audience development, together providing an arts industry bias to support for traditional music. There is no vision for recreational participatory music playing within communities. Excepting the SEAC, measures to promote traditional music rely heavily on locally driven actions within communities which, depending on the demographic and socio-economic mix, may or may not have the benefit of individuals providing the necessary leadership and skill set—the evangelists—living locally. It means the availability of traditional music transmission and performance initiatives from one location to the next can be quite hit-and-miss affairs, serendipity being a major determinant. As noted in section 6.4.2, a partnership initiative involving FCC and Music Generation to enhance music education for children and young people is being finalised.

Even where there is access to learning traditional music, particularly on the eastern side of the county, recreational playing still faces many challenges. Limited availability of suitable playing venues is one issue; another is that while children can play music together when members of a club, such as a CCÉ branch, few young adults were observed participating in sessions or other performance arrangements and, similarly, fewer female than male musicians play in pub sessions. Furthermore, while some interviewees flagged the need for it, there was no evidence offered of debate taking place by any party on the role of participatory performance of traditional music in the community today or on overcoming barriers to its wider appeal. Nor was there a noticeable sense among musicians that Fingal is an important location for traditional music, or that it could be so. The absence of such debate may arise for a combination of reasons, including a view that the music is a minority interest in the county. The low level

of contact between the disparate interests, networks and groups engaged in teaching and playing the music may also contribute to the silence. Even in those areas that enjoy the presence of a relatively significant number of players there is often low visibility of the tradition to the wider public. Word of mouth still forms an important conduit in accessing the music while, more generally, the absence of hard information on interest in and engagement with the music in Fingal, remains problematic.

Although the ten stories presented in chapter five of this dissertation relay personal experiences, there is much that is shared or common among interviewees despite being drawn from different age cohorts, geographic locations and musical trajectories. The stories of other interviewees listed in Appendix 1.1 bear many similarities to the ten reported on in detail and have contributed significantly to this research. In all instances, regular engagement with traditional music constitutes a significant and important component in interviewees' personal and social lives, whether through playing for personal pleasure, participation in performance or as organisers of activities or events. It represents a significant commitment by each person to the music as an art form, as a community activity and as a contribution to Ireland's unique cultural heritage. For most, engaging in playing encompasses dedication to continuous, life-long learning realised through home practice, local performance, listening to recordings, and attending festivals, workshops, and concerts. Few interviewees directly linked their interest in Irish traditional music to a more general interest in Irish language and cultural activities, although for some it may be the case if account is taken of those who speak Irish or who engage in other traditional arts. While a clear family association with music was noted in those areas where the music is strongest, there was no single context that might be considered the most beneficial to fostering traditional music. Early awareness of music in the home, either heard from a parent or other relative playing, on the radio / television, or through Irish dancing classes, emerged in the research as significant; the sound of the music is embedded and

normalised in children's lives from an early age. However, data from the online survey suggests that parents who are engaged in Irish traditional music are more likely to seek opportunities for their children to learn and play.

There is much that the interviewees find attractive about Irish traditional music in Fingal today. For some it is an ability to participate in challenging music playing, others lean towards the social aspects of performance occasions, while contributing to community benefit features too. Very often players are comfortable in their local playing context, but many are less sanguine about the presence of the music in their communities and believe measures are necessary to ensure its continuity, identifying challenges reported in this research. Other than in relation to the SEAC and the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, most interviewees said they were not aware of official policies or measures to support or deepen interest in traditional music. However, this should not be interpreted as a lack of interest on anyone's part but may arise because official policies are stated at a high level without links to specific traditional music activities occurring in their communities. The life-long commitment of interviewees to the music noted above and their willingness and generosity in contributing to this research reflects a common desire to broaden the reach of the tradition within their communities. A response by 176 traditional musicians to an online survey is an indicator of the improved popularity of traditional music in Fingal compared with the position forty years ago.

7.4 Overarching challenges

Two overarching challenges frame the future development of traditional music in Fingal. The first is to raise the profile and access to the music in those areas where it remains weak, i.e. primarily on the western side of the county. The second is to foster a life-cycle approach in developing the practice of traditional music within community cultural settings, where opportunities for learning, participatory performance and other interactions with the music form co-exist locally, based on sustainability principles posited by Titon (2009, pp.122-124).

Although important, providing learning opportunities and access to instruments or developing opportunities for presentational performance by professional musicians are not sufficient steps on their own to secure a local traditional music culture. Drawing on Frith who asserted: ‘a music industry does not create a music culture; rather a music culture leads to the development of a music industry’ (2013, p.1), the road ahead must address how a local traditional music culture, widely understood and eagerly engaged with, can be fostered, including beyond those areas where the music is perceived to be strongest today. As a first step, the practice of Irish traditional music in Fingal requires the formulation of a new vision for the performance of the music within communities and new approaches to achieving it based on sustainable principles. The articulation of practical measures to deliver the vision, involving public consultation and stakeholder support, would include: community contexts for the performance of the music; the availability of suitable public performance spaces for recreational playing; learning and performance opportunities for young players; fostering playing the music in those areas where the music has low visibility; addressing how to engage the wider public in the art form to a greater degree; and, not least, building resilience to counter inevitable future negative impacts like demographic change.

Interviewees believe that enabling children and young people to hear and engage at a young age with traditional instruments and the sound associated with each is vital. Instrumental classes for children need to be complemented by regular session playing with peers in a fun, non-competitive environment. Learning to play traditional music while in primary school was a common feature of several interviewees, but despite national recognition of the importance of learning music in formal education, reports to this research suggest opportunities to learn in school remain limited, with transmission reliant to a significant extent on informal educational settings. Children engaging in traditional music particularly in primary school is important. How young players in their late teenage years can participate, including in transitioning from

child learner to adult player, is also a significant topic requiring action. Without attractive contexts and access to appealing local performance spaces to play with peer groups, many young players disengage, with only a minority continuing to play into adulthood reported. Responses to the online survey suggests a higher proportion of female musicians do not play in public. Participation in sessions across the county, with the exception of sessions run by CCÉ branches for children, mainly involves players in older age cohorts. Interviewees also reported few opportunities to play at events within the community.

Addressing the absence of Irish music in those areas of the county where it has a very low presence represents a considerable challenge. Linked to this is countering falling engagement with the music due to significant demographic change. The research identified the importance of ground-up initiatives involving evangelists or facilitators to support and energise the development of the music in the absence of local activists, many of whom were blow-ins in the first instance. Access to learning also needs to be local, parents are unlikely to travel across the county for lessons, nor can peer student interaction, as in session playing, be successfully developed in such circumstances. The value of traditional music festivals like those in Skerries and Rush in providing opportunities for musicians to meet has also been noted. Small steps such as actively programming occasions within traditional music festivals for local musicians to play together (as distinct from presentational opportunities for professional artists) and the inclusion of local musicians in prominent performance opportunities in any type of local festival would be important in fostering a stronger traditional music culture.

Within its structure, the ACI has a team responsible for the traditional arts, helping to translate policies into action programmes and delivering support schemes to eligible clients. Providing similar arrangements at county level could serve a number of purposes including: helping to co-ordinate and, where necessary, energise interest in locations where the music and potential evangelists are absent; assisting in the collection and dissemination of information about the

tradition and how to engage with it (next paragraph); assisting in building links between the disparate groups currently constituting the traditional music community; and encouraging narrative about the place of local traditional music playing, overcoming impediments to its practice and assisting in the creation and promulgation of a new vision for Irish traditional music in Fingal communities.

As a means of building greater cohesion between the disparate networks, groups and communities engaging in Irish traditional music activities, and to help sustain links between them and the wider community, the provision of basic web-based information online, regularly updated and easily accessible by the general public, could be an important step. A similar recommendation was made by Jack Talty (2020, p.21) in regard to the creation of a central national information hub for professional traditional artists. Information being disseminated could include details on transmission arrangements and availability, session locations and other local performance and events arising. A more advanced system could contain historic material on traditional music in the county, information on stakeholders and players and provision for a blog on matters of interest relating to traditional music. To host such an information hub an independent body such as the SEAC might be best positioned to undertake the lead role. In addition to recognising Séamus Ennis's legacy and association with the county, public recognition of past and present players of note associated with the county, such as Mrs. Terese Nulty (section 4.3.1), could also enhance the image of local traditional music and contribute to promoting the message of a creative Fingal.

Proximity to home is important for most players in participating in session playing. Pub sessions remain the main playing outlet, although not everyone welcomes that position. Securing suitable performance locations, including alternatives to pubs, can be problematic. Pubs can be unsuitable for players under eighteen years of age. In more built-up areas, pub owners appear less willing to accommodate recreational session playing. Linking tourist and

commercial opportunities to such sessions can bring economic benefits to pub proprietors but can also create environments which are noisy and difficult for recreational players to participate in. Narratives about the importance of Irish traditional music to communities are often set in contexts of commercial opportunities and tourism and less so on personal and community social and cultural benefits, such as the formation of social networks, contribution to creativity, the availability of home-grown musicians to perform at community events and local employment, such as in teaching. Playing traditional music needs to be recognised as an important pursuit by individuals and of benefit to the community, not just for its value to tourism or other commercial interests. Some interviewees willingly contribute much voluntary effort in support of the music, especially through performance and transmission activities. But the personal contribution of organisers of traditional music related activities and events can be very substantial. Volunteering can be expected in organising community activities, and traditional music is no different, but overreliance on it also represents a risk to the sustainability of a local traditional music ecosystem.

Specifically recognising participatory as distinct from presentational performance, such that it is promoted in its own right by official bodies responsible for the arts, is very important. To achieve it may require specific inclusion in primary arts legislation similar to that provided in sports legislation. Alternative approaches could include the Department of Arts formally adopting and promulgating a national policy on public participation (not simply engagement) in the arts which, among other things, would also support key objectives under *Project Ireland 2040* in fostering creativity within Irish communities. Public policies for traditional music in communities need to reflect a new vision for participatory music in the community suggested above, while locally targeted action plans also need to reflect the life-cycle perspective referred to earlier, where citizens can learn and then participate in playing the music in their locality.

7.5 Contribution to scholarship

This research adds to scholarship on how Irish traditional music is practiced in a significantly urbanised, changed and changing community today. It adds to an otherwise under-investigated arena of musical activity, i.e. the practice of Irish traditional music at community level where recreational players are to the fore; it contributes to an understanding of Irish traditional arts policy formulation, including the impact of an increased focus over time on a presentational music paradigm; and the study also provides a practical application of the use of an ecosystem analytical framework. The research complements other inquiry into aspects of Irish traditional music in community contexts: Cotter's (2016) examination of the transformation of the traditional music scene in Ennis, Co Clare from the 1950s onwards, illustrated the importance of the presence of leaders serving as evangelists, provided through a combination of local and outsider musicians. The emphasis on transmission was also an important feature illustrated in both studies. However, unlike Fingal, the revival in Ennis coincided with a national drive by the nascent CCÉ organisation to preserve and revive traditional music nationally, then considered to be dying out. At play also in Ennis was a considerable institutionalising of music transmission, evident also in Fingal but where performance in sessions was also a strong catalyst in the initial revival period. The Fingal research also supports Cawley (2013b) on the role of families in transmitting Irish traditional music. However, the social change in Doolin, Co Clare described by Kaul (2009), attendant on an influx of blow-in musicians and the development of traditional music tourism, was not discernible in Fingal where musicians settled primarily for work reasons, illustrating a difference between the ecosystems for traditional music between the east and west coasts of the country. This research also contributes to scholarship by adopting ecosystem concepts to help understand and analyse the practice of the music in the research area.

With a focus on Fingal, a place that has not previously received scholarly attention, the findings offer a trove of further research options that can deepen understandings of traditional music within communities and advance measures to enhance participation in playing the music. Both academic and applied research approaches deserve consideration. Two priority topics for further research to advance the subject matter of this dissertation are important:

- 1. New vision:** Research to underpin the development of a new vision for traditional music and recreational playing within communities, including urban communities, deepening public involvement with the music generally and increasing engagement by younger players in local recreational performance. The research would include:
 - a. establishing the level of public interest in the music at county level,
 - b. addressing challenges to recreational playing identified in this research
 - c. examining the availability and utilisation of suitable performance spaces, including public infrastructure and other options
 - d. developing comparators in other counties in Ireland, ,
 - e. addressing the absence of traditional music in areas such as those identified in this research
 - f. undertaking a critical review of transmission arrangements
 - g. developing models for collaboration and partnership arrangements between official bodies and community interests, taking on board the principle of diversity highlighted by Titon
- 2. Policy Making:** Research should examine directions in policy making at both national and county levels, including:
 - a. providing for the application of more strategic and adaptive management processes advocated by Titon, based on sustainability principles, including the development of resilience for art forms within communities.
 - b. identifying best practice for target setting and measuring outcomes in relation to public expenditure in arts within communities
 - c. considering models and processes based on international best practice
 - d. addressing integration of traditional music policy (applies to other art forms also) within the arts sector with complementary national community objectives relating in particular to access to playing music and promoting individual creativity.

While national narratives routinely applaud the strength of Irish traditional music today in terms of the many successful professional artists, the high number of young people learning, and the international acclaim now afforded the music, this research has sought to refocus attention on how the music is actually practiced by local musicians within their communities, enabling a fuller picture on the practice of the music to be presented. In so doing, current official narratives and support policies for the music are challenged and the importance and value of encouraging and supporting participatory performance within communities as a leisure pursuit, accessible and open to everyone, is advanced.

Appendices

1.1 List of individuals interviewed during the research

1.2 List of postgraduate training courses attended

1.3 Papers presented at conferences

1.4 Sample information note provided to interviewees

4.1 Extracts from National Children's Folklore Collection

4.2 Analysis of responses to online survey

6.1 Parliamentary Question reference no. 33495/21 re sport

6.2 Letter of 2 April 2021 to Fingal County Council

7.1 Summary of issues impacting the practice of Irish traditional music in Fingal

Appendix 1.1: List of individuals interviewed

The appendix under lists alphabetically all individuals interviewed during the course of this research, including the date of the interview. A short biography on each individual is also provided with the exception of the ten people reported on in chapter 5 of the dissertation.

List of individuals interviewed

1. **Victor Byrne:** I interviewed Victor on 9/3/2020 in his home in Swords. Victor grew up in rural Ballymun, attending St. Pappin's local national school. His singing ability was recognised early on in school. Through attending fleadhanna with his older brothers, Victor became interested in playing traditional music. Now living in Swords, Victor continues to perform regularly in Howth and Dublin City. Among other things, Victor provided information on learning traditional music in the 1970/1980s and on session playing in the Howth area over the decades.

2. **Catherine Boothman:** I met Catherine on 1/11/2018 in the premises of the Arts Council of Ireland, Merrion Square, Dublin 2. Catherine is an official in the ACI. Paul Flynn, Irish traditional arts officer of the Council also attended the meeting. The meeting addressed a wide range of issues relating to the Council's policies and supports for traditional music, including the national role of the Council, arts development priorities, modalities and support structures in place for traditional music, the availability of data sets (including the national longitudinal study *Growing Up in Ireland* and behaviour and attitude surveying) and links to the Department of Arts and local authorities (including the framework for collaboration between local authorities and the ACI and county arts profiles, including Fingal County Council).

3. **Mary Capplis:** I interviewed Mary on 10/3/2020 in the headquarters of Louth County Council (LCC). Mary is the acting Arts Officer in LCC. She is a tin whistle player and a member of the Oriel Traditional Orchestra. Mary provided information on LCC's programmes for supporting the traditional arts, music in schools and the Council's general approach to encouraging engagement with the arts. Mary also provided information on partnership arrangements between the Council and local stakeholders and on adult participation in traditional music through her involvement with the Oriel traditional Orchestra.

4. **Denis Carolan:** I interviewed Denis online on 16/11/2020. Denis is a fiddle player living in Balbriggan, having moved there in 2004. He plays in a weekly session in the Central Bar in the town that includes Kieran Rice (banjo), Seamus Waters (fiddle), Mary Naughton (accordion) and Mick Blount (guitar). Denis provided information on

traditional music and musicians in the Balbriggan area. He stressed, *inter alia*, the need for a conservatory model as an incubation process for young players similar to examples he is familiar with in Britany, incorporating ideas from social capital development concepts (posited by Jurgen Habermas) to strengthen the place of traditional music generally in the locality and more widely in Fingal.

5. **Denis Collins:** I interviewed Denis on 18/11/2020 by phone. Denis is a flute player living in Donabate. His parents are from Kerry, and he spent the first 11 years of his life in London. He started whistle with Brendan Mulkere at 7 or 8 years old. While on holiday in Kerry he came across a flute belonging to his great uncle, encouraging him to take up flute back in London. Returning to Kerry with his family, he continued playing flute on a self-taught basis. Denis's father plays accordion, his uncle Ger Collins was taught by Padraig O'Keeffe and other members of the family also played. Playing regularly in family house sessions motivated him to continue playing. He moved to Dublin in 1986 to study in DCU and met Séan MacPhilíbín, then working in that college, who introduced him to sessions in Ballyboughal and Naul. Denis said that working as a pilot often means playing occasionally in sessions rather than on a weekly basis. He normally plays in either Martin's Bar in Rush or the Snug Bar in Skerries on Thursday nights and the Friday/Sunday session in Joe Mays. Denis provided information on the development of traditional music in Fingal over a number of decades.
6. **Sally Corr:** See chapter 5, section 5.2.3 of the dissertation.
7. **Liam Curran:** I interviewed Liam on 22/4/2019 in his home in Swords. Liam is a fiddle player originally from Co Kilkenny but has been living in Swords for over four decades. He comes from a musical family. He was the Principal of Oldtown primary school for most of his working life where he also taught tin whistle to students in the school. Among other things, Liam provided information on the practice of traditional music in the Swords and Oldtown areas from the 1980s and on the general development of the music from that period. He continues to play in sessions in Portmarnock and occasionally elsewhere in Fingal. See also section 4.3.4 in the dissertation for additional information on Liam.

8. **Joanne Cusack:** I interviewed Joanne on 24/3/2021 by phone. Joanne is from Swords and plays the button accordion, having started on an instrument belonging to her uncle. She attended Kinsealy CCÉ, including playing in bands and groups there. She says she chose the accordion having heard Sharon Shannon and a number of other female accordion players. Joanne holds a BA in Applied Music from DkIT and is currently a PhD candidate in Maynooth University. She plays an active role in the Fair Plé movement dedicated to improving the standing of female musicians in traditional music in line with their male counter parts. Joanne informed this research on a range of matters associated with performance of traditional music, including in relation to impediments to young people playing and challenges facing young female players engaging in local participatory performance. See also section 4.5.2 in the dissertation.
9. **Breda Dockrell:** I interviewed Breda on 26/2/2020 in her home in Donabate. Breda is from Donabate and continues to live there. Involved in community work and the arts more generally and having experienced the positive outcome of bringing her children to learn to play traditional music in Kinsealy branch of CCÉ, Breda and others established a new branch of CCÉ in Donabate in 2018. Breda provided information on setting up the organisation and the challenges that had to be overcome.
10. **Grace Dowling:** I interviewed Grace on 26/11/2020 by phone. Grace grew up in Rush and still lives there. She started as an Irish dancer when she was 3 years old. Her dancing school were associated with *Rinceoil* and she used to perform with them. Her parents are both musicians. She started playing the tin whistle and bodhran in *Rinceoil*. When she was about 9 years old she says she saw a girl playing the button accordion, was attracted to it and asked her father to let her have a go. She got her first lessons from Eimear Friel from Skerries, an accordion player in the *Rinceoil* organisation. She then engaged with John Regan and through him she joined Sean Treacy branch of CCÉ. Grace says she was initially reluctant to participate in competitions, but she enjoyed the bands and groups performing and that led to performing in trios (with Emer Toal and Niall Preston) and then solo competition. She won the U18 accordion competition in Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 2009. Grace plays occasionally with Clodagh Barnwell from Oldtown and Gerry Weldon (guitar) from *Rinceoil*. Grace provided, among other things, information on challenges to playing facing young people and to women while rearing a young family.

11. **Naoise Drohan:** I interviewed Naoise on 23/1/2021 by phone. Naoise is from Malahide and learned to play the flute in her local Malahide branch of CCÉ. Naoise recently qualified as a nurse and now works in one of Dublin's busiest general hospitals. To continue playing beyond 18 years old, Naoise believes that having peer friends / contacts is critical for young players, as otherwise knowing where and who to link in with can be very difficult. Naoise also provided information on attending weekly CCÉ classes and sessions and on challenges to continuing to play, including in relation to female players.
12. **Paul Flynn:** I met Paul on 1/11/2018 in the offices of the ACI. Paul is the Irish traditional arts officer in the ACI. Catherine Boothman of the Council also attended the meeting. The meeting addressed a wide range of issues relating to the Council's policies and supports for traditional music, including the national role of the Council, arts development priorities, modalities and support structures in place for traditional music, the availability of data sets (including the national longitudinal study Growing Up in Ireland and behaviour and attitude surveying) and links to the Department of Arts and local authorities (including the framework for collaboration between local authorities and the ACI and county arts profiles, including Fingal County Council).
13. **Joe Foley:** I interviewed Joe on 26/11/2020 by phone. Joe is from Cobh, Co. Cork and plays the button accordion. He has been living in Blanchardstown for about 45 years. He normally plays in the weekly session in Myos pub in Castleknock as well as for a number of local community events. He worked with Donal O'Sullivan and others to establish the Slí Dhála CCÉ branch in Castleknock in 2015. Joe provided information on the standing of traditional music in Dublin 15, including sessions, events and musicians.
14. **Michael (Mick) Gavin:** I interviewed Mick on 22/1/2019 in the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre. Mick grew up in Balbriggan. His father Paddy Gavin set up the first CCÉ branch in the town in 1974. Mick and his siblings played traditional music. Mick plays wooden flute and in recent years he has been concentrating on playing the button accordion. Mick provided information in relation to the founding of the Balbriggan CCÉ branch and the practice of traditional music in Fingal from the 1970s to 1990s, including

players and events as well as providing photographs. See also sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 in the dissertation.

15. **Jim Grant:** See chapter 5, section 5.2.9 of the dissertation.

16. **Bill Haneman:** See chapter 5, section 5.2.7 of the dissertation.

17. **Kathleen Hannigan:** I interviewed Kathleen on 9/4/2021 and 3/6/2021 by phone. Kathleen is an official of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. Kathleen provided responses to questions I posed to the Department. She provided information on national policies for arts, including Irish traditional music; on structural arrangements in arts policy formulation and promotion; and on the role of the Department more generally in the development of arts in Ireland.

18. **Joe Hughes:** I interviewed Joe on 7/12/2021 by phone. Joe is a button accordion player who teaches in a number of CCÉ branches in Fingal. He and his siblings Mairead and Treasa are heavily involved in transmission activities in the county. He also leads a céilí band comprising mainly musicians from Fingal playing regularly at festivals and set dancing events. He has been chairman of Kinsealy CCÉ for over 20 years. Joe provided information on the establishment of the Kinsealy branch and on a range of traditional music activities and the transmission process in Fingal. He also provided information on engagement with traditional music in Balbriggan, where he lives.

19. **Mairead Hughes:** I interviewed Mairead on 6/12/2021 by phone. Mairead, banjo and mandolin player, together with her siblings, is involved in transmission activities in the county and currently teaches in Balbriggan. In addition to information on traditional music in Balbriggan, Mairead provided observations on the availability and engagement of teachers by CCÉ branches. She also provided observations on young players learning music, including on the absence of a music social scene for them, the impact of competition on their continued engagement with the music and issues regarding students performing Irish traditional music in the Leaving Certificate Examination.

20. **Jim Jackman:** I interview Jim on 25/11/2020 by phone. Jim grew up in Cabra, Dublin. He played a recorder when young and took up the tin whistle as an adult learner. He started attending a CCÉ session in Dunboyne about 13/14 years ago. Jim says he gets a lot of his tunes from YouTube, counting Jackie Daly and John Sheahan among his preferred musicians. He started up a session in the Angler's rest pub about 12 years ago. The session transferred to Brady's pub in Dunboyne and then to Myos in Castleknock where it has been for the last 7 or 8 years. Jim provided information on traditional musicians who visited the session over the years and on the development of traditional music generally in Dublin 15.
21. **Carol Keane:** See chapter 5, section 5.2.5 of the dissertation
22. **Mary Keane:** See chapter 5, section 5.2.6 of the dissertation
23. **Dave Kennerney:** I interviewed Dave on 25/3/2021 by phone: Dave moved to Ballyboughal in 1990, having grown up in Cabra, Dublin. Dave played popular and folk musics in various band formats primarily in Dublin. He also played in the Tuesday session in O'Connor's pub in Ballyboughal in the 1990s. Dave provided information and views on the Ballyboughal traditional music scene from the perspective of a musician who had experience of playing an eclectic mix of music genres in the community.
24. **Fiona King:** I interviewed Fiona on 4/12/2021 by phone. Fiona's children learned to play traditional music in Malahide branch of CCÉ. Fiona served on the branch committee for a number of years. Fiona provided information on the operation of the branch. In particular, she provided information on maintaining young people's interest in playing the music, on developing Communities of Music Practice, the development of teacher / student relationships and fostering friendship networks to encourage continued engagement with the music.
25. **Terry Kirk:** See chapter 5, section 5.2.2 of the dissertation
26. **Ray Lawlor:** I interviewed Ray on 16/11/2020 by phone. Ray was born and lives in Rush. He plays the C#/D accordion, playing regularly in a session on Thursday

evenings in Martin's Bar (with Terry Kirk, Siobhan Fay (banjo), Tony Walsh (pipes), Denis Collins (flute), Seán MacPhilínbín (banjo) and occasionally joined by Fiachra (accordion) and Daracha MacPhilínbín (flute), Triona Tammenagi (fiddle) and Alish Quinn (accordion). He also plays the guitar and bodhran and is a noted local singer. Ray's wife, Fionnuala, is a fiddle player and his children also play. Ray was conferred with MA in traditional music performance by DkIT in 2018. His initial involvement in playing music was as a member of the Black Raven Pipe Band, coming across traditional music in the Drop Inn bar in Rush in his late teenage years. Terry Kirk gave Ray a lend of an accordion and wrote out two tunes for him to get him started playing and Ray proceeded on a mainly self-taught basis after that. Ray feels that although there is a limited interest in traditional music in Rush, there is a small cohort of strong players, but describes traditional music in Rush as disjointed. In addition to providing information on the general position relating to playing traditional music in the Rush area, Ray provided information on transmission options for children learning.

27. **Antóin Mac Gabhann:** I interviewed Antóin on 12/3/2019 in his home near Ashbourne, Co Meath. Antóin is a fiddle player, performer and teacher. Originally from Cavan, as a member of An Garda Shíochanna (Police Force) Antóin was posted to Balbriggan in the early 1970s and, together with Paddy Gavin, helped establish the first Balbriggan branch of CCÉ in 1974. He taught in the branch for a number of years. After settling in Ashbourne, he continued to teach fiddle over the decades, including to many students from Fingal. Antóin provided information on traditional music in Fingal before the 1980s period and on fostering circumstances favourable to the development of traditional music in local settings.

28. **Seán MacPhilínbín:** See chapter 5, section 5.2.10 of the dissertation.

29. **Jacqui Martin:** See chapter 5, section 5.2.4 of the dissertation.

30. **Morris (Mossie) Martin:** I interviewed Mossie on 22/7/2020 in a quiet corner of a public house in Sligo, close to where he lives. Mossie is a fiddle and tin whistle player, performer and teacher. Since 2006 he has been organising and teaching on a traditional music / music industry engagement course sponsored by the Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board. Mossie provided information on the course, including

in relation to music education for adults interested in traditional music. He provided information on community-based performance from recreational and professional contexts, and he also provided insights into measures open to official authorities to promote traditional music.

31. **Margaret (Mags) Maxwell:** chapter 5, section 5.2.8 of the dissertation.
32. **Emer McGowan:** I interviewed Emer on 4/12/2018 in her office in the Draíocht theatre in Blanchardstown, Dublin 15. Emer is the Director of the Draíocht. The information Emer provided related to the establishment and work of the theatre, programming policies and audience interests, including demand for Irish music performance.
33. **Paula Murray:** I interviewed Paula on 2/12/2021 by phone. Paula is a mandolin and button accordion player living in Malahide. Paula provided information on her daughter learning traditional music and on the challenges facing young people engaging with the music. She also provided information on female musicians playing in pub sessions and suggestions on how to strengthen their active participation in the music.
34. **Aisling Ní Ghiobéin:** I interviewed Aisling on 17/12/2020 by phone. Aisling is branch secretary of Craobh na Mara, CCÉ, Balbriggan, set up in 2017. Aisling grew up in Balbriggan and attended classes in the first Balbriggan branch of CCÉ. She recalled teachers Des Leach (whistle) and Monica and Ina Barnett from that branch. Her daughter Muireann Duff teaches flute in the new branch today. Aisling provided information on the establishment of the new CCÉ branch in Balbriggan and the challenges of providing music classes for young people in the area more generally.
35. **Jerry Nulty:** I interviewed Jerry on 9/12/2020 in his home in Swords. Jerry is the owner of a music school in Swords ‘Play Piano in Swords’ which he established in 2005. The school mainly teaches general music although there are a few students playing traditional music on piano and piano accordion. Jerry is the son of Terese Nulty (chapter 4) and played music from childhood, including traditional music on fiddle and later on accordion. He has considerable experience playing as a professional musician. As a teenager he had an opportunity to play with Séamus Ennis. He also played in sessions in Ballyboughal. Gerry provided information on his mother Terese Nally and family,

on running a music school and on the need for more joined-up thinking in relation to promoting the playing of music of any genre within the county. Gerry stresses the importance of all students developing their own playing styles and of encouraging creativity in playing.

36. **Martin Nulty:** I interviewed Martin on 20/11/2020 by phone. Martin was born and still resides near Lusk. A son of Terese Nulty, he plays the fiddle and also learned to play the piano. He recalled playing occasionally in the session in the Library in Balbriggan. His daughter also plays the fiddle and piano. Like his brother Gerry, he also played with Séamus Ennis. Martin provided information on his mother Terese and grandmother Christina Sheridan (née Kenny) – he has his grandmother’s fiddle. He also provided information on the traditional music scenes in Ballyboughal and surrounding areas in the 1970-1990s.

37. **John O’Brien:** I interviewed John on 18/11/2020 by phone. John lives in Castleknock. He grew up in Artane, a member of a family steeped in Irish traditional music. His father was Dinny O’Brien from Kilsallaghan and his brothers Mick (uilleann pipes) and the late Donacha (Denis) are known nationally for their music performance. John is a professional musician. He provided information on the local traditional music scene in Dublin 15, the activities, the musicians and activities. John is also finalising a music teaching programme for his local Gaelscoil to introduce children to traditional music and to experience playing it.

38. **Rory O’Byrne:** I met Rory 18/10/2018 in Malahide Castle. Rory is the Arts Officer in Fingal County Council. After the initial meeting on 18/10/2018, Rory provided substantial information on arts policies generally and in relation to Irish traditional music promoted by Fingal County Council on a number of occasions. This included providing responses to queries (see Appendix 6.2) and supplying reports and documentation relating to the arts in the county.

39. **Dave O’Connor:** I interviewed Dave on 22/1/2019 in the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre and on 2/1/2022 by phone. Dave is a well know local singer, song collector and musician from Garristown in Fingal. He has lived in Ballyboughal for most of his adult life. He also performs regularly in the Goilín singers club in Dublin. Dave served as a

local councillor on Fingal County Council, with an interest in promoting the arts, including the traditional arts. He has been collecting songs from and about Fingal for many years. He played a significant role in fostering the upsurge in interest in the traditional arts in Fingal. Dave provided much background information relating to traditional musicians and activities and events, including providing photographs of players. He continues to participate in the Fingal mummers and performs (singing) at various local events throughout Fingal.

40. **Michael (Mick) O'Connor:** I interviewed Mick on 11/3/2020 in his home in Baldoyle. Mick is a flute player and, among other things, was a member of the Castle Céilí Band. He is originally from the Liberties in Dublin and learned to play traditional music there. Mick has spent many decades collecting information, photographs and memorabilia relating to traditional musicians throughout Ireland and abroad. He provided information on the general position of traditional music in Fingal before the 1980s and on Séamus Ennis.
41. **Eithne O'Donnell:** I interviewed Eithne on 18/11/2020 by phone. Eithne is from Rush and is the vice-chairperson and treasurer of *Rinceoil*, an independent community organisation operating in Rush since 1994 teaching traditional music. Eithne has been a member of *Rinceoil* for 20 years. Initially she brought her children to learn there, because there was music in her family - her uncle Chris Langan was a player (see section 4.3.1 in the dissertation) - and she stayed on, learning the tin whistle herself and helping to run the organisation. Eithne co-ordinated the production of *Rinceoil*'s publication *Ceol an tSraidhbhaile Rose Éo* launched in January 2022 containing locally composed tunes, poems and songs by individuals in Rush and the surrounding area (see section 4.6.8). It includes a composition of her own. Eithne provided information on the formation and development of *Rinceoil* and the challenges it faces in sustaining itself.
42. **Kevin O'Keeffe:** I interviewed Kevin on 5/9/2019 in the evening in his home in Skerries. Kevin comes from Clonmel and settled in Skerries. From a musical family, Kevin began playing Irish traditional music in his late teenage years. His main instrument is bouzouki. Kevin generally plays in sessions in Skerries and is the main co-ordinator for a session in Joe May's pub. He has also recently taken on the role of

Chairman of the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend (see section 4.2.2 in the dissertation). Kevin provided information on session playing and musicians today in Skerries and the surrounding area, as well as on transmission and community engagement with the music.

43. **James O'Mahony:** See chapter 5, section 5.2.1 of the dissertation.

44. **Donal O'Sullivan:** I interviewed Donal on 28/11/2020 by phone. Donal is one of the founders of Slí Dhála, Dublin 15 branch of CCÉ, and is currently its chairman. He is from Freemantle in north Cork and learned to play accordion and concertina in his local branch of CCÉ in Freemantle, Craobh Cronáin. He played in winning All-Ireland grúpaí cheoil in U12 and U15 age groups and has been living in Clonsilla, Dublin 15 since 2003. His motivation for starting the Dublin 15 branch includes that those who were brought up playing the music themselves want to pass it on in a similar vein and he was aware of the very limited opportunities in the locality to learn traditional music. In addition to details on the branch, Donal provided information on the transmission process in teaching children to play traditional music and on a vision for the development of traditional music in Dublin 15 in the coming years.

45. **Shane Power:** I met Shane, a member of staff of the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre in Naul, in the arts centre on 19/12/2018. Deirdre Roche, Director of the SEAC also attended the meeting. The information Deirdre and Shane provided related to the establishment and work of the centre, programming policies and audience interests.

46. **Una Redmond:** I interviewed Una on 6/12/2021 by phone. Una is a member of Malahide CCÉ and has been on the committee of the branch for over 10 years. Una provided information on the operation of the branch and the challenges facing them. Una also provided information on engaging young people in learning and playing traditional music and in maintaining their interest, including in relation to female players.

47. **Kieran Rice:** I interviewed Kieran on 24/11/2020 by phone. Kieran has been living in Balbriggan for over 25 years. He plays the banjo and participates in a weekly session in the Central Rar in the town. Other players include Séamus Waters (fiddle), Tony

Kilcline, Mary Naughton (accordion). The session has been ongoing since about 1996/1997. Kieran provided information on traditional music playing in Balbriggan and environments from the mid-1990s and on transmission arrangements today in the locality.

48. **Sarah May Roberts:** I interviewed Sarah May on 27/3/2021 by phone. Sarah May teaches music in the newly established Irish Institute of Music and Song in Balbriggan (IIMS). IIMS was an amalgamation of Cadence Music and Fingal Academy of Music, where all genres of music are taught. The organisation has plans for the development of a theatre cum acoustic space for high quality performance. IIMS offer classes in traditional music on fiddle and tin whistle. Sarah May provided information in relation to teaching young people, including making the point that to promote instrumental playing more widely instruments need to be available, group classes to keep the price down and providing scholarships are needed. She also provided information on interacting with FCC and the provision of music teaching in schools.
49. **Deirdre Roche:** I met Deirdre, Director of the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre in Naul, in the arts centre on 19/12/2018. Shane Power of the SEAC also attended the meeting. The information Deirdre and Shane provided related to the establishment and work of the centre, programming policies and audience interests.
50. **Christy Sheridan:** I interviewed Christy on 31/1/2019 in his music studio attached to his home in Swords. Christy was born in Swords and continues to live there. Before retiring, he was a professional musician, playing in the folk group *The Bards* for many years. Christy provided information on music playing by members of his family, traditional music playing in Swords from the 1960s and information on the mumming tradition in Swords, in which he and his family were involved. See also sections 4.3.1, 4.3.2 and 4.3.3 in the dissertation.
51. **Niall Walsh:** I interviewed Niall on 4/12/2021 by phone. Niall is chairman of the recently established Portmarnock branch of CCÉ. Niall provided information on establishing and running the branch and on addressing COVID-19 restrictions. Niall plays traditional music on the wooden flute.

52. **Padraig Walsh:** I interviewed Padraig on 3/12/2021 by phone. Padraig plays concertina, learning to play as an adult. Along with a group of about 16 adult players, Padraig set up a weekly slow session under the auspices of a group called *Ciúnas*. The session takes place away from a pub setting in Portmarnock—see section 4.2.1 in the dissertation. Padraig also provided information on the adult learning process and performance challenges facing that cohort.

Appendix 1.2: Postgraduate training courses attended

The next page provides a list of postgraduate training courses I attended in Dundalk Institute of Technology.

Postgraduate training courses attended

	Course Title	Course Description
1	<i>Postgraduate Introduction Course</i>	Welcome to new postgraduate students, introduction to the Postgraduate Research Office and Creative Arts Centre, research methods and research tools
2	<i>Presentation on Smartsimple</i>	Explanation of system and reporting requirements for postgraduates
3	<i>Postgraduate Research Induction Programme</i>	Introduction to research in DkIT, policies and procedures, postgraduate services available
4	<i>Survival Skills for Postgraduates</i>	Good research practice, nature of research programmes, processes involved, interacting with supervisors, developing research strategies and action plans
5	<i>Literature Research on the Web</i>	Demonstration / practical on use of library search facilities
6	<i>Research Presentation and Communication Skills</i>	Preparing and delivering oral and poster presentations, including a practical exercise
7	<i>Training as a Tutor and Graduate Teaching Assistant</i>	Concepts and requirements, planning a tutorial Completing a practical exercise.
8	<i>Planning and Project Managing Your Research</i>	Preparing research questions, developing project planning approach, literature search, training needs analysis, academic writing, interacting with supervisors
9	<i>Thesis Writing Strategies</i>	Thesis writing strategies and writing style
10	<i>Research Integrity and Ethics (1)</i>	Policies and obligations, integrity and ethical principles, conduct of research, misconduct, code of practice for authorship
11	<i>Research Integrity and Ethics (2)</i>	Principles and practices, practical examples of application of integrity and ethics rules
12	<i>Surviving the Viva</i>	Defining the Viva, what examiners expect, preparing for the Viva, workshop discussion

Appendix 1.3: Papers presented at conferences

The next page provides a list of papers I presented at conferences during the course of the research.

Papers presented at conferences

	Conference	Title of paper	Date
1	Éistígl Conference (in DkIT)	<i>A Case for Ethnomusicology in Irish Traditional Music Today</i>	17 May 2018
2	Joint Society of Musicology /International Council for Traditional Music Postgraduate Conference (in DkIT)	<i>How the State Supports Irish Traditional Music in Fingal.</i>	10/11 January 2019
3	International Council for Traditional Music Annual Conference (in UCD)	<i>Irish Traditional Musicking in Fingal - A Twenty-Years Perspective</i>	22/23 February 2019
4	Postgraduate Researcher Conference DkIT	<i>Tracking Down Traditional Music in Fingal</i>	5 March 2019
5	Society of Musicology of Ireland Conference (Maynooth Univ)	<i>The Flow and Ebb of Irish traditional music practice in Fingal</i>	28-30 June 2019
6	British Forum for Ethnomusicology / Royal Music Association Postgraduate Conference. (The Open University, Milton Keynes)	<i>Charting the Irish Traditional Music Ecosystem in Fingal</i>	9-11 January 2020
7	Joint Society of Musicology /International Council for Traditional Music Postgraduate Conference (Univ. of Limerick)	<i>Role of the family on transmission of traditional music in Fingal.</i>	17-18 January 2020
8	International Council for Traditional Music Annual Conference (in UCC)	<i>Whither policies for traditional music in Fingal?</i>	21-22 February 2020
9	Society of Musicology /International Council for Traditional Music Postgraduate Conference - Online	<i>Last one out, turn off the lights!</i>	22 January 2021
10	Centre for Creative Arts Research, DkIT Online Research Colloquium	<i>Traditional music in Fingal: Do the facts match beliefs?</i>	21 May 2021
11	Online symposium on 'Access and participation in Irish traditional music' (Newcastle University / DkIT)	<i>Is there a place for the amateur player in Irish traditional music today?</i>	18 November 2021

Appendix 1.4: Sample information note provided to interviewees

Attached under is a sample of an information note provided to individuals in advance of interviews. It contains information on the project, sample questions, a short biography of Maurice Mullen and a consent form.

Sample of an information note provided to interviewees

PhD Research by Maurice Mullen

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)

Note for interviewees with knowledge of Irish Traditional Music in Fingal

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this PhD research project. You are being interviewed because you have specialist knowledge or engagement with the promotion and performance of Irish traditional music (ITM) in North County Dublin (Fingal).

The interview will follow a semi-structured format, i.e. a series of general questions are set out (see below), but the dialogue may follow issues emerging in the course of the discussion. The interview will adhere to ethics procedures set by DkIT and, in that regard, a consent form is attached that you are asked to review in advance and agree to.

Title of Project: *“Return to Fingal”: A critical review of the Irish traditional music heritage and music making in north County Dublin.*

The Research Project

The research will consider the factors that shape the practice of Irish traditional music in north County Dublin, a geographic area the subject of much recent population growth and demographic change. The study will engage in qualitative and ethnographic research methodologies, entailing extensive fieldwork and analysis. The research is intended to contribute to a greater understanding of the development of traditional music within modern society and to the planning, promotion and support for this art form at local and national levels.

The importance of understanding traditional music in such contexts as regional style and canon has long been recognised. However, in a more urbanised Ireland, where transmission processes are increasingly institutionalised, performance opportunities may be limited, and other music forms can share the same sound and cultural spaces, understanding what shapes and drives traditional music within the community today is important. The project will establish the status, significance, engagement with, community impacts and key issues affecting the development and performance of traditional music in Fingal.

The main research questions, engaging both the tangible and intangible heritage, are:

1. What is the physical and social infrastructure for music in North County Dublin?
2. Who are the principal stakeholders in the networks that support music making in Fingal?
3. How can funding and other supports be best used to consolidate and develop music making and participation in music in North County Dublin?

Questions being asked during the interview

The questions fall under 6 categories (your engagement in the music, how ITM is organised locally, how it is passed on, community interest and State involvement in the music and possible ways of further promoting the music in Fingal. You may feel there are some questions you can't answer, but any assistance you can give to help understand Irish traditional music heritage and music making today in the community would be appreciated. There may also be issues not referred to that you feel should be addressed (category 7).

1. Information about your involvement with Irish traditional music (ITM)

- a. Outline your engagement with / involvement in ITM (e.g. as an organiser / advocate, a player or a listener)?
- b. If you are a player:
 - i. How often do you play outside your home and where?
 - ii. Do you play outside Fingal on a regular basis?
 - iii. How did you learn ITM, what motivated you to learn, does anyone else in your family play?
- c. As a listener, how often would you attend ITM events / what type of events?
- d. Who are the main individuals / groups in ITM that you would interact with?

2. Information about how ITM is organised and engaged with in local settings

- a. How is ITM organised and how do people engage with it in your locality (and other localities in Fingal you are aware of)?
- b. What ITM activities are most evident?
- c. Who are the key movers and shakers (including players and non-players) driving the music locally?
 - i. What do they do that is important or that makes them effective?
- d. Where is ITM performed and who are the players?
 - i. Are you aware of any local players operating in a professional / semi-professional capacity?
- e. What community organisations (e.g. CCÉ, GAA), networks or groups are involved locally in performing or promoting the music?

3. Information about Transmission of ITM

- a. How is ITM transmitted / taught locally: including who the individual teachers and organisations (if any) involved are and where it is taught.
- b. Are children in your local school(s) are being taught ITM?

4. Community Interest in ITM

- a. What is your perception of the broader local community interests in traditional music?
- b. Is this interest evident in any particular way (e.g. sessions, performances at local community events or festivals, etc? Any details?

- c. What is your perception of the interest of young people versus an older generation? Are there ITM events (e.g. sessions) targeted at young people?
- d. Is the GAA or other similar body involved?

5. State Bodies' roles in ITM in Fingal

- a. Are you aware of actions, plans or strategies of any community groups (e.g. CCÉ) or State Bodies (such as the Arts Council, Fingal Arts Office, Music Network, Tourism Ireland, etc.) to promote ITM in your locality or anywhere in Fingal?
- b. Are you aware of State actions taken in the past that you think were helpful to ITM locally?
 - i. Were / are these actions evident to (1) the broader local community and (2) the local ITM community?
- c. Are you aware of any local surveys or information gathered by any party (at local community or wider area levels) relating to ITM in Fingal?

6. Promoting ITM in Fingal

- a. What do you see as the main barriers or impediments to promoting ITM locally?
- b. What actions could be taken / by whom, to strengthen ITM in the community?
- c. If State funding was available for ITM, how might this be best spent:
 - i. A modest sum available?
 - ii. A more substantial sum available?

- 7. **Any other information** that you consider might have a bearing on the main research questions of the project (set out above).

About Maurice Mullen

Maurice is a student in Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) undertaking PhD research into the practice of traditional music making in North County Dublin. He lives in Malahide and plays traditional music on the wooden concert flute. He is a mature student, having had a career in the Civil Service for over 40 years. Upon retiring, Maurice completed an MA in traditional music studies in DkIT and subsequently decided to continue to PhD. He was awarded First Class Honours and the College President's prize for academic excellence in the MA. For his PhD research he is in receipt of funding from the Irish Research Council.

Maurice Mullen / mob no: 087 2425684 / email: mauricedmullen@eircom.net

PhD Research Study by Maurice Mullen, Dundalk Institute of Technology
Project Title: “Return To Fingal”: A Critical Review of the Irish Traditional Music Heritage and Music Making in North County Dublin

Consent Form for Persons being Interviewed

The Research Project

The research project examines the Irish traditional music heritage and practice today in north County Dublin and is being undertaken by Maurice Mullen, from Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) in pursuance of an award of PhD, with support from the Irish Research Council. The study is examining the physical and social infrastructure, stakeholders and networks, as well as socio-economic aspects that influence the traditional music heritage and music making in the area.

You are being invited through an interview process to contribute information, views and comments to this study as a person identified with expertise, knowledge of, or engagement with, Irish traditional music in north County Dublin.

The Interview Process

The interview will follow a semi-structured format, which means the discussion may go beyond pre-set questions, allowing deeper exploration of some issues or consideration of additional matters that arise during the interview.

Your participation in the interview is voluntary and you may withdraw from it at any time. You are welcome to raise any questions or to seek clarification on any matter regarding your part in the research programme. No payment or inducement of any type will be offered to those involved.

Record Keeping

To facilitate accurate recording and the completion of the PhD thesis, written notes will be taken during the interview, and it will also be recorded to facilitate accuracy and verification. The storage and disposal of written and electronic records will follow procedures set out by DkIT. This includes the storage of electronic material in a secure, password protected facility belonging to the Institute. After the completion of the PhD and related follow-up work, all records will be destroyed.

Confidentiality

Much of the general information gathered during the study (e.g. through surveys), will be reported on in an anonymous form. Information either published or already in the public domain, will be attributed to relevant sources. Given your position as a person with relevant expertise, any views, observations and comments expressed in this interview may be attributed to you in the PhD thesis and published material.

Consent Given

Acknowledging the above conditions and arrangements, including that my contribution may identified and referred to in the completed study, I agree to participate in the research study.

Signed:

Name in Block Capitals:

Date:

Signed (Maurice Mullen):

Tel: 087 2425684. Email: mauricedmullen@eircom.net

Appendix 4.1: Extracts from National Children's Folklore Collection

Three sample extracts from the National Children's Folklore Collection are provided on the next page.

National Children's Folklore Collection

Extracts from 1937/1938 National Children's Folklore Collection regarding mouth organ playing and the wren / mumming tradition in Fingal

Example 1: Children playing mouth organ

Extract for Mary Baker, Church Road, Skerries, of 13 May 1938

'New Year's Eve the first festival day of the year is a great day for merry making in Swords. The young people gather together at the cross roads, and dance to the music of a mouth organ, they dance until they hear the sound of the bells ringing the old year out and the New Year in'.

At <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4428186/4384668> (accessed on 16 January 2022)

Example 2: (Reference to wren boys / mumming)

Extract from Rita Carton, Hampton Gardens, Balbriggan of 8 June 1938

'On St Stephen's Day all the little boys go out and catch a wren which they kill and put on a stick. That evening they dress up in masks and trousers and go round from house to house singing and collecting money. These are known as the "wren boys." They do this for twelve days'.

At <https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4428169/4383468/4498235> (accessed 23 August 2021)

Example 3: (Reference to wren boys / mumming)

Maura Mc Keown, Hampton St. Balbriggan of 4 June 1938

'Those (sic) facts were told to me by my mother Mrs. Mc Known, Hampton St. Balbriggan:

Feasts are celebrated in a certain way each year in this district. On St Stephen's day the boys of this district gather in crowds. Every street has a certain crowd. Each crowd of boys go round with the wren. On the morning of St Stephen's Day the boys go out in the fields and catch a wren. If they cannot catch it, they get a little box and cover it with feathers. During the twelve days of Christmas each group of boys go from house to house collecting pennies. These are the words they sing:-

"The wren, the wren, the King of all Birds,
On St Stephens Day she was caught in the forge.
Though she was small her family was great.
Get up boys and give us a treat.
Up with the kettle and down with the pan,
A penny or two pence to bury the wren.
If you don't believe what I say,
Enter in John Butcher and we'll clear the way"

The next boy steps in and continues:-
"In steps me John Butcher with my knife and stick,
I cut a big cow from head to heel,
I cut him in slices and fry him on the pan,
A penny or two pence to bury the wren"

They also sing other songs and play mouth organs. One of the boys leads the crowd. He also collects the money he is called the money bearer.

At website [Saints Peter & Paul, Balbriggan | The Schools' Collection | dúchas.ie \(duchas.ie\)](#)
(accessed on 26 August 2021)

Appendix 4.2: Analysis of responses to online survey

Attached is a detailed note on undertaking and responses to the online survey on interest in and engagement with Irish traditional music reported on in chapter 4 of the dissertation.

Analysis of responses to online survey

1. Introduction

An online survey was undertaken in April and May 2021 seeking information on public interest and engagement with traditional music. Respondents who played traditional music were additionally asked about how they learned to play the music, their family involvement and playing in pub sessions. Having perspective on the extent of public interest in traditional music helps in gauging the degree to which the music is perceived to be integral to community rather than primarily confined to musicians and a limited cohort of enthusiasts. A second objective was to extend inquiries to a larger cohort of musicians beyond the key informants. The survey facilitated the experience of many more musicians being heard, enabling a more informed understanding of the involvement of musicians within the traditional music ecosystem. As indicated in chapter 1 of the dissertation, it had been planned from the outset to undertake a detailed face-to-face survey based on targeted populations, but travel and movement restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic limited the form of surveying possible. Nevertheless, it was important to undertake a survey since this research had established that little hard information on the practice of traditional music by amateur musicians in Fingal exists.

The survey elicited 518 responses, including from 176 musicians. This appendix provides an analysis of the responses. The survey underscored the value of undertaking in-depth targeted analysis to better understand the art form in the community today. It suggests there is significant interest in traditional music, shared by women and men. It provides information on the ways the tradition is engaged with, including through participating in pub sessions, attending live musical events and through a variety of media forms. It also shows there are also multiple options availed of for learning the music.

A high proportion of respondents indicated a strong interest in traditional music, but the lower percentages of respondents who attended music sessions in pubs, live music events or who engage with the music through various media forms suggests the high level of interest may be overstated. Responses from the 176 musicians, comprising an almost equal number of males and females, is significant. The responses indicate more males attend pub sessions than females, while over half of female musicians report seldom or never playing in sessions in Fingal. Likewise, fewer females attend live music events. In response to a question on the principal way traditional musicians learned to play, one third of respondents said they learned from a local teacher, another third learned in a recognised teaching organisation and just under a third said they were self-taught. However, when separated by gender, more female respondents learned in classes provided by local teachers or a recognised organisation and relatively few reported being self-taught. The survey highlights significant family involvement in traditional music, that was intergenerational and wide. However, very few reported a family member being the principal source for learning to play.

2. Methodology

Enquires to official bodies responsible for the development of traditional music in Ireland and informants to this research established that no in-depth survey of the practice of traditional music in Fingal has been undertaken to date. As part of this research, a survey on public

interest in the music utilising random sampling and a targeted sampling of traditional musicians was proposed, the latter cohort to be recruited through attendance at sessions, festivals, workshops and through known networks of players. Drawing on Besen-Cassino and Cassino, (2018, p.302) such forms of ‘probability sampling’, where members of the population have an equal chance of being recruited to the study, avoids systemic bias in the selection process and thus provides a basis for extrapolating the findings across the population of the research area. However, Government COVID-19 pandemic restrictions relating to travel and meeting people, introduced in March 2020, prevented any face-to-face contact taking place, including the forms of surveying initially envisaged in this research.

In its place, an online survey in the form of a questionnaire was undertaken, the preparation of which was guided by Besen-Cassino and Cassino (chapters 10 and 11) in relation to question design, phrasing, and circulation. *Survey Monkey* software was used to undertake the survey and facilitate analysis of responses. Besen-Cassino and Cassino label the form of survey adopted as ‘nonprobability’ sampling, as the target population could not be defined in advance (p.323). The specific form of nonprobability method deployed to broadcast the questionnaire was ‘convenience sampling’. However, the approach also deployed elements of ‘snowball sampling’, since the survey was sent to known musicians who were asked to forward it to other musicians known to them (p.303). The use of nonprobability surveying can pose challenges in regard to the representativeness of responses to a wider population and avoidance of systemic bias, making it difficult to draw generalised conclusions from the data (p.287). Thus, for example, caution must be exercised when interpreting responses from the public relating to questions on interest in traditional music, in this case especially in relation to questions 4 to 8, see below. On the other hand, a high number of the responses were received from traditional musicians, most likely attributable to a snowball broadcasting effect, enabling more generalised conclusions to be considered from that cohort. An additional consideration in proceeding on a convenience sampling basis, as highlighted by Besen-Cassino and Cassino (p.303), is its value in guiding the formulation of a more in-depth and targeted, probability-based study.

The survey involved a questionnaire targeted at people over 18 years. The survey was circulated using a combination of email and social media platforms, including WhatsApp and Facebook. It presented 15 questions in total, set out in section 3 below. The first nine questions and the final one were targeted at all respondents. Questions 10-14 specifically related to those who played Irish traditional music. The survey was anonymous, only ‘closed-ended’ questions were included, and it was confined to 15 questions to encourage the widest possible response to the survey. Other than in respect of compulsory questions (Q.1 and Q.2), respondents could choose which questions to answer such that in the analysis, account must be taken of actual number of replies received for each question.

On reflection, following analysis of replies to the survey, some questions would have benefited from wider choice in options presented. Question 3, for example, asking respondents where they lived in Fingal, was skipped by 12% of respondents, perhaps because they were unsure of the electoral district they lived in or some may have lived outside Fingal. The issue could have been avoided by either having an additional option for ‘don’t live in Fingal’ which, if it was selected, would have caused the survey to close to the respondent, or the question could have been made a compulsory question. In the circumstances, only respondents who identified an electoral area in Fingal were included in the analysis. Question

11 asked musician respondents to identify family members who also play traditional music, with 4 non-mutually exclusive response options provided being - respectively, ‘Parents’, ‘Spouse/Partner’, ‘Children’, and ‘Extended Family’. The question would have benefited from inclusion of an additional option providing for ‘no family members’. In the absence of the additional option, it must be assumed that not selecting any of the 4 options provided means the respondent has no other family members involved in playing the music. While this may be a reasonable assumption, for clarity and simplicity the additional option of ‘no family members’ would have been a better approach.

In general, percentage responses are shown to one decimal place. However, in certain instances to aid clarity and presentation, rounding to the nearest whole number is used. Where this occurs, fractions greater than 0.5 are adjusted upwards and those less than 0.5 are adjusted downwards.

3. Survey Questions

The following questions were presented in the survey:

Question Number	Question	Reason for inclusion
1	<i>Are you over 18 years of age?</i>	A compulsory question to be responded to by all respondents. Responses indicating under 18 years resulted in the survey closing to them.
2	<i>Do you agree to this information being given to Maurice Mullen from DkIT for research purposes?</i>	A compulsory question to be responded to by all respondents. Respondents who indicated they were not satisfied to have the information given for research purposes resulted in the survey closing to them. Question was included to comply with GDPR requirements and to ensure respondents were clear on the proposed use of the information.
3	<i>Where do you live in Fingal?</i>	Only responses from individuals living in Fingal were being sought, and information collected was by local electoral area.
4	<i>How interested are you in Irish traditional music?</i>	5 optional answers offered comprising: extremely interested; very interested; somewhat interested; not so interested; not at all interested.
5	<i>Do you attend Irish traditional music sessions in pubs in Fingal? (Pre COVID-19 restrictions)</i>	5 optional answers offered comprising: at least once per week; once per month; once every 2 months; seldom; never.

6	<i>How often would you attend live musical performances featuring Irish traditional music? (Pre COVID-19 restrictions)</i>	5 optional answers offered comprising: at least once a week; once per month; once every 2 months; occasionally; never.
7	<i>Do you watch / listen to programmes featuring Irish traditional music on television, radio, or other media?</i>	5 optional answers offered comprising: at least once a week; once per fortnight; once per month; occasionally; never.
8	<i>Tick any of the following that you have heard of.</i>	A list of 7 traditional music events and organisations associated with traditional music in Fingal and nationally was provided with respondents asked to indicate those they were aware of, with the objective of gauging the level of knowledge about the activities listed for Fingal in particular. The list comprised: Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann; the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre; the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend; Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann; The Fingal Fleadh; Séamus Ennis; the Willie Clancy Summer School.
9	<i>What is your gender?</i>	Options for female, male and other were provided. The placing of this question down the list was to ensure that at the earliest possible stage in completing the survey the respondent engaged with questions relating to traditional music to engage their interest in the survey.
10	<i>Do you play Irish traditional music?</i>	A 'yes' answer directed the respondent to an additional set of questions, i.e. numbers 11 to 14 inclusive, while a 'no' answer directed the respondent to the final question, number 15.
11	<i>Do other members of your family play Irish traditional music?</i>	4 categories of relations were offered comprising: parents; Spouse/Partner; Children; Extended family members.
12	<i>What was the principal way you learned to play?</i>	6 options were offered comprising: from a parent/family member; from a local teacher; in school; at a class provided by a recognised organisation; an online class; self-taught.

13	<i>Do you play in music session in Fingal?</i> <i>(Pre COVID-19 restrictions)</i>	5 optional were offered: one or more times per week; once per month; once every 2 months; occasionally; never.
14	<i>Do you play music in Dublin City?</i> <i>(Pre COVID-19 restrictions)</i>	5 optional were offered: one or more times per week; once per month; once every 2 months; occasionally; never.
15	<i>Are you aware of programmes by the Arts Council of Ireland or Fingal County Council to promote and support Irish traditional music?</i>	‘Yes’ and ‘no’ options were provided. The question was addressed to all respondents. To avoid a leading question, no reference was made to any supports in the question.

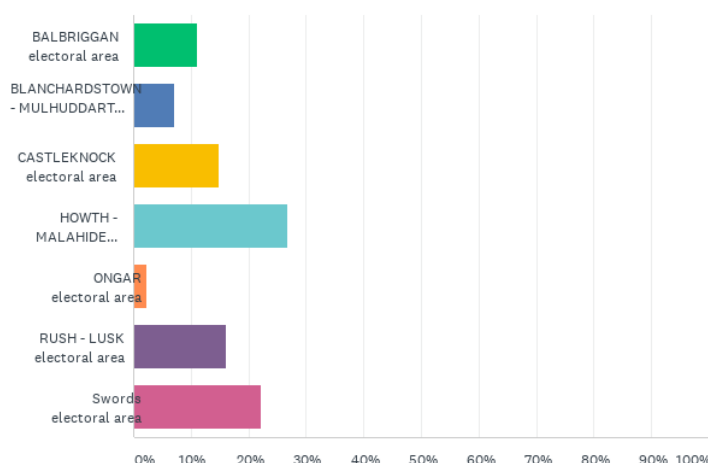
4. Responses to Questionnaire

4.1 The respondents

A total of 518 people responded to the survey, comprising 62.7% female, 37.1% male and 0.2% other (Question 9). 5 responses were excluded, 3 for being under 18 years of age (Q.1) and 2 through a failure to confirm that responses can be used for the purposes of this research project (Q.2). 453 respondents indicated the electoral area they reside in in Fingal (Q.3). Of these, 76% respondents reported living in one of the four electoral areas associated with the eastern side of the county (Balbriggan, Howth / Malahide, Rush / Lusk and Swords), while the remaining 24% reported living in one of the three electoral areas associated with the western side of the county - Blanchardstown / Mulhuddart, Castleknock and Ongar. Chart SC1 illustrates:

Chart SC1

Q3 Where do you live in Fingal?



Cross-comparing Q.3 regarding where respondents reside in Fingal with Q.9 relating to gender shows that for female respondents, 73% live on the eastern side while 27% live in the western area, while the corresponding percentages for males are 80% and 20% respectively. Table S1 summarises the position.

Table S1: Responses by gender and location in Fingal

	Total	Eastern side	Western side
Female	282 (62.8%) *	206 (73%) **	76 (27%) **
Male	167 (37.2%) *	134 (80.2%) ***	33 (19.8%) ***
Total	449	340	109

*Calculated as a percentage of all females plus males (449)

**Calculated as a percentage of total females

***Calculated as a percentage of total males

Q.10 asked respondents if they played traditional music, to which 448 responded, 62.5% of whom were female and 37.3% male. Those who indicated that they are musicians were then directed to questions 11-14 regarding how they learned, the involvement of family members as players and their engagement in pub session playing. Table S2 summarises the responses to Q.10 ('Do you play Irish traditional music?')

Table S2: Respondents who play traditional music

	Total respondents No. (%)	Yes (Musicians) No. (%)	No (Non-musicians) No. (%)
Female	280 (62.5%)	85 (48.3%)	195 (71.7%)
Male	167 (37.3%)	90 (51.1%)	77 (28.3%)
Other	1 (0.2%)	1 (0.6%)	-
Total	448	176	272

That a total of 176 musicians replied to the survey is significant in numerical terms and allows for the possibility of drawing more general conclusions regarding this cohort. Notable also is the fact that these respondents comprised almost equal numbers of female and male musicians, 85 and 90 respectively, which facilitates some gender comparison in relation to transmission and engagement with the music.

4.2. Interest in Irish traditional music

Questions 4-8 inclusive are linked questions in so far as they relate to interest in and engagement with Irish traditional music. Q.4 is pivotal, with respondents rating their level of interest in traditional music from 5 options provided, ranging from 'not at all interested' to 'extremely interested'. An important consideration is the extent to which respondents might

unintentionally overstate their interest, a form of systemic bias. Thus, questions 5-7 serve to elaborate on respondents' interest through exploring how they engage in activities normally associated with the performance of traditional music. It is in effect a particularisation of responses to Q.4 through seeking information on attending sessions (Q.5), live performances (Q.6), and watching / listening to programmes featuring the music on television, radio or other media format (Q.7). Additionally, Q.8 asks respondents to indicate which of 7 activities and aspects associated with traditional music they have heard of.

As already noted, other than initial compulsory questions required for informed consent, respondents could choose to skip a question. In relation to Qs.4-7, a close correlation will be observed between the numbers of responses and skips to each question, as table S3 illustrates.

Table S3: Responses and skips for Qs.4-7

Question No.	No. of responses to the question	No. of respondents who skipped the question
4	449	69
5	451	67
6	449	69
7	450	68

In the next section assessing responses to Q.4, it will be noted that a relatively high number of respondents indicated they were very or extremely interested while, corresponding, a lower percentage than might otherwise have been expected, indicated little or no interest. A combination of systemic bias in the survey methodology and respondents' variable interpretations in the use of the term 'interested' are likely to be factors here. However, recalling also that these are linked questions, the close correlation in the incidence of skips could allow an inference to be made that those who skipped the questions most likely constituted a cohort with limited or no interest in traditional music. Adopting such an inference, for example, would provide a more nuanced perspective on replies to Q.4.

4.2.1 Question 4 – ‘How interested are you in Irish traditional music?’

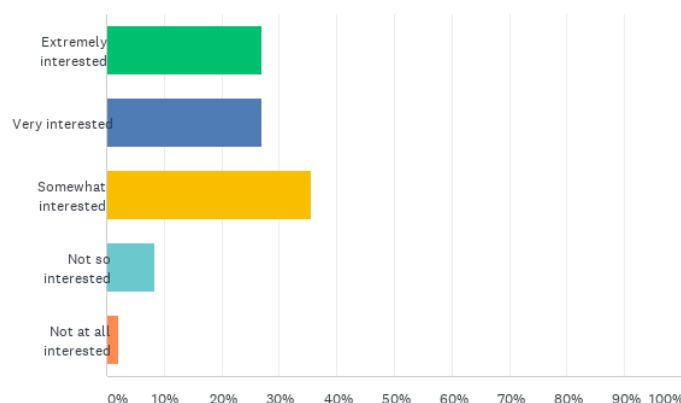
Table S4 and chart SC2 provides numerical and visual representation of responses to Q.4. The question attracted 449 responses, of which 53.8% claimed to be either 'very' or 'extremely' interested in traditional music - columns A+ B in table S4. 35.6% claimed to be 'somewhat' interested (column C) and only 10.5% 'not so interested' or 'not at all' (columns D+E). Even if the high positive responses in columns A and B and the low percentages in columns D and E are attributed to systemic bias referred to above, the high percentage (35.6%) in column C indicates there is a substantial cohort in the community who may not be engaged in traditional music but could be disposed to it; such that with the appropriate policies or circumstances encouraging the music, they could be enticed to a greater degree to the art form.

Table S4: Interest in traditional music

Q.4	A	B	C	D	E	No. of responses	No. of skips
	Extremely interested	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not so interested	Not at all interested		
% of responses	26.9	26.9	35.6	8.5	2.0	-	-
(No. of responses)	(121)	(121)	(160)	(38)	(9)	(449)	(69)

Chart SC2

Q4 How interested are you in Irish traditional music?



If an inference is made that the skips in Q.4 (64 in number) should be combined with to column E ('not at all interested') the percentage of the 'somewhat interested' cohort (column C) remains high at nearly a third of the respondents (31.2%). Recalculation to include skips is at table S5. The adjusted returns for the 'not so interested' and 'not at all interested' combined suggest between a fifth and a quarter of the respondents are not interested in the music. (While beyond the scope of this survey, a more comprehensive inquiry should seek to understand why respondents are not interested, including, for example, if they are engaged in other artforms, the nature of their experience with traditional music and whether enculturation factors are involved).

Table S5: Recalculation of table S4 to include ‘skips’

Q.4	A Extremely interested %	B Very interested %	C Somewhat interested %	D Not so interested %	E Not at all interested %	No. of responses	No. of skips
% with skips included	23.6 (121/513*)	23.6 (121/513)	31.2 (160/513)	7.4 (38/513)	14.2 (73*/513)	-	-
(No. of responses)	(121)	(121)	(160)	(38)	(73)*	(513)*	(64)

*The denominator 513 and the numerator 73 in column E in the adjusted calculation are used to reflect that 5 of the original responses of 518 were excluded.

Even with the adjustment to include ‘skips’ in the ‘not interested’ category, the percentage of respondents claiming to be ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ interested in traditional music, at 47.2% (columns A+B) remains high. The significant number of musicians who completed the survey (176) will invariably have influenced this outcome. However, given the high percentage returned even after adjustment (31.2%), the ‘somewhat interested’ cohort (column C) should become the focus of future research, as it is from this group that greater interest in traditional music might be fostered, and audiences created for professional (i.e. paid) performances. Translating being ‘somewhat interested’ into actively taking steps to participate in the music in one form or another usually involves significant challenges, the first of which is to develop an informed understanding of the interests of this group. Reverting to the original returns from respondents (i.e. not adjusted for skips) set out in table S4, the way respondents interpreted ‘extremely’, ‘very’ and ‘somewhat’ (columns A, B and C) in Q.4 will also have had a significant influence on the options they chose. While it is not possible to gauge to what degree respondents may have overstated their interest generally, the extent to which respondents actively engage with the music (questions 5, 6 and 7) could give a more practical expression of their levels of interest.

4.2.2 Questions 5, 6 and 7 – attending sessions, events and media

The graphic for responses to Qs 5, 6 and 7 follow immediately (Charts SC3-5) and the responses to the 3 questions are then brought together in a single table S6 for ease of comparison (not adjusted for skips). The questions relate to, respectively, attendance at pub sessions (Q.5), attendance at live music events (Q.6) and watching / listening on media (Q.7). The number of responses to each question was almost the same, i.e. 451, 449 and 451, respectively, and similarly for the number of skips, i.e. respectively, 67, 69 and 68. The responses to Q.4 have also been repeated in table S5 to aid comparison.

Chart SC3

Q5 Do you attend Irish traditional music sessions in pubs in Fingal? (Pre COVID-19 restrictions)

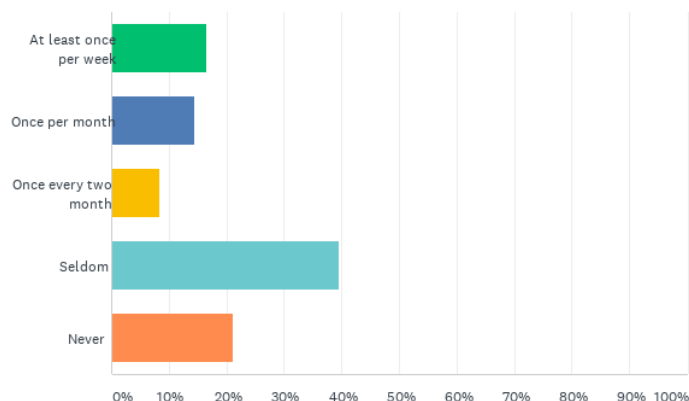


Chart SC4

Q6 How often would you attend live musical performances in Fingal featuring Irish traditional music? (Pre COVID-19 restrictions)

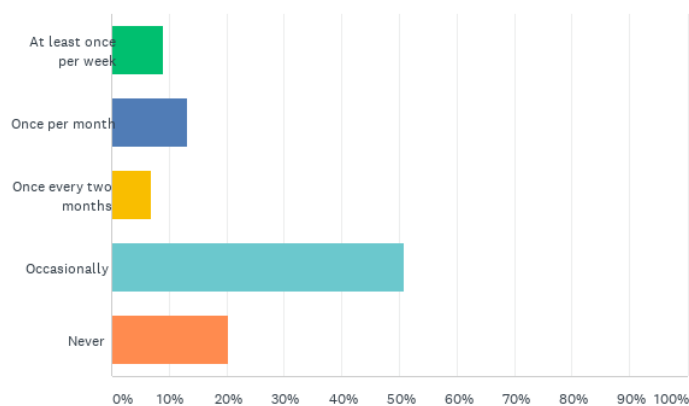


Chart SC5

Q7 Do you watch / listen to programmes featuring Irish traditional music on television, radio, or on other media?

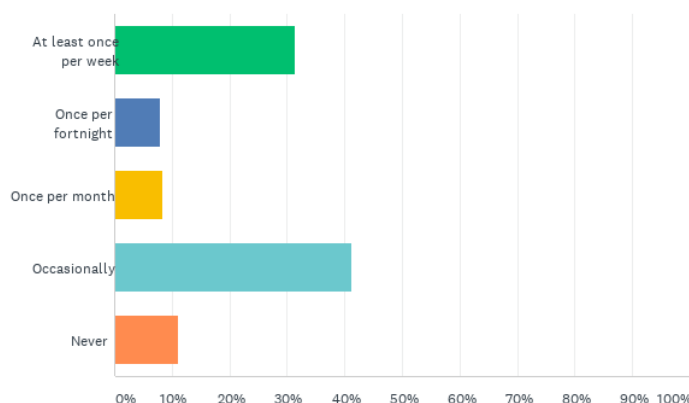


Table S6: Responses regarding attending sessions, events and media

Question	A Attends sessions or live performances weekly / engages through media weekly	B Attends sessions or live performances monthly / engages thro' media fortnightly	C Attends sessions or live performances bi-monthly / engages thro' media monthly	D Seldom attends sessions / attends live performances and engages thro' media occasionally	E Never attends sessions, live performances or engages thro' media	No. of responses	No. of skips
	%	%	%	%	%		
5	16.6	14.4	8.4	39.5	21.1	451	67
6	8.9	13.1	6.9	50.8	20.3	449	69
7	31.3	8.0	8.4	41.1	11.1	450	68
	Extremely interested %	Very interested %	Somewhat interested %	Not so interested %	Not at all interested %	No. of responses	No. of skips
4	26.9	26.9	35.6	8.5	2.0	449	69

For a more concise conceptualisation of the returns relating to questions 5, 6 and 7 along with those for Q.4, the responses under the 5 options A-E in table S6 are grouped in table S7

below into 3 interest categories - ‘high interest’ comprising columns A, ‘occasional interest’ comprising columns B+C and ‘limited or no interest’ comprising columns D+E.

Table S7: Summary of attendance at sessions, events and media

Question	High interest (Cols A table S6) %	Occasional interest (Cols B+C table S6) %	Limited or no interest (Cols C+D from table S6) %
5. (sessions)	16.6	22.8	60.6
6. (live perform.)	8.9	20.0	71.1
7. (media)	31.3	16.4	52.2
4. (interest)	26.9	62.5	10.5

Collectively, the responses to questions 5, 6 and 7 show less enthusiasm by respondents for engaging in activities than their responses to Q.4 might otherwise suggest. A trend evident in the responses too is that those who are ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ interested in traditional music frequent sessions in pubs more often than attending live performances, while media in its various guises, is the conduit through which the music is engaged with by the greatest number of respondents, its convenience and ready accessibility no doubt being a factor. The survey shows that 16.6% of respondents reported attending a traditional music session in a pub (Q.4) at least once per week, 22.8% attend occasionally (monthly or every 2 months) while 60.6% seldom or never attend pub sessions. Less people attend live performances (Q.6) with 8.9% saying they attend monthly, a fifth declaring they attend occasionally (monthly or every 2 months) while 71.1% effectively do not attend. Almost one third (31.3%) reported engaging with traditional music through some form of media (Q.7), half that number (16.4%) engage occasionally while over half of respondents (52.2%) reported little or no engagement with traditional music through media. However, the responses from female and males respectively show significant differences in habits regarding questions 5, 6 and 7.

4.2.3 Attending sessions: male versus female (Q.5)

Table S8 filters responses from males and females regarding attending sessions in pubs (Q.5) and shows a significant difference in behaviour.

Table S8: Attending sessions - female and male responses

Question 5	A At least once per week	B Once per month	C Once every 2 months	D Seldom	E Never	Number of responses
	%	%	%	%	%	
Total responses	16.6	14.4	8.4	39.5	21.0	(451)
Females	8.5	14.2	8.9	43.6	24.8	-
(No.)	(24)	(40)	(25)	(123)	(70)	(282)
Males	30.5	15.0	7.8	32.3	14.4	-
(No.)	(51)	(25)	(13)	(54)	(24)	(167) +(1) ‘other’

8.5% of female respondents reported they attend a music session at least once per week and the corresponding percentage for males is 30.5%. Similarly, the number of female respondents who reported seldom or never attending a session was 68.4% (columns D+E) while the corresponding figure for males is 46.7%. A complication in making a direct comparison here is that almost twice as many females as males responded in the survey, including a higher percentage of non-musicians who are unlikely to attend sessions with the same regularity as musicians. While almost the same number of male and female musicians responded, the overall female response comprised 30.4% musicians and 69.6% non-musicians respectively, compared with males involving 53.9% musicians and 46.1% non-musicians. Despite the differences by gender in the numbers of responses, it is still the case that female musicians attended sessions less frequently than their male counterparts, and this will also be noted below where a direct comparison is provided between female and male musicians in response to Q.13 regarding playing in music sessions in Fingal.

4.2.4 Attending live events: male and female responses

Responses regarding attending live events traditional music events (Q.6) suggest less people generally attend these relative to sessions in pubs, with again less females participating than males, table S9 illustrates the responses:

Table S9: Attending live events - female and male responses (Q.6)

Question 6	A At least once per week	B Once per month	C Once every 2 months	D Occasionally	E Never	Number of responses
	%	%	%	%	%	
Total responses	8.9	13.1	6.9	50.8	20.3	(449)
Females	5.3	12.4	6.4	51.8	24.1	-
(No.)	(16)	(35)	(18)	(146)	(68)	(282)
Males	15.1	14.5	7.8	49.4	13.3	-
(No.)	(25)	(24)	(13)	(82)	(22)	(166) (+1‘other’)

In this case 8.9% (column A) of respondents reported attending live events on a weekly basis, another 20% reported attending them on a monthly or 2 monthly basis (columns B+C) while a majority of respondents, constituting 71.1%, reported seldom or never attending (columns D+E). Separating the responses by gender again shows less females attending live music events, with over three quarters (75.9%, columns D+E) with limited or no attendance. The corresponding figure for males is 62.7%, again relatively high. Whether this arises out of disinterest or lack of opportunity is not possible to say from the survey. Interviewees observed that other than during the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend, there is little or no live music performances in Skerries outside of sessions. On the other hand, the Séamus Ennis centre in the Naul provides opportunities for attending live events on an ongoing basis, while proximity to Dublin City also provides opportunities. However, the high level of non-attendance at live performance events reported in Q.6, in the context of a very significant number of respondents reporting being favourably disposed to Irish traditional music, serves to illustrate the challenges in creating markets and audiences for live performances by professional traditional musicians in the county.

4.2.5 Engagement through media (Q.7)

Given the relative ease of access and wide proliferation of broadcast and technology based recorded media options, a more frequent engagement with traditional music through these technologies might be anticipated especially by those respondents who expressed interest in the music. The survey shows (table S10) that 31.3% of responses can be classified as having a high interest through engaging ‘at least once a week’ through media, a second cohort

comprising 16.4% of respondents who said they engaged ‘once per fortnight’ or once per month (columns B+C), which perhaps could reasonably be considered only ‘occasional’ engagement. A third group seldom or never engage through media, involving 52.2% of total respondents. Interpreting an engagement ‘every two months’ as being too infrequent to count as a regular engagement suggests that, overall, close to two third of respondents to this question have very limited or no engagement with traditional music through any form of media (60.6% columns C+D+E).

Table S10: Engaging through media – including female and male responses (Q.7)

Question 7	A At least once per week	B Once per month	C Once every 2 months	D Seldom	E Never	Number of responses
	%	%	%	%	%	
Total responses	31.3	8.0	8.4	41.1	11.1	(450)
Females	23.0	8.51	9.2	48.2	11.0	-
(No.)	(65)	(24)	(26)	(136)	(31)	(282)
Males	45.5	7.2	7.2	29.3	10.8	-
(No.)	(76)	(12)	(13)	(49)	(18)	(168)

Noting the discussion above on responses to Q.4 regarding tempering the analysis to reflect an inference that the ‘skips’ could reasonably be regarded as representing respondents with no interest in traditional music, the responses to questions 5, 6 and 7 can also be adjusted in the same manner, through again assigning them to column E (including utilising a denominator of 513 to adjust for 5 disallowed responses and adding the number of skips into column E), to provide a more balanced and nuanced perspective on respondents interest. Table S11 shows the adjusted figures for questions 5, 6 and 7.

Table S11: Responses to Qs.5-7 adjusted for ‘skips’

Question	A Attends sessions or live performance weekly / engages through media weekly	B Attends sessions or live performance monthly /engages thro’ media fortnightly	C Attends sessions or live performance bi-monthly / engages thro’ media monthly	D Seldom attends sessions /attends live performances and engages thro’ media occasionally	E Never attends sessions, live performances or engages thro’ media	No. of responses	No. of skips incl. in column E
	%	%	%	%	%		
Q.5 Sessions	14.6	12.7	7.4	34.7	31.6		
(No.)	(75)	(65)	(38)	(178)	(95+67*)	(451)	(-67*)
Q.6 Events	7.8	11.5	6.0	44.4	31.2		
(No.)	(40)	(59)	(31)	(228)	(91+69*)	(449)	(-69*)
7 Media	27.5	7.0	7.4	36.1	23.0		
(No.)	(141)	(36)	(38)	(185)	(50+68*)	(450)	(-68*)

*Skips assigned to column E

The reduction of the 5 columns into 3-category system of interest, respectively ‘high interest’, ‘occasional interest’ and ‘limited or no interest’ to provide a more concise report for comparative purposes is presented in table S12 below. The table includes adjustment for inclusion of the ‘skips’ in column E as explained already.

Table 12: Summary for questions 5-7 adjusted for skips

Question	High Interest (Columns A) %	Occasional interest (Columns B+C) %	Limited or no interest (Columns D+E) %
5	14.6	20.1	66.3
6	7.8	17.5	75.6
7	27.5	14.4	59.1

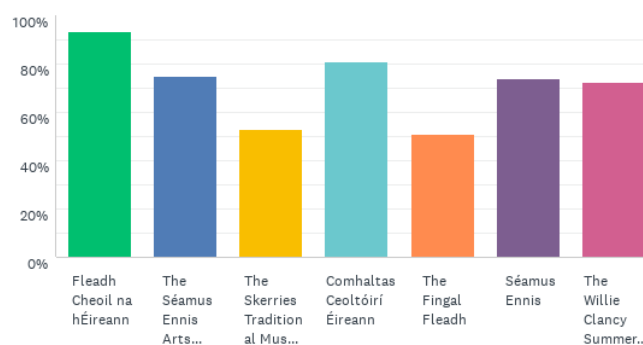
Responses to Qs.5-7 taken as a proxy for interest, again may provide a truer reflection of interest in traditional music by the respondents. Overall, taken in broad brush terms, the adjusted figures suggest about 25% of respondents who are interested or very interested and about 75% with occasional or no interest.

4.2.6 Question 8

Respondents were asked to indicate which of 7 organisations, events and one individual associated with traditional music they had heard of. Chart SC6 illustrates the responses.

Chart SC6

Q8 Tick any of the following that you have heard of



The table on the next page (table S13) separates responses to the question for females and males.

Table S13: Knowledge of Irish traditional music activities (Q.8)

	Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann	Séamus Ennis Arts Centre	Skerries Traditional Music Weekend	Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann	Fingal Fleadh	Séamus Ennis	The Willie Clancy Week
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	93.4	75.1	53.1	80.9	50.8	74.1	72.5
Females	93.0	72.9	48.0	78.4	49.1	67.8	69.2
Males	93.9	78.7	61.6	84.8	53.7	84.8	78.1

Overall, the responses suggest a significant level of knowledge of the 7 traditional music items listed in the survey, including over 93% of respondents indicating they had heard of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, reducing to 75% and 74% respectively for the Séamus Ennis Arts Centre and Séamus Ennis. About half of respondents heard of, respectively, the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend (53%) and the Fingal Fleadh (51%). The responses suggest that nationally associated organisations and events are better known than local events.

Unsurprisingly, less knowledge of local events was notable in the case of those respondents who reported limited or no interest in the music (cross-comparing the responses to question 8 with question 4 on interest in traditional music). Of significance in this regard was that only slightly over half of respondents who indicated they were very interested in traditional music said they had heard of the Fingal Fleadh (55%) and the Skerries Traditional Music Weekend (57%).

Comparing responses of males and females indicates that for all elements listed in Q.8, slightly more males said they had heard of the 7 choices, except for Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, where there is an almost equal percentage for the genders. The most significant difference between the genders was in respect of knowledge of the Skerries weekend, where 62% of males reported they had heard of the event while the corresponding figure for females was 48%. Again, the most likely explanation for the difference is that more non-musician females completed the survey than males, see comments regarding Q.9 above.

4.3. Responses from traditional musicians

Questions 10 to 14 inclusive were directed to those who play traditional music, including in relation to the involvement of families in playing the music (Q.11) and the principal way musicians learned traditional music (Q.12). Questions 13 and 14, respectively, enquired whether musician respondents played in sessions in Fingal and Dublin City, in both cases offering response options ranging from ‘never’ to ‘one or more times per week’.

4.3.1 Question 10 – ‘Do you play Irish traditional music?’

Out of the 448 respondents to Q.10, 176 (39.2%) indicated they played traditional music, with 272 (60.7%) saying they did not. The 176 musicians comprised almost an equal number of females (86) and males (90) with 1 musician declaring in the ‘other’ gender category. However, 81.9% of the musicians lived in one of the four electoral districts on the eastern side of Fingal, as set out in table S14. A significant and equal number of responses from female and male musicians provides an important basis for analysis of this cohort and for drawing inferences in relation to traditional musicians more generally living in Fingal.

Table S14: Do you play traditional music?

Electoral District East Fingal	No. of musicians	% of total musicians	Electoral District West Fingal	No. of musicians	% of total musicians
Balbriggan	35	19.9	Blanchardstown Mulhuddart	8	4.5
Howth - Malahide	37	21.0	Castleknock	20	11.4
Rush-Lusk	36	20.5	Ongar	4	2.3
Swords	36	20.5			

The inclusion of so many musician respondents from the eastern side of Fingal reflects the strength of the music on that side of the county and confirms evidence already collected regarding locations where the music is strongest. This holds true for both female and male musicians, where respectively 83.7% and 81% live on the eastern side. The relatively even spread of musicians responding from each of the 4 eastern electoral areas also provides a useful basis for comparison in relation to the remaining Qs.11-14 and their application more widely.

4.3.2 Question 11- Family members playing traditional music

Question 11 seeks information from respondents on family members who also play traditional music. Respondents indicated a significant family involvement at parental, spouse/partner, children and extended family levels. Overall, 136 respondents indicated family members played traditional music, representing 77% of the total number of musicians who responded to the survey. The returns for each category are not mutually exclusive, as a musician can have family members from several categories involved such as parents and children, respectively. Chart SC7 illustrates the responses and table S15 provides details, including separation by gender.

Chart SC7

Q11 Do other members of your family play Irish traditional music?

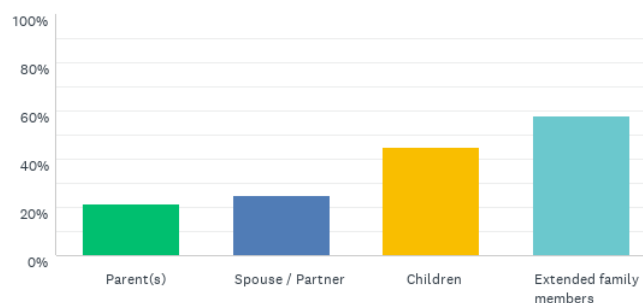


Table 15: Family members playing traditional music (Q.11)

	A Parents	B Spouse / partner	C Children	D Extended family members	E Respondents with family links
	%	%	%	%	(No.)
Total	21.3	25	44.9	58.1	
(No.)	(29)	(34)	(61)	(79)	(136)
Female	23.2	29.0	47.8	56.5	
(No.)	(16)	(20)	(33)	(39)	(69)
Male	19.4	20.9	41.8	59.7	
(No.)	(13)	(14)	(28)	(40)	(67)

The responses to the question show:

1. slightly more female respondents reported family involvement in playing traditional music, at 80%, compared with males, at 74%.
2. about a fifth of both female and male musicians reported having parents as players (column A).
3. 29% of females reported having a spouse or partner who plays, while the corresponding figure for males is 25% (column B).

4. almost 45% of musicians reported having children who played (column C), but gender difference is notable: 48% of female respondents reported children playing in comparison with 42% of males.
5. 58% reported having extended family members who play (column D) - females 56.5% and males 59.7%.

Despite the significant association with playing traditional music within family groups, it will be noted from the next question (Q.12) that only 6.9% of respondents reported learning from parents or family members. The responses chime with Cawley (2013) - see section 4.6.4 in the main text. Responses to Qs.11 and 12 together underscore the view that visibility of the music within family groups in the first place, irrespective of how members formally learn it, is important, suggesting the presence and practice of playing the music may be normalised within the wider family. Children in a family where traditional music is evident can, from a young age, gain familiarity and knowledge of the music, and access to play in traditional music circles. But attracting children to traditional music should not be confined to those associated with families who already have an involvement. Interviewees advocated having children exposed to the music and the music instruments associated with the tradition from an early age and stressed the importance to them of hearing the music regularly on the radio when growing (where parents did not play).

It will also be noted that from responses to Q.12 below regarding the principal way music was learned, that more females attended classes or a local teacher, compared with males, where 44.3% of respondents said they were principally self-taught. Whether the propensity to attend classes by females is a contributing factor in a higher number of children of female musicians playing, and therefore an unacknowledged but important conduit in the transmission of traditional music, is an issue worthy of consideration in a more comprehensive study.

4.3.3 Question 12 - Learning traditional music

Question 12 asked about the principal way respondents learned to play Irish traditional music, giving six options. Chart SC8 and table S16 provide details of the responses, including subdivision by gender.

Chart SC8

Q12 What was the principal way you learned to play?

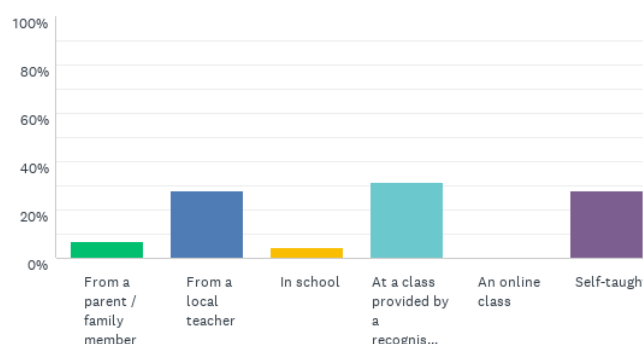


Table S16: Principal way of learning traditional music (Q.12)

	A	B	C	D	E	F
	Parent / family member	Local teacher	In school	Class by recognised organisation	Online class	Self-taught
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	6.9	28.2	4.6	31.6	0.6	28.2
(No.)	(12)	(49)	(8)	(55)	(1)	(49)
Female	9.4	32.9	7.1	40	-	10.6
(No.)	(8)	(28)	(6)	(34)	-	(9)
Male	4.6	23.9	2.3	23.9	1	44.3
(No.)	(4)	(21)	(2)	(21)	(1)	(39)
Other	-	-	-	-	-	100
(No.)						(1)

Of the 6 options presented, three feature strongly and are of almost equal significance:

1. learning through a local teacher (column B, 28.2%),
2. attending a class provided by a teaching organisation (column D, 31.6%) and
3. being self-taught (column F, 28.2%).

The responses may be seen to run counter to popular narratives that focus on transmission being ‘handed-down’ through traditional music families. In contrast, the replies suggest multiple routes to learning. Of course, as noted in the responses to Q.11, family links remain important in engaging their children with the music, but less so in formal transmission, where multiple routes are being availed of generally.

The high number of males declaring that they were self-taught, 44.3% of male responses, in comparison with 10.6% for females is a standout feature in the returns to Q.12. A possible explanation for such a high number of males declaring to being self-taught may be that many of the respondents are of an older cohort, where the availability of classes was more limited when they first engaged with the music. This was the case with several informants to the research in the age bracket 50 years and upwards, an age group still significantly represented in session playing today. Recognising that playing traditional music is a life-long engagement and learning for many, self-taught players will variously attend classes and workshop

weekends to acquire technique and repertoire, while continuing to manage their learning in a self-directed manner. Irrespective of how informants learned in the first instance, the process of acquiring tunes on an ongoing basis is a common feature widely shared by informants, explained by Slominski as ‘lateral peer-to-peer transmission of tunes as the way most musicians learn repertoire’. (2020, p.12)

A higher percentage of females reported attending classes as their principal way of learning, either through a local teacher (32.9%) or through a recognised teaching organisation (40%), with only 10.6% declaring to be self-taught. In the context of increasing institutionalisation of transmission of the music noted in recent decades, including through the wider provision of classes, the responses might suggest that the female respondents comprised a younger cohort of musicians. However, information relating to age of respondents was not gathered in the survey, so it is not possible to determine how age profile and attendance at formal classes correlate. Given the circumstances today of a greater availability of classes to learn the music, it is possible to hypothesise that the proportion of males attending classes in the first instance as the principal way of learning has been increasing over time and consequently that for self-taught correspondingly reducing.

Learning with a local teachers also features strongly in the responses. Cross-comparing the returns with electoral districts where respondents live confirms that local teachers are most popular in those area where no teaching organisation is situated or convenient. Table S17 illustrates the position.

Table S17: Learning with local teachers versus teaching organisations

Electoral Area	A Local teachers %	A Local teachers No.	B Teaching organisation %	B Teaching organisation No.
Balbriggan	44.1	16	11.8	4
Howth-Malahide	16.2	6	54.1	20
Rush-Lusk	16.7	6	44.4	16
Swords	22.2	8	27.8	10

1. **Balbriggan:** Balbriggan electoral district shows that 44.1% of respondents there attended local teachers. The electoral area includes Skerries where there is a strong traditional music scene although no traditional music teaching organisation is located there. A corpus of individual teachers locally provides tuition opportunities for learning. The group *Inis Rua* provides opportunities for performance and session playing for teenage students attending local teachers and The Séamus Ennis centre is conveniently located.
2. **Howth-Malahide:** This electoral area contains 3 branches of CCÉ

3. **Rush-Lusk:** The Séamus Ennis Arts Centre, *Rinceoil* in Rush, and conveniently located CCÉ branches in Malahide and Kinsealy provide learning opportunities in this district.
4. **Swords:** Almost equal numbers of respondents attended local teachers and teaching organisations in Swords, where two branches of CCÉ, Malahide and Kinsealy, are convenient. Local general music schools also offer traditional music tuition.
5. **Western side:** Most returns in respect of the western side of Fingal related to learning with local teachers, reflecting the absence of teaching organisations there until recently.

The proportion of respondents who reported learning from a parent or family member was 6.9% (females 9.4% and males 4.6%) suggesting that most musicians will send their children to classes as the principal way of learning. Only 4.6% reported learning to play traditional music in school (7.1% for females and 2.3% for males). but this may not have been unexpected given C. Keane's observations (chapter 5) that many schools only offer a short taster in traditional music. Only 1 of the 176 musician respondents indicated learning online as the principal process adopted, again this may not be unexpected given that technology to facilitate such processes is relatively new. The restrictions on face-to-face classes during the COVID-19 restrictions on face-to-face meetings caused most of the teaching organisations and many individual teachers in Fingal to transfer classes online. Online classes may develop in the wake of the COVID-19 experience.

4.3.4 -Questions 13 and 14 – Frequency of playing in sessions

Questions 13 and 14 asked musician respondents the frequency they play in sessions in Fingal (Q.13) and in Dublin City (Q.14), respectively, before COVID-19 restrictions were introduced. Again, significant differences in gender responses emerge. Chart SC9 and table S18 provide details of responses regarding musicians playing in sessions in Fingal.

Chart SC9

Q13 Do you play in music sessions in Fingal? (Pre COVID-19 restrictions)

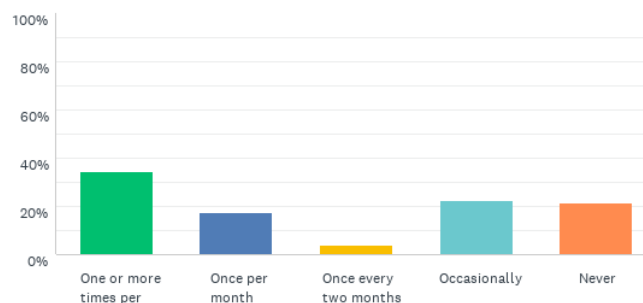


Table S18: Frequency of playing in sessions n Fingal (Q.13)

Fingal (Q.13)	A Once or more per week	B Once per month	C Once every 2 months	D Occasionally	E Never
	%	%	%	%	%
Total	34.3	17.7	4.0	22.3	21.7
(No.)	(60)	(31)	(7)	(39)	(38)
Female	21.8	16.1	5.8	25.3	31.0
(No.)	(19)	(14)	(5)	(22)	(27)
Male	47.1	19.5	2.3	19.5	11.5
(No.)	(41)	(17)	(2)	(17)	(10)
Other	-	-	-	-	1.0%
(No.)					(1)

The responses (table S18) indicate that a third of respondents play once or more each week in sessions in Fingal. About one fifth (21.7%, columns B+C) play monthly or every two months while the remainder, comprising 44% play either occasionally or never. However, when female and male returns are segregated, significant differences in frequency of participation will be noted. About one fifth of females (21.8%) versus nearly half of males (47.1%) play weekly in sessions (column A). Conversely, over half of females report only playing occasionally, or never, in sessions (56.3%, columns D+E), while the comparable response for males is less than a third (31%, columns D+E). Further observations on this question are provided table S20 below.

Chart SC10 and Table S19 sets out the responses regarding session playing by Fingal musicians in Dublin City (Q.14).

Chart SC10

Q14 Do you play in music sessions in Dublin City? (Pre COVID-19 restrictions)

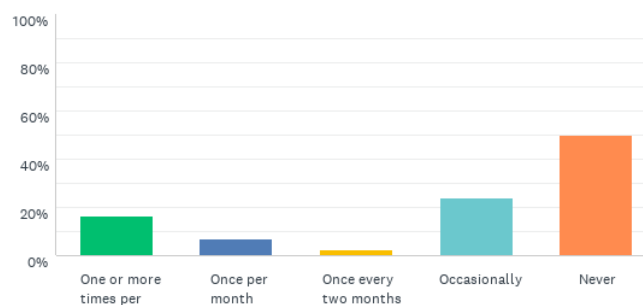


Table S19: Frequency of playing in sessions in Dublin City (Q.14)

Dublin City (Q.14)	A Once or more per week	B Once per month	C Once every 2 months	D Occasionally	E Never
	%	%	%	%	%
Total	16.7	6.9	2.3	24.1	50.0
(No.)	(29)	(12)	(4)	(42)	(87)
Female	9.3	3.5	4.7	20.9	61.6
(No.)	(8)	(3)	(4)	(18)	(53)
Male	24.1	10.3	-	27.6	37.9
(No.)	(21)	(9)	-	(24)	(33)
Other	-	-	-	-	1
(No.)					(1)

While, as expected, less players travel to Dublin City to play in sessions than play in Fingal, the number is still significant – 16.7% on a weekly basis, with males again outnumbering females by almost 3:1 (column A, table S19). Half of all respondents said they never play in sessions in Dublin, and for females the percentage rises to over 60% (column E).

Comparison of Fingal and Dublin City

For ease of comparison, the following table (S20) brings together the returns for playing sessions in Fingal and in Dublin City, respectively, into 3 categories: ‘Weekly’ (one or more times per week); ‘Less Often’ (‘once per month’ plus ‘once every two months’) and ‘Occasionally/Never’ (‘occasionally’ plus ‘never’), including separation by gender.

Table S20: Comparison of session playing in Fingal *versus* Dublin City

	Weekly	Less Often	Occasionally / Never
	%	%	%
Fingal (Q.13)			
Total	34.3	21.7	44.0
Females	21.8	21.9	56.3
Males	47.1	21.8	31.0
Dublin (Q.14)			
Total	16.7	9.2	74.1
Females	9.3	8.2	82.5
Males	24.1	10.3	65.5

A third of respondents said they played once per week or more often in sessions in Fingal, about one fifth (21.7%) play ‘less often’ (monthly or every two months) while the remainder, comprising 44% play either occasionally or never. In this instance ‘occasionally’ means less than once every two months, such that playing in sessions for this cohort might take place no more than 3 to 4 times per year. When female and male returns for playing sessions in Fingal are segregated, significant differences in frequency of participation will be noted. One fifth of females (21.8%) versus nearly half of males (47.1%) play weekly in sessions. Conversely, over half of females report playing only occasionally, or never, in sessions (56.3%), while the comparable return for males is less than a third (31%). As expected, less players travel to Dublin City to play in sessions than play in Fingal, but the number is still significant – 16.7% on a weekly basis, with males again outnumbering females by almost 3:1. Three quarters of all respondents said they never play in sessions in Dublin, and for females the percentage rises to over 82%.

Intuitively, those playing in Dublin City may be expected to live geographically closer to the capital, i.e. those living in south Fingal. However, a more complex position is evident from the responses. Table S21 presents, in respect of 5 the county’s 7 electoral districts, the

percentage of musicians resident in Fingal who play ‘weekly’ and ‘never’, respectively, in Dublin City. Separation by gender is also provided.

Table S21: Frequency in session playing in Dublin by electoral district

	Balbriggan	Howth – Malahide	Rush – Lusk	Swords	Castleknock
	%	%	%	%	%
Total					
Weekly	21.2	21.1	5.6	16.2	21.2
Never	48.5	42.1	52.8	59.5	42.1
Female					
Weekly	26.7	4.6	5.3	5.9	-
Never	60.0	59.1	47.4	88.2	44.4
Male					
Weekly	16.7	43.8	6.3	25.0	40
Never	38.9	18.8	56.3	35.0	40

Howth-Malahide and Castleknock are two electoral districts bordering Dublin City and the percentage of musicians in each playing weekly in Dublin, at slightly over 21% each, might be expected. Similarly, the low level of musicians playing in Dublin City each week from the Rush-Lusk electoral area, which is geographically more distant from Dublin City, is low. Surprisingly, respondents from Balbriggan, the electoral district furthest from the capital, indicated a level of playing on a weekly basis in Dublin City like Howth-Malahide and Castleknock, at 21%. Two issues may help explain the unexpectedly high figure. In Balbriggan town itself there are limited session playing opportunities, see section 4.4.1, causing musicians to find alternative outlets including in Skerries, Dublin City and Drogheda. Secondly, several musicians from Skerries, part of the Balbriggan electoral district, are known to this researcher to play regularly in Dublin city. Another notable feature of responses from the Balbriggan electoral district is the higher percentage (26.7%) of females who said they play weekly in Dublin, a higher percentage than men (16.7%). Female musicians choosing to play elsewhere other than in the very limited session playing opportunities in Balbriggan town and women from Skerries playing in Dublin are again likely to be the main reasons for this return. Overall, proximity to Dublin City influences to some degree musicians living in Fingal choosing to play in sessions in Dublin City. However,

opportunity also plays a part, for which musicians will travel distances. Table S21 also records consistently high percentages of musicians from across the county who ‘never’ play in Dublin City.

4.4 Knowledge of public funding (Question 15)

The final question, Q.15, posed in the survey asked about respondents knowledge of programmes by the Arts Council of Ireland and Fingal County Council to support Irish traditional music. The question was addressed to all respondents. 31.4% (140) replied that they were aware of such programmes while 68.6% (306) reported they were not aware. In the responses to the survey there were 72 respondents who skipped the question. If they are included with an inference that those concerned had little interest or knowledge of traditional music, and, therefore, would be unlikely to know about support programmes, the resulting figures would be 27.3% having knowledge and 72.7% not knowing, roughly speaking, one quarter knowing about the programmes and three quarters not.

Isolating returns from traditional musicians, including separating by gender, shows that about half of musicians are aware of official support programmes, with little gender difference evident. Table S22 sets out the position.

Table S22: Musicians’ knowledge of official support programmes

	Yes %	No %
Total	48.6	51.2
Female	50.6	49.4
Male	47.7	52.3

5. General observations and conclusions

The survey received a significant response at over 500 responses, including from 176 musicians comprising almost equal number of female and male players. Responses were received from all 7 electoral districts in Fingal, but those from the four districts on the eastern side of the county were considerably more numerous, reflecting the stronger presence of the music there. Despite limitations in applying the responses to a more general population because of the nonprobability form of survey adopted, the replies provided important information in relation to how perceived interest in traditional music translates into active engagement in the music, and the implications of that can inform an understanding of how to attract more people to the art form.

A critical conclusion to be drawn from the survey is the value and importance of undertaking in-depth, targeted research into traditional music in the county. It has not been possible to identify such research undertaken to support arts planning and development by official bodies, including in relation to traditional music. The responses to the online survey intimate a substantial interest and involvement in playing at amateur level in the county and provide useful information on the practice of the music today. These issues, and more, need to be better understood to provide the base necessary to determine how to support the music in the community in terms of financial and artform supports, infrastructure development and access opportunities.

A high proportion of respondents indicated a strong interest in traditional music, but that interest does not translate into active attendance at events or engagement through various media, suggesting a lower level of interest generally than perceived by the respondents. However, while only 10.5% of respondents indicated little interest, an important and significant cohort comprising one third of respondents (35.5%) indicated they were ‘somewhat interested’ whose interest in the music could be fostered and developed, for the benefit of amateur playing in the community and as a wider audience base for the professional artist.

The 176 musicians responses to the survey provide a useful base to reflect the behaviours of musicians more widely in the county and for comparison between female and male musicians. More male musicians reported attending pub sessions than females, while over half of female musicians report seldom or never playing in sessions in Fingal. A smaller number of musicians (16.9%) play in sessions on a weekly basis in Dublin City, with males again dominating on a ratio of almost 3:1. Those musicians who play in the Dublin sessions come from across the county rather than from those areas immediately adjacent to Dublin City. Similarly, fewer females attend live music events.

The responses on the principal way musician respondents learned to play, that multiple routes are adopted, is significant - approximately one third from a local teacher, another third in a recognised teaching organisation and just under a third reporting being self-taught. Despite an unexpected 44% of males reporting being self-taught the greater transmission opportunities today may see class-based transmission featuring more strongly in relation to males in the future. Individual teachers dominate in areas where teaching organisations are less active.

77% of musician respondents indicated that family members also played. Overall, the survey portrays significant association with playing traditional music among family groups, both intergenerational and through extended family: Very few reported a family member being the principal source for learning to play; 25% of musician respondents reported having a spouse / partner who played; and 45% indicated they had children who played. While the strong family involvement suggests family connections will remain central to the future of the music in Fingal, the fact that multiple ways are adopted to access learning the music can provide the necessary framework to foster the music in areas and communities where it has low visibility at this time.

Appendix 6.1: Parliamentary Question Ref. No. 33495/21

Reply to Parliamentary Question No. 33495/21 of 22 June 2021 answered by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media is on next page.

Parliamentary Question

To ask the Minister for Tourism; Culture; Arts; Gaeltacht; Sport and Media her plans for the encouragement of sporting and recreational activity in all primary and second-level schools throughout Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

- Bernard J. Durkan.

* For Written answer on 22/06/2021

Ref No: 33495/21

Reply

Minister of State Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Jack Chambers)

Increasing participation levels in sport for all age cohorts, including those attending school, is a priority of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027.

Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, supports a range of programmes and activities that aim to encourage, support and empower primary and secondary school children to actively participate in sport and physical activity. This is a central component of the recently launched Sport Ireland Participation Plan (2021-2024) and reflects the long-term commitment made in the National Sports Policy that ‘all children enjoy their sporting experiences and have the physical literacy to underpin their participation in sport and physical activity throughout their lives’.

Sport Ireland is undertaking several initiatives for children and young people under its Participation Plan. Sport Ireland Coaching is currently working with the network of Local Sports Partnership (LSP’s) and National Governing Bodies (NGB’s) on the delivery of training for the coaches of primary school children “Coaching Children Programme” and the Coaches of second level coaches “Coaching Young People Programme”. Sport Ireland has also developed a ‘Coaching Girls programme for coaches of teenage girls. This workshop aims to reduce the high dropout rate of teenage girls from sport by upskilling and educating the coaches.

Sport Ireland is also funding school-based initiatives as part of the ‘Get Ireland Running’, ‘Get Ireland Swimming’ and ‘Get Ireland Cycling’ programmes in line with the National Sport Policy commitment to prioritise these sports as they have the greatest potential for generating high levels of active participation across the life course.

The European School Sports Day (ESSD) will take place on September 24th 2021. As part of the European Week of Sport 2021, Sport Ireland plans to support the Irish Primary PE Association (IPPEA) to coordinate the ESSD. The IPPEA have been invited to apply for funding supports and the application review process is currently underway. The IPPEA plan to grow the event from last year, reaching more students and schools. They have already held workshops with schools focusing on the sustainability of their activities following the ESSD. They also plan to continue with competitions for physical education equipment for schools, to drive further engagement.

Sport Ireland and my Department, in collaboration with the educational authorities, will continue to support these and other initiatives to get young people more active in our schools and in our communities.

Appendix 6.2: Letter to Fingal County Council

The following pages include letter of 2 April 2021 with two attachments to Fingal County Council seeking information on arts activities promoted by the Council and governance activities undertaken.

Letter (and attachments) to Fingal County Council

2 April 2021

82 Sonesta,
Malahide
Co Dublin, K36 X306

Fingal County Council
County Hall,
Main Street,
Swords
Co Dublin

Dear Sir / Madam

I am Maurice Mullen, a PhD candidate at Dundalk Institute of Technology, undertaking research into the heritage and practice today of Irish traditional music in Fingal. My research is being funded by the Irish Research Council. I would value the assistance of the Council in responding to the questions posed in the note attached to this letter please.

I also attach for your information a note on the research project, which also provides context and background to my questions to you, and a short biography of myself. As part of reading myself into this research project, the Council's Arts Officer and the directors of the Seamus Ennis Arts Centre and the Draíocht centre kindly provided helpful information to me on the role and work of the Council in relation to the traditional arts.

An important element of the research is establishing how official policies impact on the practice of the music within communities. I am aware that under section 6 of the 2003 Act local authorities have responsibilities in relation to the development of the arts in their jurisdictions. Fingal has also published an arts plan in accordance with the 2003 Act. While the Arts Council provides some funding, Fingal County Council also directs funding from other sources to fostering the arts. I am writing separately to both the Arts Council and the Department of Arts regarding their respective remits, so the information requested herein is directed to Fingal County Council's role.

I would like to thank you in advance for your responses. I would be pleased to discuss the attached questions with the Council where clarification or amplification is required.

Yours sincerely

Maurice Mullen

Centre for the Creative Arts Research
Dundalk Institute of Technology
087 2425684
mauricedmullen@eircom.net

Information being sought from Fingal County Council

Fingal Arts Plans 2019-2025 and 2013-2017

1. Was a report assessing the impact of the 2013-2017 arts plan prepared? If so, could I see a copy of that please?
2. Was there a report prepared following the consultation process in 2017 that informed the Arts Plan 2019-2025? If so, could I see a copy of that please?
3. Were there any Value for Money (VFM) or other evaluations of achievement of expenditure on the arts by the Council over the past 10 years? If so, could I see a copy of it/them please?
4. I have not been able to identify periodic surveys of the engagement by members of the public in the practice of playing instrumental music, or reviews that would give a reasonable approximation of that. Is the Council aware of any such surveys, even if not county wide?

Annual work programmes and progress reports

5. The Council's current and previous arts plans make provision for the preparation of annual work programmes to include budgets and annual progress reports. I would like to see the annual plans and reports for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 please.

Supporting traditional music in Fingal

6. It is noted from the Council's arts plans that priority is afforded to supporting full-time artists and key arts infrastructure developments. Measures such as support for the Seamus Ennis Arts Centre are also noted. What is the Council's policy and associated actions to support and foster the continuity of traditional music playing in the community by amateur musicians?
7. The research thus far confirms the fragmented nature in the distribution of traditional music playing across the county – some towns and villages are noted for it while there is little visibility of the music in significant portions of Fingal, particularly on the western side. Does the Council have any specific plans to encourage the wider amateur practice within the community of playing and engaging with Irish traditional music in areas where it is weak / has low visibility?
8. Informants to the research highlight the importance of early leadership in motivating and driving the uplift in interest in traditional music in those areas where it is now considered strong, and that in most instances those involved were 'outsiders' who had settled in the area. Has the Council considered funding / supporting any type of 'ground-up' capacity building to foster playing the music, such as the appointment of community traditional music facilitators, particularly in those of areas of Fingal where there has been significant population churn and increase?

Traditional Music Networks

9. Does the Council maintain a register or network information on traditional music actors in Fingal?

Council agreement with Music Generation

10. Has a target date been set to finalise an agreement with Music Generation for the introduction of accessible instrumental classes for children in Fingal? If not, what is the likely date the agreement might be finalised?
 - a. Will the agreement provide for every child having an opportunity to learn an instrument of their choice?

- b. Will the agreement cover Irish traditional music, and if so how is it expected this will be delivered?
- c. Has the Council other plans in train, other than that covered by Music Generation, to provide for instrumental teaching covering traditional music throughout Fingal?

Funding for Irish traditional music

11. Has the Council funded any individual or group over the past five years in relation to Irish traditional music projects? This request includes bursaries, traveling and performance assistance, etc. to individuals or groups playing Irish traditional music.

Fingal Fleadh

12. What was the Council's strategy in introducing the 'Fingal Fleadh' held in Swords?
- a. How much does it cost to run per annum?
 - b. What plans have the Council got for this Fleadh post COVID-19?
 - c. Are there plans to introduce a similar event in the west Fingal area or in Balbriggan?

Briefing note on PhD Research Project being undertaken by Maurice Mullen, Dundalk Institute of Technology

The research project

The research is a critical review of the Irish traditional music heritage and music making in Fingal. The project is considering the factors that shape the practice of the music today in the county and is intended to contribute to a greater understanding of the development of the music within modern society. The research is focused on the amateur side of music playing and includes understanding how musicians engage in the music, what the music means within local communities, how transmission (teaching / passing on the music) takes place and identifying impediments to the practice of the music. Among other things, it is important to understand how official policies, including their formulation and implementation, help foster the music and overcome perceived barriers to the practice of the music.

The milieu in which traditional music is performed in the county is multi-faceted - there are many musicians involved, different levels of engagement and participation by the public, diverse circumstances surrounding performance and transmission, commercial interests, artists and instrument makers earning a livelihood, and various governmental and community organisations involved as well. Therefore, an ecosystem analysis approach is being adopted in the research to comprehend the roles and actions of the key actors associated with or influencing the practice and development of the music in Fingal. The project engages both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, utilizing ethnography and an extensive fieldwork programme which, to date, has included interviewing some thirty key informants involved in different ways in the traditional music community, whether as musicians, teachers, event organisers or other contexts. A survey of the public on aspects of traditional music has received over 500 responses to date.

Context for questions

Official published policies relating to traditional music appear to be weighted heavily towards supporting and developing the professional artist, providing arts infrastructure, and building audiences, with only minor or passing references to amateur participation alluded to. It is not clear what the objective or priority of official policies to the amateur category is, or how any such references are expected to translate in specific action programmes, while distinctions between amateur musician 'participation' versus 'engagement' are also not clear.

The research to date shows there are locations in Fingal where the music has a foothold - evident through, for example, the existence of regular music sessions in pubs, festival events and the presence of teaching organisations such as branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and *Rinceoil* in Rush. Festivals like the Skerries traditional music weekend and the Chris Langan festival in Rush are regarded as important in supporting amateur practice and there has been some expansion in the availability of classes for children and adults to learn to play the music. The research also suggests that there are significant areas of the county where traditional music has little visibility and opportunities for playing and learning appear very limited. In this category are many areas on the western side of Fingal - the Castleknock, Blanchardstown-Mulhuddart and Ongar electoral districts collectively have a population (2016 census) nearly four times that of Co. Leitrim. Economic and social factors may contribute to this circumstance where, for example, learning and performance opportunities are concentrated more in longer established and wealthier areas of the county. An issue arising is whether any organ of state with a remit to promote traditional music is acting to specifically address the absence of traditional music in such cases. In linked vein, is whether

there has been any assessment of the standing and practice of the music within the local communities, especially where large and developing populations are concerned.

Even locations on the eastern side of the county noted in the past for traditional music playing face challenges to the sustainability of the tradition. Some locations once considered ‘strongholds’ of the traditional arts have experienced significant fall-off in engagement and practice. Informants explain such changing circumstances by reference to population churn, reducing locations for performance/session playing as the availability of pub venues diminishes, the need for suitable playing opportunities for young players (including outside of pub settings), difficulties in availing of instrumental teaching and limited knowledge by the wider public about the tradition especially, as noted, in the context of population churn. Although beyond the scope of this research, some informants believe diminishing opportunities to learn traditional music in schools may also be a contributing factor.

The level of public funding provided to foster traditional music in community contexts and the award selection methodologies are also important questions. The picture emerging suggests the quantum is low. For example, in the case of the Arts Council’s now closed DEIS scheme, only one project per year for each of the four years 2014 to 2017 was awarded to an applicant from Fingal, all to established artists while community music projects did not feature. On the other hand, funding for the Seamus Ennis centre in Naul and the Skerries Traditional Music and Chris Langan festivals are notable recipients within the category in question, and there may be traditional music promotion components to other projects in receipt of public funding, but it is not visible.

Informants have suggested that a vital step in fostering traditional music in locations where the tradition is weak and traditional arts organisations / infrastructure is absent, is the presence of community traditional music facilitators. They can play a central role in nurturing projects and in guiding the preparation of proposals for public funding. Public funding generally operates on a ‘demand led’ basis, i.e. the process is dependent in the first place on applications being made through tender type processes. Without such active direct support, the development of local traditional music can have a ‘hit and miss’ aspect to it, especially in those areas where social structures are less developed. It is clear from the research that the presence of facilitators at critical times in the past played game changing roles in the development of traditional music in those areas of Fingal where traditional music is now considered strong. The ongoing visibility of traditional music along with opportunities for children to try out instruments are among the suggestions also being made by informants.

Biography

Maurice Mullen is a PhD candidate at Dundalk Institute of Technology researching Irish traditional music practice in Fingal. He holds an MA in Traditional Music Studies. Before returning to research, Maurice worked in the Irish Civil Service in several Government Department, with responsibility for policy formulation and implementation across a variety of fields. As a traditional musician, he has performed and taught traditional music in Fingal and Dublin for many years.

Appendix 7.1: Issues impacting the practice of traditional music in Fingal

Summary of issues impacting either positively or negatively on the practice of Irish traditional music in Fingal presented in Schippers and Grant's five-domain ecosystem analytical framework.

Issues impacting the practice of traditional music in Fingal

The following table summarises issues identified in this research emerging from the interviewees' observations, online survey, personal observation and other data collation processes that impact, positively or negatively, on the practice of traditional music in Fingal today. The issues are grouped and presented within the framework of Schippers and Grant's (2016) five-domain ecosystem analytical structure in section 2.4.3 of the dissertation. The five domains are: (1) systems of learning music; (2) musicians and communities; (3) contexts and constructs; (4) regulations and infrastructure; and (5) media and the music industry.

Domain	Issues
1. Systems of learning music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuition is generally available on the eastern side of the county but much less so on the western side. The Séamus Ennis centre in the Naul, six branches of CCÉ (five on the eastern side), <i>Rinceoil</i> in Rush and several individual teachers operating from their own homes provide a significant portion of the transmission, while some general music schools catering for multiple music genres also provide limited tuition in traditional music. • In general, initiatives for the establishment of teaching entities were driven by individuals within the community, often motivated by a desire to create a learning opportunity for their own children. • The presence of 'evangelists' and adult musicians settling in Fingal to promote and organise learning initiatives was essential to creating the local music scenes that developed over the past 40 years. • Creating learning environments where children can meet with their peers to play and socialise around the music was widely recognised. However, options to join groups outside of CCÉ or learning contexts outside of competition need to be included. • To engage young people in the music, particularly outside of a traditional music family context, having access to hearing and trying instruments at a young age is considered very important. • Learning online as the primary source of learning has not been a feature of transmission to date.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A significant portion of adult male musicians responded in the online survey to being self-taught, although the trend appears increasingly towards attendance at classes as the primary source of learning.
2. Musicians and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although much depleted in numbers generally, a cohort of local musicians who had been playing before 1980, contributed in certain locations to the upsurge in participation on playing traditional music from the 1980s onwards. • Musicians settling in Fingal for work opportunities helped to swell the ranks of traditional music and contributed to its development. Demographic change also worked in reverse whereby musicians moved away from Fingal causing in some locations a reduction in interest and capacity to play the music. • The role of the recreational musician as an integral element in the practice of traditional music needs to be recognised. Participatory as well as presentational forms of performance need to be promoted and supported—see domain 4 below. • Those engaged in traditional music in Fingal do not comprise a single, homogeneous community. There are many small groups, often with little knowledge of, and interaction with, each other. Some of the groups are associated with branches of Comhaltas or teaching schools while more comprise networks of individuals associated with playing in particular sessions or as organisers of traditional music related events. Those musicians who centre their playing in Dublin City normally interact within the networks associated with the sessions they play in. Other than within the Comhaltas organisation, there are no cross-group information sources common to a significant number of interests. While there are limited horizontal links evident between the groups, CCÉ branches interact vertically with the headquarters of the association and with other branches. Many groups interact with the wider traditional music community through attendance at major festivals such as the Willie Clancy Week and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance by members of the public at sessions in pubs is generally limited. Musicians don't expect numbers attending to be significant, with many (musicians) believing the knowledge and interest by the wider community in traditional music is generally low. Recreational musicians often prefer to play in venues where attendance by the public is low to minimise the impact of the audience talking over the music. • Although playing in pub sessions is the principal performance outlet for many recreational musicians playing together, a high percentage of female musicians do not play out in sessions or other public spaces. • Beyond the pub session, there are few opportunities for adults (over 18 years) to engage in playing traditional music together outside of the home, leading to many learners discontinuing playing in early adulthood. Most musicians playing in pub sessions observed during this research were in the 50+ years age bracket. • Opportunities for young people in their late-teenage years to play with others was critical for a number of the interviewees in transitioning their playing from childhood classes to playing as adults in their communities.
3. Contexts and constructs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewees reported few links / little interaction between the wider community and the traditional music community, some interviewees describing the music as a 'minority sport' in the eyes of the public. However, responses to the online survey beyond those who played Irish traditional music community were positive towards the music. • There are limited opportunities for participation in Irish traditional music beyond the session, usually located in a public house. • The focus of official bodies on supporting the full-time musicians and the presentational performance aspects of the tradition underpins their categorisation of traditional music primarily as an art form rather than viewing it in a wider community music context engaged in for recreational purposes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The focus on developing access to learning the music and the provision of transmission opportunities for citizens separate from consideration of the contexts and opportunities in which the music can be performed locally undermines a whole-of-life perspective being adopted on promoting the music within communities.
4. Regulations and infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard information on engagement by the public with the arts at county level is not available, resulting in reliance on national data sets for official decision making. • The focus of legislation and official involvement in traditional music is in relation to the full-time artist: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community music per se is not catered for ○ Unlike sport, the arts acts do not include provisions relating to participation by the public in music. • Official plans and strategies in the main present little hard information in terms of targeted outcomes for public investment in relation to the penetration of traditional music in society and participatory community music, the latter term being seldom deployed. • Annual reports normally report work delivered by ‘outputs’ only such that, coupled with the long planning horizons deployed (6-10 years) and the lack of targeted locational surveying, many official published statements of strategies and plans can serve little purpose beyond way markers of intent. • Outside of the two main arts centres in Fingal, the state does not provide facilities for performance for recreational players, unlike sport where public football pitches, tennis courts and other facilities are provided. • In considering arts services delivery, official bodies react to demands from within communities, such that in the absence of a demand being made on their behalf, children and communities may have limited or no engagement with traditional music in local settings.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no clear vision or evidence of narratives taking place at national or local levels on the future practice and needs of traditional music at community level, despite significant life style changes and urbanisation throughout the country, to inform the public, stakeholders and official policy making and support. The 2018 traditional music policy and strategy of the Arts Council is virtually the same as the policy issued in 2005. None of the existing official arts plans or strategies are location specific. (Strategies for the development of harping are, in certain respects, an exception).
5. Media and the music industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National narratives about the strength of traditional music today often emphasis (1) the higher number of learners (children in particular) in comparison with recent decades and (2) the variety of presentational performers evident, including being featured on radio and TV stations. Such narratives suit the professional side of the sector but ignore the lack of engagement in many parts of the country or problems facing participatory performance musicians. • Paid session gigs can reduce session playing opportunities by recreational players • Although limited in number, festivals and events featuring traditional music have provided opportunities for remunerated presentational performance and workshops • Acquiring and sharing repertoire sourced through the ready availability of material on various forms of media (e.g. TV, radio, recordings, streaming) has been very important to recreational musicians in Fingal.

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