

Listening to Louth's Heritage: The Role of Local Culture and Traditions in Enhancing the Tourist Experience

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Thesis submitted for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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June 2026

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and have conformed to the regulations on the use of and declaration of Generative AI, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Tools:	ChatGPT, GPT 5.1., used between 12/11/2025 and 06/12/2025
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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 would like to thank the Irish Research Council (now Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland) for their decision in funding my research project through a two-year scholarship, giving trust to my academic career and recognising the potential benefits this study may bring. I also acknowledge the assistance of a series of music, tourism and trade organisations including Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and its local branch in Dundalk – Comhaltas Craobh Dhún Dealgan, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, and the Vintners Federation of Ireland.

I appreciate the expressions of goodwill and encouragement I received from all the lovely people I met over the last three years at music sessions and other events while pursuing my research enquiries, and 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.

While I am grateful to entire Dundalk Institute of Technology staff for its constant assistance – with specific regards to the DkIT Research & Graduate Studies Office and the School of Informatics and Creative Arts teams – I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my supervisors Dr Daithí Kearney and Dr Ioannis Tsioulakis for their advice, guidance, never-ending patience, goodwill and encouragement and not least for their friendship throughout my research and preparation of this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for their on-going support in helping me bring the project to fruition. In particular, I would like to thank my research fellows Darren Culliney, Colleen Savage, and Aminah Dastan; Seamus & Niall Mooney (my "Irish family"); my "Italian big brother" Denny Lattanzi, who guided my first steps during my Irish adventure; and Kristina Mashtaler – the person who always reminds me to take a breath when I need it.

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Pessina, L. (2025). The Potential of Music Tourism for Destination Development: the case of Carlingford, Ireland. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, pp.1–21. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2025.2591064.

Abstract

The geographical focus of research on (Irish traditional) music and tourism in Ireland has typically been on the west of Ireland or Dublin city. Tourism statistics from Fáilte Ireland demonstrate a similar geographical bias, which is reinforced through marketing campaigns which emphasize all the natural and wild sceneries of the Atlantic coast and the cultural and entertaining relevance the Irish capital still maintain within the European context. This creates an imbalance in how regions are perceived by both locals and visitors. Musical activities can enhance cultural awareness and provide advanced tourism experiences for visitors while simultaneously shaping the sense of place for people living in a destination.

The aim of this study is to critically examine how Irish traditional music can contribute to the development of tourism in the north-east of Ireland, with a specific emphasis placed on Co. Louth. Influenced by the development of the Ireland's Ancient East tourism strategy, which includes Louth within its regional focus, this study engages with the tourism experience for local and visiting stakeholders. Ethnography and participant observation underpin the methodology, which involves attending and musicking at several relevant events and activities. The research aims to identify people engaged in music and local heritage (including musicians, festivals, schools, cultural associations, museums) and gain insights into their perspectives on the potential for tourism development in the region. It also engages with a business perspective from the point of view of hotel/accommodation facilities, transport and accessibility, and marketing.

This research identifies current – and potential – activities, trying to imagine how local actors and their music events could act within a collaborative partnership for music tourism promotion in Co. Louth, comparing this with international models. It will inform tourism promotion organisations that exist already, such as Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and Visit Louth but also aims to empower local stakeholders engaged in musicking and cultural activities. This study ultimately assesses the impact of tourism on cultural and identity awareness, activated by the understanding of living within a region with a rich local heritage.

Introduction

Research Aims, Questions and Objectives

This research project explores the potential of music for tourism enhancement within the context of the north-east of Ireland. Since the post Second World War, tourism has been recognised as an extremely important industry for the global economy (Lozato-Giotart 2008; Fletcher et al. 2018; Friel 2019). Until 2019, this sector recorded growth on an annual basis in terms of international visitor arrivals, contribution to global GDP and number of workers in the sector (UNWTO 2021). This growth contributed to advance interest and engagement in academic contexts. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 brought a disruptive period of great crisis and change. Many destinations tried to reimagine their offering and marketing strategies in order to survive what has been identified as the worst crisis for the sector (Burini 2020). The desire for engaging in tourism and experiencing new places and cultures was rejuvenated at the end of the pandemic, and as soon as the possibility of travelling – both nationally and internationally – was allowed, the industry engine has started once again.

This disruptive period boosted the interest in niche and alternatives experiences and destinations on the international tourism market (Novelli et al. 2022). Experiential and creative tourism, whereby people are motivated by the desire to really connect with places, cultures and inhabitants, consists of immersing oneself in the localness, interacting with people, engaging the senses, while learning history and stories of the place. These forms of tourism can be understood as a form of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism, which benefits and engages local communities, can also provide a source of livelihood, strengthen cultural identities while protecting natural and cultural environments, and spurring entrepreneurial activities (Holden 2008). This aligns with United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which provide a specific list and structure through which to engage with tourism among its 17 main objectives (UNWTO 2015). Tourism is recognised as an impactful force in relation to sustainability, with impacts including global greenhouse gasses emissions and the relationship between visitors and host destinations; nevertheless, it is also seen as a tool to prevent violence and conflict in post-conflict societies, fostering multicultural and inter-faith tolerance and understanding (*ibid*.).

Heritage – in its tangible as well as intangible forms – is often integral to the tourism experience. Heritage is part of and enriches a destination's identity, enhancing its sense of place in the minds of those engaging with it (Tuan 1977). New forms of tourism

consumptions forecast immersive experiences within a destination and its culture, with opportunities to learn and discover specific themes such as gastronomy, sports, dances or music. Music in this sense has an important role within regions and societies' intangible cultural heritage, and it has been recognised as a fundamental element able to offer experiences to visitors searching for the musicscape of their selected destination (UNWTO 2018; Kearney 2020).

My research is focused on Co. Louth, the smallest county of Ireland, located in the north-east of the island. Advertised as the "Land of Legends" owing to the rich heritage of Celtic mythology references associated with its territory, Co. Louth is located beside the Northern-Irish border, on the eastern side of Ireland, nestled between Co. Meath, Co. Monaghan, Co. Down and Co. Armagh, along a corridor between the two main Irish cities of Dublin and Belfast. This area is accessible and culturally rich. Nevertheless, it is an overlooked tourism destination, with the majority of tourism promotional materials focused on Dublin city and the west coast. Marketing campaigns for tourism in Ireland give limited attention to Co. Louth, creating a perception that this territory does not have a lot to offer to the visitor. The launch of the marketing campaign Ireland's Ancient East in 2015 suggested a rebalancing of the Irish tourism marketing strategy, but Co. Louth and neighbouring counties remained at the periphery, further problematised by their location in the border region (Jackman 2016). This imbalance is further evident when critically reflecting on music and Irish traditional music more specifically.

My research aims to develop a critical understanding of the potential of Irish music for tourism development in Co. Louth and in the north-east of Ireland, proposing a strategy for local tourism promotion where music is a main attraction, the pull factor to attract tourists and visitors in the region. This research addresses three themes:

1. An investigation of the relationship between music and tourism in Co. Louth, seeking to critically understand the level of awareness of musical heritage amongst local stakeholders;
2. A critique to the role of tourism in musical and cultural activities and its impact on local cultural awareness;
3. An examination of how local music heritage could be incorporated into information dissemination and marketing tourism strategies in the region.

This research presents three main objectives:

1. Identify music experiences for tourists in Louth;

2. Critique tourism promotion of the county;

3. Develop proposals for local music tourism enhancement.

The first objective aims to identify as many music-related opportunities in Co. Louth and surrounding territories as possible. These are initiatives and events that could be enjoyed by visitors as side activities during their staying in the region, or that could represent the primary reason(s) for visiting this destination, and are mainly symbolised by festivals, sessions, concerts series and workshops. This part of the research highlights how events may impact on place marketing, visitor experience and economic development. The second objective critiques tourism promotion of the region, identifying discrepancies related to recent destination strategies, together with an analysis of current numbers of tourist arrivals. This forecasts future economic impacts and scenarios and their sustainability based on current infrastructure. In this effort, the thesis considers Co. Louth as a territory to develop cultural tourism strategies with a focus on local musical traditions and heritage. In doing so, I critically compare the county with national and international destinations to consider models of best practice that may be used to further explore the tourism potential in the area highlighting musical activities. The third objective is dedicated to the formulation of a coordinated project of local tourism promotion through a participative network of public and private actors, where local music is the focus. The project involves the design of a platform model where results are evidenced, to collect and promote the place, but also musicians and specific music initiatives. The development of a theoretical model for management and cooperation of local offer and local stakeholders (musicians, museums, cultural centres, organisations etc.), realised together with their support and collaboration will thus be fundamental to guarantee the realisation of something able to represent and respect all the desirables and wills, allowing a bottom-up approach in its realisation, informed by literature and examples from broader fieldwork and research across Ireland and internationally.

While Co. Louth remains the epicentre of this study, my objectives extend beyond its perimeters, encompassing territories belonging to Co. Meath, Monaghan, and Armagh. The reason lies in the nuanced and blurred reality of culture and music, especially in such a relatively small geographical context, where tourism strategies already extend beyond the limits imposed by county borders. During the course of my studies, it was evident that many of the musicians involved in musicking engaged across the county bounds, with many attending festivals, classes and sessions in each of the counties involved in the analysis. From a tourist perspective, while Co. Louth has its own tourism promotional material, it is often

presented as part of the Ireland's Ancient East programme, while it is also twinned with Co. Meath in materials dedicated to the Boyne Valley.[1]

Motivation for Research, Significance and Impact

My research aims to demonstrate that this territory is able to offer many elements that characterise an enjoyable Irish tourism experience, including opportunities to approach local intangible cultural heritage through more alternative, deep and intimate ways. Often categorised as a transit zone along the corridor between Dublin and Belfast – and thus excluded from main tourism discourses – the region's heritage sites and traditions can contribute to tourism development. My research questions if music from the north-east of Ireland can form part of a local tourism promotion strategy targeted for experiential music tourists searching for forms of engagement with sounds and melodies. While Irish traditional music is foregrounded in literature and advertising, this study acknowledges the multi-music world that exists in Ireland and the potential that lies across genres and communities of musical practice (Finnegan 2007). This territory, which is identifiable as a music cluster (Krims 2011), has a valuable offering of music activities and initiatives, not only related to the world of Irish traditional music but a broader sphere of music, encompassing musicking activities including classical, contemporary, alternative and popular sounds. This is manifested through several music-related initiatives and events, like concerts series, festivals, workshops and masterclasses. Since Co. Louth and its surroundings do not attract large numbers of tourists, they do not suffer from overtourism and commodification phenomena and instead offer opportunities for niche tourism development (Novelli et al. 2022). High quality music opportunities here can thus be the lock pick to propose this territory as a compelling "music tourism destination", developing a strategy to attract high quality tourism arrivals, giving them the opportunity to enjoy intangible and tangible cultural heritage in the area.

This project will contribute to the development of understanding that will reorient the tourist gaze in ways that both promote the local destination and are also respectful of needs and self-perceptions of local actors. It will also inform tourism development in areas such as Louth, Monaghan and Armagh, which are the focus of recent studies on the Oriel

[1] Fáilte Ireland is exploring potential for a tourism destination brand that extends across Louth, Monaghan and Armagh. This project, named "Ancient Kingdom of Oriel" and led by the Paul Hogarth Company, a landscape architecture and planning team, takes into account the tangible and intangible heritage of the Oriel region, including music. My research directly informed the project during the stakeholder engagement phase, alongside that of other scholars from Dundalk Institute of Technology.

region's intangible cultural heritage (Ní Uallacháin 2003; Moley 2015; Crawford 2018) but also within the Boyne Valley, an established tourism infrastructure between Co. Louth and Co. Meath with famous attractions such as the Neolithic site of *Brú na Bóinne* (UNESCO World Heritage Site).

Literature Review

My research is informed by international studies and local perspectives coming from a variety of disciplines including music and tourism studies, geography, anthropology and ethnomusicology.

Music Tourism and Music Tourism in Ireland

There are many international studies that engage with music and tourism, including the seminal work of Australian geographers John Connell and Chris Gibson (2005; 2007), which is foregrounded and will be expanded in Chapter 1. These two researchers have deeply analysed the concept of music tourism, and on the ways music-related activities can be the primary reason to stimulate a visit to a particular territory. Other scholars have emphasized the role of music tourism in small cities and environments (Cantillon et al. 2022), while others have highlighted the impact of music practices and the role of tourism flows in relation to cultural practices and meanings (Francois 2020).

In my research, Ireland is recognised as a valuable music tourism destination, with music that is recognised as an important promotional element (Fáilte Ireland 2009). This country is strongly associated with certain types of music and sounds that contribute to its identification, enriching the imaginaries associated with the island (UNWTO 2018). Irish traditional music is an important element of the tourist experience in Ireland. This is partially due to its globalisation and commercialisation, reached after the success of Riverdance at the end of the 20th century (O'Connor 2001; Ó Cinnéide 2002; Motherway 2013), that generated a global interest in and market for Irish traditional music, which has been exploited by the tourism sector. Much research in the field of Irish traditional music presents it as an important aspect of localness, and expression of identity in shape of intangible cultural heritage, all themes which remain relevant in cultural tourism studies. Irish traditional music has been examined, particularly in the context of the west of Ireland, by anthropologists Helen O'Shea (2008) and Adam Kaul (2009), and geographer Moya Kneafsey (2003).

Others have highlighted the staging of folklore and dance for tourists (Kearney 2009; Kearney 2022b; Foley 2015), raising questions about the authenticity of what is presented to tourists (Cronin and O'Connor 2003). Some western territories of the island like Co. Clare and Co. Sligo are particularly renowned as "music destinations" within the Irish music landscape (Mac Aoidh 1994; Ó hAllmhuráin 2016; Sweeney 2017). The town of Doolin is an internationally famous example, with thousands of music visitors that come into town every year searching for and playing within its music scene, and is indeed recognised as the "music Mecca of Ireland" (Kaul 2009).

There is little scholarship in Irish tourism studies that involves areas outside regions of high tourism engagement, but the expansion of research into other regions of Ireland has highlighted territories away from the west coast with rich musical heritage. Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin (2003) published a monograph dedicated to the music and poetry traditions of Oriel, a cultural region encompassing North Louth and the border zones, while Sylvia Crawford (2018) explores Oriel's regional harping tradition in relation to cultural tourism development. Ciara Moley (2015) provides a comprehensive analysis of music festivals from the north-east, while Maurice Mullen (2022) discloses the heritage and practice of Irish Traditional Music in the Fingal region, south of Co. Louth. Focusing on a major music event, Daithí Kearney and Kevin Burns (2022) analysed the use and reconfiguration of public spaces in Drogheda, Co. Louth, during the two editions of an important Irish traditional music festival held in the town between 2018 and 2019. This heritage often remains overlooked in tourism promotional discourses, but my research is a fundamental step towards highlighting the potential of music tourism enhancement for this region.

Ethnography in Music and Tourism

Ethnography is a qualitative research approach rooted in anthropology and sociology. It is designed to study everyday lives, cultural practices and social interactions of human societies. Its central principles are based on immersion of the researcher in the space of analysis – the "field" – spending extended periods of time observing and participating in the lives of those being studied (Hammersley and Atkinson 2010; Dei 2016). Data is typically gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis (*ibid*.).

Ethnography and fieldwork appear as fundamental themes giving the nature of this study. Numerous scholars – within the field of sociology, cultural anthropology and music studies – use and describe these methods of research (Barz and Cooley 2008; Rice 2008).

Ethnomusicology focuses on the analysis of music as part of cultures and societies, and it is realised through the same processes and activities that characterise the ethnographic research (Seeger 1991). However, as Bruno Nettl evidences, music is considered as a "complex whole", and there are multiple theories, ideas and approaching toward the analysis of music in and as culture (2005). Some models have been realised to explain how ethnomusicology works – such as the Merriam or the Rice Model (Rice 1987), but they make clear that a single method for ethnomusicology approach does not exist (Rice 2008). Ethnomusicology seeks to understand music and music discourses and their meanings among communities and cultures, paying attention to the way historical, economic, environmental and social phenomena may affect them (S. S. Cohen 1993). For example, ethnomusicologist Christopher Small (1998) challenges the Western tradition of treating music as a fixed object, emphasizing instead its ritualistic and social dimensions, advocating for the concept of musicking, and understanding music as a dynamic process of interaction among composers, performers, and listeners. Moreover, Small argues that perception is never neutral; it is filtered through past experiences, including deeply internalised notions of gender.

Music is composed, learned, performed and reacted to by members of societies (Seeger 1991), and music ethnography offers an immersive perspective and an attention to discourses and lives associated with music production and consumption, as well as their role within societies and economies. In particular, Seeger proposes three main questions associated with the analysis of music and its role within culture and human communities (*ibid*.). These are:

1. What are the principles that organise sound and moments to have music?
2. How are these sounds different or similar to other musical traditions?
3. Why do people perform or listen to particular music in a given context?

The third point is extremely associated with concepts like music production and consumption, and the relationship between music and place, in which music contributes in filling environments and affecting territorial identities (Stokes 1994). In this sense, tourism thus appears as an important force that can shape, safeguard or alter music forms, and ethnomusicologists must take it into account (Kearney 2009).

Tourism can be analysed from different perspectives by several social sciences. Tourism (and tourists) engage with and consume destinations, activating both positive and negative transformation phenomena. If, until the 1990s, tourism was faced and managed exclusively as an economic topic related to foreign expenditure, profit for agencies in the

sector, accommodation systems and seasonal work, a new sensitivity in the general perception of this topic allowed to introduce a more holistic perspective concerning its analysis (Lozato-Giotart 2008). This method, thus, is translated into the fieldwork experience applied to tourism. Tourism has been approached through an innovative way that coalesced in the 1990s and continues to be prominent today, that looks directly into account the history of anthropology: this is the experience-near, interpretive humanistic perspective at the earth of modern ethnographic research. As Leite et al. remember, 'this approach is often (though not exclusively) associated with the work of the American anthropologist Edward Bruner' (2019, p.1), whose work provides an exemplar for fieldwork presented in this dissertation.

Early ethnographic research involving tourism typically focused on host communities, often presented in a passive position, as rural, indigenous, and postcolonial populations whose lands have become a tourism destination. The observable impact of tourists and emerging tourism economies on traditional lifestyles followed lines of inquiry interesting at disclosing the effects of colonialism on indigenous cultures, with questions focused on identifying evidence of change in social structures, resource allocation, gender norms and rituals. It was not until the 1980s that more nuanced and flexible ways of thinking about the dynamic cultural phenomena surrounding tourism flourished, with tourists increasingly recognised as part of the territorial mix. It was only after a period of dramatic changes of the discipline's methodological and theoretical underpinnings that anthropologists found a way to undertake ethnographic research characterised by the introduction of interpretive, postmodern, and poststructuralist theories into the more traditional anthropological discourses. Edward Bruner contributed to this earlier shift through a more humanistic oriented, experience-centred anthropology (Leite et al. 2019). If early ethnographies of tourism were afflicted by a static, monolithic vision of tourism communities (both as host cultures and visitors), new works offered a more fluid point of view, affected by symbolism and interest in events, performances and other expressive forms, identified as autonomous meaning-making vehicles (*ibid*., pp.6-7). Music has become a relevant object of study for many tourism ethnographers, with some of them examining the impacts of tourists and tourism on destinations and local performances, while also raising issues of authenticity (Cooley 2005).

A central aspect in this new approach is the recognition that anthropologists are themselves culturally and socially situated beings, and hence always experiencing, understanding and interpreting phenomena from a particular subject position (Bruner 1984;

Bruner 1993). Such reflexivity – meaning the one's own role in producing ethnographic knowledge – led to a firestorm of debate over whether objectivity was possible and concretely reachable, since lens of personal observation always shape conclusions. Bruner's openness to the mere idea of being a tourist as well as an observer (while being observed by local communities just like other tourists), combined with his intense self-reflexivity 'were vital contributions to the move to finally take tourists and tourism seriously in anthropology' (Harrison 2019, p.73). Bruner's work is thus fundamental to approach more anthropological and updated aspects of tourism, always keeping in mind position and background of the researcher undertaking fieldwork experience. A similar development has occurred within ethnomusicology studies, where the researcher's positionality and active role within local music environment have been recognised as an important component of the fieldwork experience (Barz and Cooley 2008; Rice 2008). Ethnographers of music and tourism engage with concepts including authenticity, narration, contested sites, the touristic border zone and embodiment, always keeping in mind this reflexivity.

Following Bruner's (1984; 1993) acknowledgement of reflexivity and positionality of researchers in the field, I believe it is important to disclose mine. While a positionality statement is not required nor compulsory within quantitative, scientific and data-based analysis, it is correct and helpful to acknowledge potential biases that might influence a researcher's work, especially when it is about studies grounded in social sciences and based on anthropological frameworks. I am a geographer and tourism expert, and a classically trained flutist with limited experience with Irish traditional music. My background influenced my research, impacting over access to spaces, information about the events and regional musical cultures. As a non-native English speaker, I faced a series of difficulties in terms of stakeholders engagement, especially when it came about interviews and collection of responses. Nevertheless, this imbalance was partially addressed during my permanence in Ireland, as I was progressively getting used to local accent and slang. Mostly, my positionality influenced my expectations of the destination and of its music prior my arrival and during the first months of research in the field. In particular, I was fascinated by cross-border intangible heritage, with my imaginaries depicting it as something with very distinctive traits. Then, my empirical and constructivist approach (based on what I experienced) provided me with the lens to disclose the reality under analysis, contextualising it within a national background.

Visual Representation and the Tourist Gaze

Theoretical perspectives from visual representation and gaze studies further inform this research. Visual illustrations, images and imaginaries contribute significantly to trends in the tourism industry, appealing and stimulating the desire of potential tourists of visiting a certain destination. It is in this context that the work of John Urry (1990) emerges as foregrounded. Urry has developed the concept of *tourist gaze*, which remains a very important theme within tourism studies and perhaps even in the context of ethnomusicology, with its focus on aurality and sound. Exotic images associated with musicians and music traditions or environments can appeal people to look for local sounds and performances (McCormack and Swan 2019). Originally theorised within the medical field, this concept has been adapted on the idea that people generally "consume" a tourist destination, which is something out of their ordinary, through their imaginaries. People have expectations about what they are going to see and visit, and the destination is chosen to be gazed upon because there is an anticipation originated from fantasies, evocative images and stories that build a personal idea of the place in the eyes of those people. Such anticipation is constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourism products, like movies, television programmes, literature, magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce that gaze (Urry 1990). Such products can also promote a perception of local culture (and music) that local practitioners feel as representatives for themselves.

Urry's contribution within this research has two main functions. On one side, it reveals how international visitors may experience and approach cultural and music practice through the lens of their "gaze" (informed by brochures, websites and social media, as well as word of mouth), thus constructing different meanings of authenticity and tradition and consuming music products in a different way than locals (Kneafsey 2003). On the other side, it also challenges stakeholders to think about how to encapsulate cultural and territorial features of destinations, in order to propose them to potential visitors, thus activating their gaze and sense of curiosity for this land, increasing their imaginaries and desires. This second aspect strengthens the argument for an ethnographic approach able to listen to the voices of local practitioners. Such activity must be able to portray forms of representation that fits the society/culture/destination, rather than ones that create only a consumable version of the place local stakeholders cannot identify with.

Landscape, Soundscape and the Representation of the World Through Sound

The idea of the gaze is also connected to the identification of places, territories and destinations through an acoustic perspective. Soundscape is a term employed to describe the sounding aspects of destinations and landscapes. Studies on soundscape were pioneered by the Canadian musician and researcher Raimond Murray Schafer, who identified this concept as the set of all the sound elements present in a given environment (1977). His innovative approach brought to the recognition of the value sounds – both natural as well as artificial – and music have within communities and societies (Hendy 2013), as well as their role within the geographical analysis and landscape studies. Other authors have translated and updated the concept of soundscape into *acoustemology*, another word employed to identify a way of knowing the world through sound (Feld 1996). Moreover, concepts such as the sense of place began to be associated with music and sounds, as soon as their contribution in establishing territorial identities was recognised (Gibson and Connell 2007, p.169). As Daithí Kearney states:

> The sound, setting and significance of music (to both performers and listeners) are all important in understanding the geography of music. A greater awareness of sound and music, the study of soundscapes, can inform the study of landscapes, spaces, the relationships between people and environments, regions and localities (2020, p.298).

This passage highlights that the active role people have in shaping and perceiving the landscape. Listeners of a particular soundscape can craft their individual identities, as well as their relationship to the places and people around them (Bull 2008, p.194).

Within the soundscape studies, a further distinction is made when the focus relies on music only, and the distinction between soundscape and musicscape occurs. The term *musicscape* is used to identify the number of music elements within cultures (Slobin 1992), territories and destinations, that actually form music landscapes. Music (and its history, development, performance and production) can be understood in geographical and anthropological terms, being observed as an expression of place, movement, traditions and, above all, people's and territories' identity (Connell and Gibson 2003, p.ix). Connell and Gibson state:

> Music, through its actual sounds […] is crucial to the ways in which humans occupy and engage with the material world. Sound is invisible; music cannot be seen. Yet music plays an important role in defining our behaviour in certain

> locations, creating a mood or atmosphere, eliciting reactions and responses, and reinforcing roles in particular geographical situations. […] Music does not exist in a vacuum. Geographical space is not an 'empty stage' on which aesthetic, economic and cultural battles are contested. Rather, music and space are actively and dialectically related. Music shapes spaces, and spaces shape music (*ibid*., p.192).

Music and sound thus contribute in developing and enriching the sense of place of territories and societies, and their reproduction, performance and consumption emphasise contemporary and continuous reconstructions of space (*ibid*.). This symbolic combination of music and destination leads to the creation of new imaginaries, providing new research paths for music, tourism and geographical studies.

Methodology

The project combines desk research with in-depth fieldwork in an identified geographic location and music community. It relies on a constructivist approach, following the example of influential scholars engaged in mixed-methods research about music tourism (Friel 2021) and its consequently social (Gibson and Davidson 2004) and economic impacts (McKerrell and Hornabrook 2022). This methodology has engaged in primarily qualitative research to gain critical insights into both the historical and current factors that provide opportunities for music tourism in Co. Louth and neighbour regions. This included participatory observation, field-play, netnography, semi-structured interviews and participative cartographic activities. This approach is enriched through attending and presenting at several conferences and industry events dedicated to tourism, music and geographical studies in Ireland and abroad. Nevertheless, three online questionnaires directed to (potential and actual) international and domestic tourists, pubs and music venues, and accommodation providers from the region were disseminated in an effort to gather quantitative data to understand the role of music in the choices and activities of a wider cohort of local actors connected or working within the tourism sector.

It is important to highlight that this research develops from a background – and remains aligned with the paradigms and approaches of tourism studies. Nevertheless, methods employed – as well as the literature review – reflect the interdisciplinary nature of this work, with a tourism studies perspective being integrated through ethnographic analytical tools and practices. The reason for this combination lies in the added value

ethnography and ethnomusicology can provide to tourism research where the focus is on music. Ethnographic methods and resources enabled me to collect data and generate findings that enrich this research, providing clearer insights into the perspectives of musicians and stakeholders involved in creating, experiencing, and shaping music at the local level, and positioning them as the starting point for any potential local tourism development.

Desk Research

The initial phase of this project involved a desk research engaging in a critical analysis of policy documents relating to tourism in Ireland, exploring local marketing strategies and promotional material dedicated to music events and cultural activities, together with a literature review of main texts and books devoted to the phenomena. The research was also informed by a wider scholarship of music and tourism studies and draw upon national and international comparison. The approach was critical and holistic, documented through the examination of several authors active in the Irish context or able anyway to provide good models and examples coming from an international framework, reporting then a literature review of their main papers, emphasising their main findings. A very important aspect of this literature review was to prepare myself for engaging in the fieldwork experience, which was a fundamental part of the entire project.

Ethnographic Participant Observation

As ethnography provides opportunities for gaining a deeper understanding of a destination and its musical culture, my research involved extensive ethnographic fieldwork at music-related events. Fieldwork, aimed at the collection of qualitative data through interviews and participant observation, can be undertaken to know and discover reasons for visiting a place, a festival or to attend – as locals or outsiders – a particular cultural event, and to understand participants' behaviours (Crompton and McKay 1997). Ethnography is particularly useful when considering a phenomenon such as music, especially in the context of tourism. It can be considered integral to understand the tourist experience of Irish traditional music, as well as of other music genres. Qualitative research methods allow for a more focused engagement with case study examples, drawing on the experiences of musicians and audiences at selected events. Data collected were critically analysed shaping current scenarios and forecasting potential future developments.

My fieldwork activity included participative observation as well as direct participation within music initiatives, together with interviews and online questionnaires. In particular, the opportunity of participating in the music initiatives – both as a listener and a performer – enabled me to fully experience the topic under analysis. As soon as I arrived in Ireland, in order to advance and enrich my research, I felt the necessity to understand and discover Irish traditional music from a more practical – and *emic* (Rice 2008, p.50) – perspective, learning the music and becoming able to play together alongside the traditional environment. During my fieldwork, I joined activities where I learnt Irish traditional music, both in terms of style and techniques on the flute and the uilleann pipes as well as new tunes and repertoire, musicking in the area (Small 1998). In order to improve my music skills, I first joined a local ensemble named Scale Force. This is a group dedicated to adult beginners, who are moving their first steps within Irish music. I began to attend their rehearsals and public sessions, joining in some live performances they had in the area. Similarly, I joined the Oriel Traditional Orchestra, as it provided me with opportunities to learn and perform local repertoire. In order to additionally increase my abilities associated with Irish music, I decided to take lessons with the local Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann branch in Dundalk (Comhaltas Craobh Dhún Dealgan). This decision was made to follow and completely experience the learning process many musicians encompass to play this kind of instruments, directly engaging – ideally – with teaching and learning opportunities for potential visitors undertaking music courses during their stay. Participating in music activities – both as a listener and a performer – made me approach music through multiple perspectives, reflecting *field-play*, a research approach aimed at better understanding the context thanks to its multi-faceted qualities. Rice defines this methodology as an ontological solution to an epistemological problem arising when discussing differences of knowledge between insiders (*emic*) and outsiders (*etic*) in relation to cultures and music practices (2008). Field-play activity was translated for this research in joining, both as a listener and a performer, traditional sessions – developing and increasing the knowledge associated with tunes and the proper way to play them – workshops, concerts and music lessons. The opportunity of participating both as a member of the audience as well as a musician enabled me to fully experience these activities through a multi-faced perspective, enabling me to overcome the insider-outsider dichotomy (Culliney and Pessina 2022), allowing for a deeper understanding of the realities observed (Rice 2008). Moreover, field-play enables the experiencing of music (tourism) offer from multiple points of view, according to the different ways visitors may engage with it. Events can be thus appreciated through a double

perspective, and it is possible to record positive (or negative) sensations while acting as performer as well as a listener.

Interviews

Interviews with stakeholders were of central importance within my ethnographic experience. Áine Mangaoang's research and interviewing activity in Oslo (2023) offers a parallel example of what I did in Ireland. These meetings had the important role of highlighting ideas, desires, critiques and hopes of local operators (arts and music practitioners, tourism workers and managers, cultural organisations, national and local public bodies) and they were consequentially part of the stakeholder engagement phase. Participants were identified based on their public profile and through existing networks with snowball sampling techniques used across different communities to capture diverse stakeholder perspectives in the region. Gender balance among participants was pursued and maintained where possible. Interviews were carried out through a semi-structured approach, where main key questions were asked within informal discussions, in order to get respondents as much comfortable as possible and allowing my interlocutors 'to imagine themselves in a position of power' (Tsioulakis 2011, p.19). Interviews were realised approaching singular persons, but also small groups of two/three people. Questions were divided according to who my interviewees were (e.g. traditional or Classical musicians, tourism operators, festival or cultural organisations' secretaries and representatives etc.), trying to reflect their role within local music community and what they could give for the tourism enhancement of the area through their offer. As semi-structured interviews, some main questions and key points were considered with broad opening questions allowing participants to introduce themselves, creating a space for the interlocutors to perceive themselves like in a sort of open dialogue where they had the power of telling anything they wanted, in the way they preferred (*ibid*.). All of the interviews were occasion of debate, comments and further opportunities to discuss some specific aspects with the interviewees. After the first preliminary questions, the next step was to understand how they were involved with music locally, and if they were working with music, or if it was just a form of recreation. Further questions were more geographically-orientated, and developed through their perception of music as an expression of place or local identity. A critical aspect of the interviews was the need to investigate participants' knowledge about music tourism and the possibilities it offers in the region. Their opinions about the role of music and musicians could play in enhancing the tourist experience can inform future strategies for local

sustainable development. Interviews recorded a shared interest in this project, with local music (traditional, but also Classical) recognised to be a great potential tourism pull factor for the region.

While I engaged in informal discussions and chats with a number of people during my fieldwork, I collected a total number of thirty-nine in-person and online long and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. My interviewees can be classified according to different taxonomies and classifications, such as gender and age, as well as by whether they are active musicians in the region or stakeholders whose primary focus is tourism. While the research project seeks to understand Louth as a multi-music soundscape, there is a predominance of Irish traditional musicians, reflective of the communities of musical practice that exist and the interest amongst tourists in specifically Irish traditional music. Nevertheless, there is a particular overlap in the area of festivals and events involving music, with different musicians being also organisers and directors and *vice versa*.

I interviewed in total twenty-five women and fourteen men. With regard to age groups, eight people were in their twenties, seven in their thirties, six in their forties, five in their fifties, twelve in their sixties and one person in its seventies. In terms of geographical origins, almost all participants were from Ireland, with the exception of four individuals from abroad: one from Scotland and three from Italy, although they currently live and work between Dundalk and Drogheda. The vast majority of Irish respondents were from Co. Louth, even though I also recorded the stories and opinions of three musicians from Co. Monaghan, three people from Northen Ireland, one person respectively from Co. Cavan, Co. Kerry, Co. Leitrim, Co. Roscommon and Co. Tipperary, two musicians from Co. Meath and two individuals from Co. Dublin. I approached a total of thirty-one musicians to participate in interviews for this research. The vast majority (twenty-seven) were – also – Irish traditional music performers. Twelve interviewees were actively engaged as music events' secretaries or directors, while seven were tourism operators of local or national level. Demographic information are summarised in Figures 1-4.

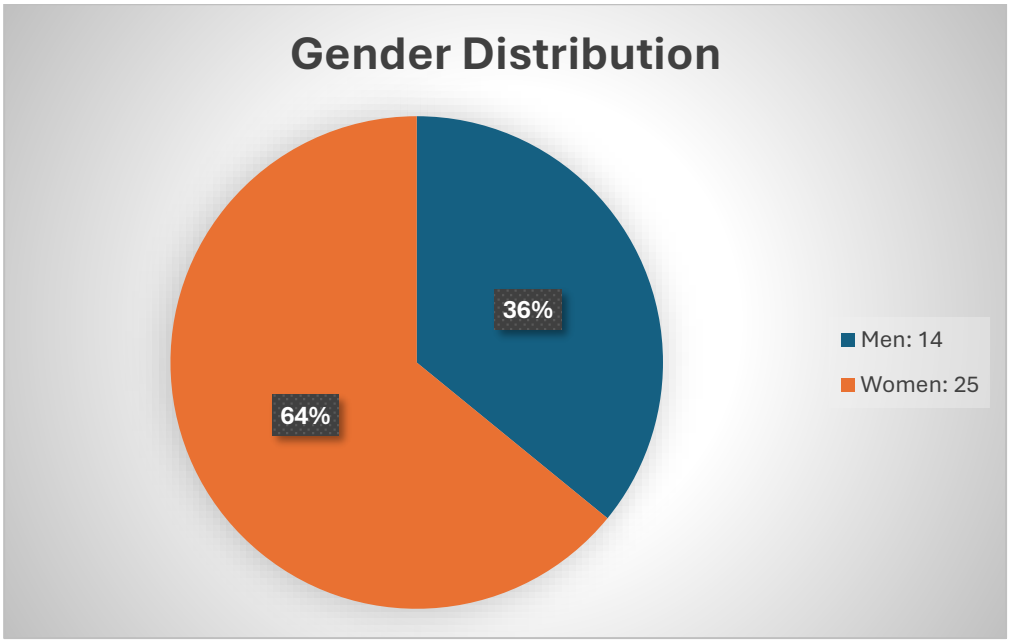


Figure 1: Gender distribution of interviewees (source: author).

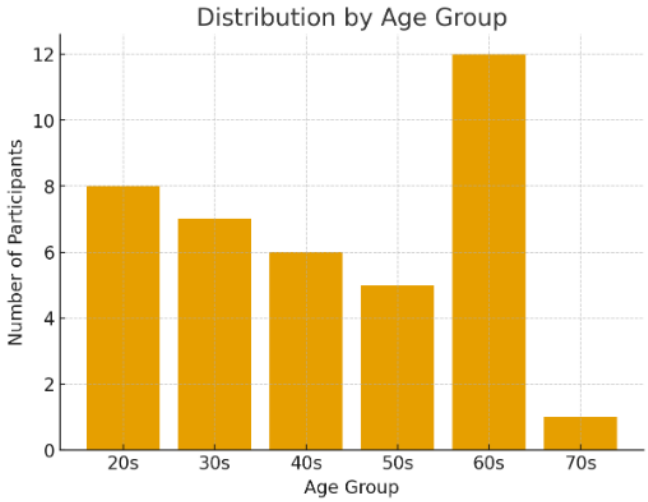


Figure 2: Distribution by age group (source: author).

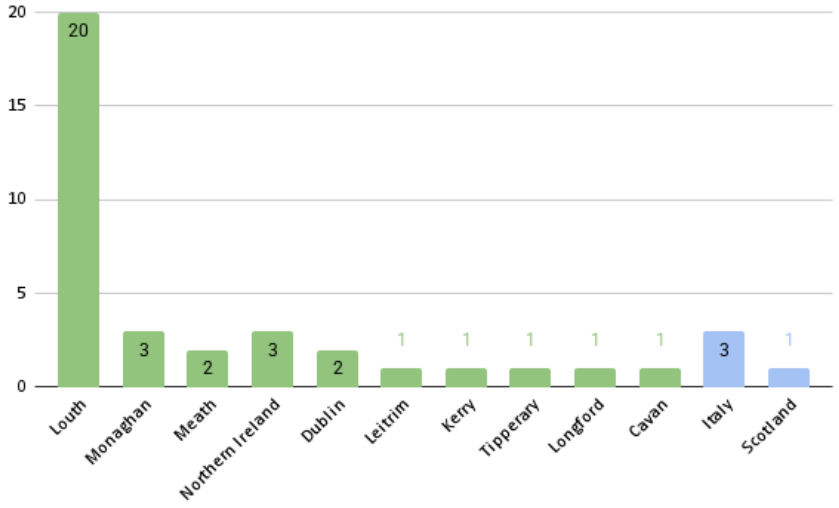


Figure 3: Geographical origins of interviewees (source: author).

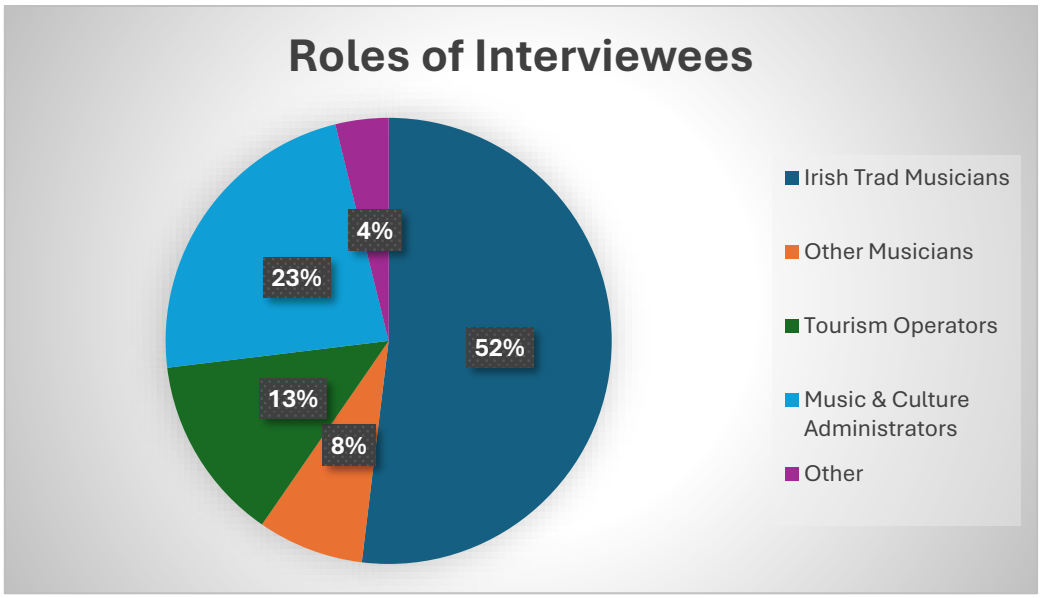


Figure 4: Roles of interviewees in percentage (source: author).

Digital Ethnography and Netnography

Digital connections and tools also offer the opportunity to engage in anthropological and ethnographical research even online, remotely, and this becomes extremely helpful and useful, especially in an after-pandemic world. Digital ethnography provides an alternative way of doing ethnography in a contemporary world, and it invites researchers to consider and use contemporary digital devices and spaces (Pink et al. 2016). This involves the observation of what people do online, how they engage with social media practices, or analysing online contents. Virtual fieldwork thus employs technologically communicated

realities in the gathering of information for ethnographic research (Cooley et al. 2008). The analysis of online contents can eventually go further, enabling the opportunity to engage with netnography. Netnography exploits the possibilities offered by the recent digital revolution to connect with online communities (like those composed by musicians or festivals attendees) and virtual contents. The qualifying element – and main distinction from the more general digital ethnographic background – is that netnography is focused solely on Internet and online contents. This activity can be based on observations only, without interactions with online users, but it can also allow direct participation of the researcher in online discussions. Initially, netnography was developed for marketing and consumer research (Kozinets 2010), but material disseminated on the worldwide web in the form of blogs and social media has been recognised as a valuable source of ethnographic data (Janta 2017), and so online contents, communities and products have begun to be analysed through an ethnographic perspective. My research has incorporated digital ethnography and analysis of online contents as well, observing websites and social media pages of several musicians, music organisations and music events, as well as online products with a musical focus that could offer potentialities in a destination promotion strategy perspective.

Participatory Cartography

Interviews represented a chance to collect geographical data through a participative approach. Inspired by the work of Italian tourism geographer Frederica Burini (2015) and Irish music-geographer Aoife Kavanagh (2020), I engaged in cartographic activities involving stakeholders during my fieldwork. Participative cartographic practices contribute to increase the value of this research, allowing for spatial and visual representation of music phenomena in the area. Studies associated with sounds and music combined with spatial representation provide interesting perspectives to advance ethnographic knowledge, while Geographical Information Systems (GIS) technology represents an opportunity to create highly detailed cartographic products in digital formats, useful to represent and explain data obtained from fieldwork experiences. Within an ethnographic environment, “mapping” is helpful especially when it is realised through a bottom-up approach, forecasting the direct participation of inhabitants of a territory. Participative cartography practices can thus be part of the fieldwork experience, where the collection of data is realised to get knowledge of the ways inhabitants perceive their territories and engaged with it and its cultural features – such as music.

During my interviews, participants were then invited to contribute to an interactive map based on their own experiences of musicking and tourism in the region. I also collected other geographical data independently, looking at tourism brochures and guidebooks of the region. This amount of information was then convey in the realisation of a QGIS map of local music resources, which can provide the basis for additional research and regional tourism development. A more detailed discussion of this part of my research will be provided in Chapter 3.

Online Questionnaires

While interviews gave me the possibility to collect in-depth ethnographic data, questionnaires represented an opportunity to alternatively obtain precious quantitative information, allowing the gathering of a greater number of sources in a shorter time. Three different anonymous questionnaires were developed to engage with:

1. International and domestic tourists;
2. Pubs and venues' owners;
3. Accommodation providers.

Three different QR codes were realised and distributed physically – while attending expertise meetings or by leaving copies in key locations – and digitally, through the use of email addresses, social media pages or thanks to the contribution of organisations and associations, that forwarded my requests to their members operating in Co. Louth, Co. Meath, Co. Monaghan and Co. Armagh. Participants were required to respond to a series of questions, mostly by selecting a single option from a range of alternatives, although some questions allowed multiple choices. Questionnaires included a few open-ended questions at the end, where participants were invited to share additional thoughts if they wished. Almost all the questions were optional, with one exception – the first one, which referred to the voluntary agreement to participate in the study.

The first target (tourists) was engaged through research of online communities of Irish music and tourism enthusiasts, together with QR codes left in key spaces such as tourist offices, theatres and pubs in the area. The online questionnaire for this target forecasted a common beginning, with a division in the middle, depending on the geographical origins of visitors (whether "international" nor "domestic"), leading to a different set of questions. I collected a total of thirty-eight responses (twenty-four from overseas and fourteen from Ireland and Northern Ireland). The second questionnaire was addressed to pubs and venues

owners in the region. I received sixty replies, and their contribution provided me with interesting data about the impact tourism and tourists have on these enterprises. The last questionnaire, which targeted accommodation providers, generated only modest engagement, with just six respondents. Nevertheless, they provided me with information about their guests, as well as their perspectives on the challenges about developing Co. Louth and the north-east as tourism destinations.

Although some results are mentioned in section 5.5., the collection of data through the use of online questionnaires saw the emergence of a series of challenges, only some of which could be effectively addressed. Mainly, these difficulties originated from the struggle of engaging with a wide range of potential stakeholders without the support of a stronger infrastructure. While the Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) allowed me to reach a vast number of pubs, bars and live venues in the region, I experienced difficulties in receiving responses from tourists and accommodation providers. Despite the support of some Fáilte Ireland's representative, other organisations denied me the chance to share my questionnaire through their network, and so my results are quite limited. In relation to the first questionnaire, I got too many responses from Italian people only, thus producing a bias in the percentage of people visiting or wishing to visit Ireland and Co. Louth. Moreover, despite being a questionnaire dedicated to visitors only, nine people living in Co. Louth decided to reply anyway, thus partially polluting the results. While a series of surveys at Dublin Airport was suggested as an option to engage with overseas tourists, my supervisors did not consider this as a successful strategy, as it was perceived as extremely time and energy consuming. Therefore, only the survey targeted for venues and pubs can be considered as a valuable data source. The three questionnaires, along with their list of questions, are included in the Appendices section.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval from the School of Informatics and Creative Arts Ethics Committee was granted prior to the beginning of fieldwork, the interviewing activities and the distribution of questionnaires. In accordance with these policies, participant consent forms and participation leaflets have been developed (see Appendices). These are important to comply with ethics associated with the interaction between and the researcher and human informants. Participants had the option of being anonymised and may withdraw from the research at any point. To prevent mishandling or leaking of data, any information provided

by participants has been digitally stored securely. This information remains available to me and my supervisors only. Information provided by participants will be kept available to analyse for the duration of the research project. Once the research project is completed and defended, all information provided by participants will be managed according to Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) data protection policy and GDPR strategy.

Chapters Outline

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of music tourism on a theoretical basis. Moving from an introductory section focused on the history of tourism development and its role within the international economy, the chapter continues by introducing cultural, heritage and creative tourism forms. New and alternative forms of tourism – like niche tourism – are associated with sustainability discourses. The role of UNESCO is also highlighted and critiqued. As part of one destination's heritage, music and music tourism are then introduced and analysed from multiple perspectives, including its various forms and its management.

Chapter 2 moves the discourse of tourism and music tourism towards a localised destination: Ireland. After a historical account of the development of tourism on the island, the chapter analyses Irish main imaginaries and stereotypes which enrich the tourist gaze associated with the destination. Music – and Irish traditional music more specifically – is recognised to be a valuable component of the local holiday experience, but also a strong element of Irishness. The chapter proceeds moving between the history of Irish music and its more recent development, noticing how it became part of tourism imaginaries associated with the island.

Chapter 3 brings the reader in the north-east of Ireland, with specific regards to Co. Louth, the smallest Irish county. Here, local heritage, music traditions and places of music production and consumption are described and analysed through a geographical, but also ethnomusicological, account, engaging with fieldwork activities. I also consider cross-border identities and shared music heritage represented by the Oriel music tradition. This chapter leads to a section dedicated to participative cartographic practices, where a "music map" of Co. Louth and of its surroundings is presented.

Chapter 4 examines the experience of current musical practice in the north-east of Ireland, engaging with a strong ethnomusicological analysis of local music and tourism opportunities, introducing the voice of many stakeholders from the territory. In this chapter I critically reflect on my fieldwork experience with a specific focus on sessions, concerts

and music festivals. Beyond Irish traditional music, part of the analysis involves other genres such as Western Art music. The chapter then explores the different opportunities for musicking in the region considering their intimate and niche qualities, alongside the potential for edutainment experiences. The informality which characterises many local initiatives is regarded as a potential symbol for authenticity.

Finally, Chapter 5 critiques the potential of music tourism enhancement for Co. Louth and the north-east of Ireland, considering how local music could benefit from – or be affected by – a tourism development strategy centred on its recognition as a key destination commodity. The earlier sections engage with an analysis of local cultural tourism resources and regional tourism supply. These lead to a comprehensive SWOT analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The role, and potential, of some key urban places is evidenced, together with a consideration of how music and tourism in the area could generate and maintain sustainable practices concerning peace and well-being. The end of the chapter determines pillars and objectives for the future, looking at some case studies of international relevance.

Conclusions include a series of recommendations for future research and activities that could be developed from this thesis. These forecast the use of digital tools and the involvement of undergraduate and postgraduate students interested in programmes associated with tourism, hospitality, informatic and the creative arts.

Chapter 1: International Perspectives on Tourism and Music Tourism

1.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the concept of tourism, a phenomenon of global significance, illustrating its relevant role within the international economy. Economic, environmental, cultural and social impacts of tourism are also highlighted. The chapter then moves towards the realm of cultural tourism, highlighting the role of culture and heritage within the tourism systems as part of destinations' value chain. Heritage in particular is understood both as tangible as well as intangible, and its role within cultural tourism, and its safeguarding and management are evidenced. Following new consumer choices that led to a segmentation of the tourism market – together with the emergence of relevant themes such as authenticity and commodification of culture – the chapter explains the dimension of niche tourism, meaning a new and alternative category of tourism tailored to meet the needs of a particular market segment. Niche tourism is also recognised as a potential tool to join the tourism industry with sustainability discourses, such as those highlighted within the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

It is within the sphere of niche tourism that music emerges as a specific theme. Music practices are part of a destination's intangible cultural heritage, but they can also become part of a territory's attractions. Music tourism is then recognised as a complex phenomenon guided primarily by musical reasons, that can be appreciated and experienced by different music tourists, while it also retains various shapes, activities and forms. The chapter ends focusing on music tourism management, marketing and place branding.

1.2. The Tourism Sector: an Overview

Since the period after Second World War, tourism has been recognised as one the most dynamic contemporary "industries", and it has come to play a very important role in the lives of people today. Numbers of global travellers have grown exponentially since the 1960s as a result of a series of economic improvements and cultural factors, especially in Western countries. These include better working conditions with an increase of leisure time, a peaceful context among European nations, higher rates of education, the popularisation of "making tourism" through movies and new medias (Beeton 2005), and the so-called

transport revolution, which introduced charter and low-cost flights (Battilani 2001; Fletcher et al. 2018) that made several destinations far more accessible.

As tourism involves the movement of billions of individuals every year, it represents the largest form of temporary migration in the world (Lozato-Giotart 2008; Mortet et al. 2021). From an economic perspective, tourism produces sensible direct, indirect and induced impacts on local and global scale, contributing to foreign exchange earnings, income and employment generation, and GDP growth (Fletcher et al. 2018; Friel 2019). International tourism was also accounted to be the third largest export category after chemicals and fuels, and ahead of automotive products and food (Figure 5 – UNWTO 2019).



Figure 5: Export earnings by product category (USD billion – UNWTO 2019).

Prior the COVID-19 pandemic (a theme which is going to be addressed in the context of sustainable tourism), 330 million people were globally employed within the travel industry (10.3% of all jobs were in this sector, meaning roughly 1/10th of all workers in the world), while more than 10% of global GDP was produced through tourism activities (WTTC 2022). Even if these numbers were heavily altered and reduced by the pandemic and following limitations to domestic and international travels, data from 2022 showed that tourism is still relevant for the global economy, accounting for around 295 million workers in the world, with a share of 7.6% over of global GDP (WTTC 2023). This demonstrate the relevance tourism and tourism planning have in economic and political agendas, since the impressive movement of money they involve, and it also shows why governments – on a regional, national as well as international level – are including tourism within their development strategies.

Figure 6 shows that France is the destination that received the largest number of international tourists to May 2024. It is followed by Spain, United States, Italy and Turkey, along with other countries from the Mediterranean region, continental Europe and nations that are traditionally an accessible destination for Western source markets (UNWTO 2024). This ranking reflects the centrality of Europe and North America within tourism discourses because tourism developed here to a combination of economic, social, technological and geographical factors. Increasingly countries like China and Japan are developing outgoing flows, demonstrating the global and multi-faced relevance of contemporary tourism phenomena. The Mediterranean region remains the primary international destination, with four out of the top-five main countries that belong to this area. The geographical proximity to source markets, together with an affirmed combination of attractive elements such as prestigious coastlines, that allowed the development of seaside vacations and consequent facilities, plus historical and cultural features, contribute to a diversified regional tourism offering (Battilani 2001; Holden 2008; Lozato-Giotart 2008).



International tourist arrivals

Rank	Destination	(millions)
1	France	100.0
2	Spain	85.2
3	United States	66.5
4	Italy	57.2
5	Türkiye	55.2
6	Mexico	42.2
7	United Kingdom	37.2
8	Germany	34.8
9	Greece	32.7
10	Austria	30.9

Source: UN Tourism (May 2024)

Figure 6: International tourist arrivals (millions) and top-ten destinations (UNWTO 2024).

Dispelling common perceptions that tourism is mainly, if not only, about international travels, official classifications put forward by UNWTO – the United Nations World Tourism

Organisation – recognise three distinct forms of tourism phenomena. These are: domestic tourism, comprehensive of the activities of a resident visiting the country of residence; outbound tourism, consisting of the activities of a resident visitor outside the country of residence; inbound tourism, which encompasses the activities of a non-resident visitor within a country during an inward trip (Fletcher et al. 2018). This first level distinction leads to a further categorisation, comprehensive of: internal tourism, which includes domestic tourism and inbound tourism; national tourism, which is the sum of domestic tourism and outbound tourism; international tourism, which covers inbound tourism and outbound tourism. The international tourism categories is the one that receives primary interest from international organisations and governments (*ibid.*).

Means and purposes of travel are extremely diversified. As Figure 7 shows, UNWTO provides a division between reasons for visiting a destination in its official reports, highlighting their weight within the system. More than half of the total number of global inbound tourism is attributed to leisure and recreational vacations, regardless of the different shapes and motivations these holidays can have. UNWTO then comprehends health and religious tourism together with VFR (*visiting friends & relatives*), accounting these purposes for more than one quarter of the total number of trips per year. A minor reason for travelling is represented by the MICE (*meeting–incentive–conference–exhibition*), or business tourism, while a final and smaller category comprehends other reasons not previously mentioned (UNWTO 2021).

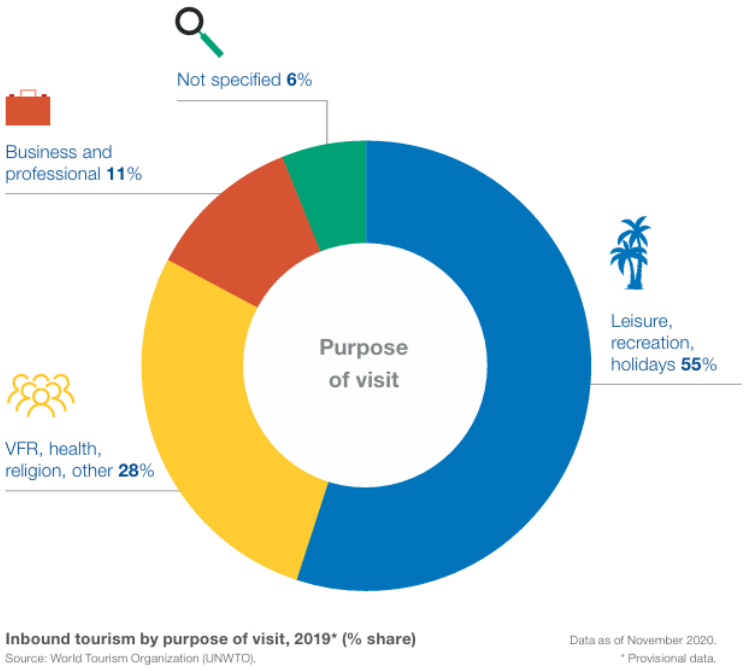


Figure 7: Inbound tourism by purpose of visit (UNWTO 2021).

Beyond its role within the international economy, it is noteworthy to observe that tourism has also important environmental, cultural, social and political implications. These components are not passive subjects only; they also actively influence tourism phenomena, either positively or negatively (Holden 2008). Tourism also impacts music practices. Music is a cultural resource for many destinations, and people travel domestically or internationally to engage with it. The role of music in tourism and the impact of tourism on musical practice will be explored later in this chapter.

1.3. Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Imaginaries associated with leisure tourism are generally connected with traditional beach tourism and seaside holidays, characterised by recreational purposes summarised in the slogan of the four "S" (*sun, sea*, *sand* and *sex*), occasionally joined by a fifth one, standing for *spirits* (Lozato-Giotart 2008). The dream of tropical island under the sun is probably a common stereotype within the minds of many people, that consider tourism – and tourism discourses – connected only to this kind of scenario, but this is just one shape of a very complex system, articulated in multiple forms. Attempts to define tourism and different tourism shapes are made difficult because there are not clear divisions between them (Holden 2008; Novelli et al. 2022), but a first a first distinction can be introduced when it comes about cultural and heritage tourism.

1.3.1. The Relationship Between Tourism and Culture

Cultural tourism includes the movement of people driven by motivations of cultural nature – thus connected with education, monuments, museums or popular practices and traditions, that involves more than 40% of the total number of international travellers (Richards 2021), and that is increasingly growing and developing (Gortan-Carlin and Krajnović 2016, p.207). Culture is recognised as a whole, including both tangible as well as intangible features, that has been a key component in the rise of tourism.

The definition of culture has been notoriously difficult. The word has Latin origins, and it derives from the terms *cultus* (cultivation) and *colere* (to till). Culture definitions can be summarised as related to:

1. External behaviours (language, gestures, customs/habits);
2. Products (literature, folklore, art, music, artefacts);

3. Internal ideas (beliefs, values, institutions).

In his book *Primitive Culture*, Edward B. Tylor defined culture 'a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society' (1871, p.1). More recently, other definitions of culture have emerged, such as that provided by ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl, who defines the term as a organic unit, where societies and communities play a role in shaping it, together with learning processes and other exogenous factors (2005).

Cultural tourism appears on the tourism market either as a stand-alone tourist product, or as part of the "integral" tourist destination product (Gortan-Carlin and Krajnović 2016, p.207). So, it is wrong to consider it as an independent phenomenon; on the contrary, most of the time cultural and traditional forms of leisure tourism are mixed, and are observable through different lens and scales. In fact, it is wrong to consider cultural tourism as something that involves only hidden destinations and new forms of holidays. Certainly, it also includes niche themes, destinations and experiences to compete within a wider market, but has always been a key part of mass tourism.

1.3.2. Cultural Tourism as a Global Phenomenon

Culture's importance within the tourism sector has significantly increased over the last forty years, gradually becoming an object of travel for growing numbers of people around the globe (Richards 2021, p.1). Reasons underlying this development are multiple, and include the aforementioned elements that contributed to the rise of tourism as a mass phenomenon, together with other motivating factors such as education, and improved economic and social conditions (Smith and Robinson 2006, p.4). Educated travellers look for experiences that combine educational interest and entertainment, resulting in the worldwide expansion of cultural tourism (Flecther et al. 2018, p.319). The marketization of culture also helped in promoting and enhancing the interest for cultural experiences, while low-cost airlines made travels to cultural destinations available for an increasing number of travellers.

Less established destinations in particular benefitted from the rise of low-cost airlines. Cheap travelling was a driver for tourism globally (Keller 2020), and this is evident especially in less renowned regions, that recognised the potential of culture – and tourism flows – as economic forces and a chance to present themselves on the international market. As Smith and Robinson states, 'though well-established cities of culture such as Paris, Rome,

Venice and Athens maintain their primacy from the early days of tourism, cheap flights have created new opportunities for people to experience heritage and the arts, particularly in some smaller places' (2006, pp.4-5). Moreover, new initiatives, like 'the European Cities of Culture campaign, with its strong emphasis on destination branding, has been particularly successful in this way and has acted to endorse the idea that culture is a highly "moral" product and also, through its ability to attract tourists, is economically beneficial' (*ibid*.).

Another factor that contributed to the recognition of the economic and tourism value of culture has been the change of destinations' offer and demand, triggered by a mutation of tourists travelling behaviours and interests (Timothy and Boyd 2003; Holden 2008). This process is still ongoing, and it is constantly favouring new forms of cultural tourism production and consumption possibilities (Novelli et al. 2022). Fifty years ago, the typical holiday pattern included a single, long, vacation in a unique destination, usually during summer months. This habit started to change in the 1990s, with the introduction of shorter and more frequent holiday trips all along the year. Such a disruptive novelty slowly changed international tourism demand and offer, allowing a wider diversification of attractions within new and old destinations (Timothy and Boyd 2003; Richards 2021). Cultural tourism and arts development are also facilitating the transformation of post-industrial cities. An example is Bilbao and its Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, which has served as a model for the franchising of museums in other parts of the world (Yúdice 2008).

1.3.3. The Emergence of Heritage Tourism

The emphasis and interest on cultural elements of territories contributed to the emergence of a form of tourism focused on heritage, namely heritage tourism. Heritage tourism is a section of the wider cultural tourism, and it labels forms of tourism focused on aspects of cultures and landscapes that have been understood as valuable by the communities who own them. Heritage is then recognised as a significant and representative element of societies or populations. The traditional understanding of heritage is that it refers to elements with an historical value that people venerate and reproduce over time as an inheritance for future generations (Palmer and Tivers 2019, p.1). Heritage is understood as a selection of the past, with societies recognising only some elements as portions of their identity and history. As Palmer and Tivers state, 'to speak of heritage is, therefore, to speak of a relationship that brings the past into the present' (*ibid*.). The past is then interpreted, and only those object a community appreciates as valuable are then included and celebrated as part of

destinations' heritage. This is also the reason why heritage and its promotion are also connected to, and occasionally also abused for, social, economic and political reasons (Graham et al. 2000; Richards 2001).

In their analysis on heritage tourism, Timothy and Boyd (2003, pp.4-5) summarise main objects of interest as follows:

1. Historical buildings and monuments;
2. Areas pregnant of historical significance, like battlefields;
3. Landscapes;
4. Languages, music, arts and literature;
5. Events and festivals;
6. Lifestyles and traditions and local products such as food and beverages.

Heritage can be both tangible, including elements such as buildings, monuments but also natural areas, as well as intangible, like values, customs and lifestyles, in addition to experiences such as festivals, ceremonies and other artistic or cultural events (*ibid*., p.3). Heritage and heritage tourism can be classified according to the type of attractions. Some examples are natural heritage, living culture heritage, building heritage and industrial heritage (Palmer and Tivers 2019; Williams 2022). Heritage is not homogeneous, but it is identifiable on different scales, from global to even personal (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Different dimensions of heritage (Timothy and Boyd 2003, p.14).

Global heritage attracts large masses of visitors internationally, and they are recognised to be world heritage sites, able to represent something that is valuable and deserves protection and appreciation on an international level (Timothy and Boyd 2003, pp.14-15). Similar to global heritage, but applied on a different scale, national heritage symbolises a society or a nation. Tourists usually visit these sites as part of their vacation in a country, as they stand as national landmarks. Historical monuments or symbolic events express durable national ideas, while national pride can be an important stimulus for heritage preservation, while at the same time such heritage feeds national pride and identity (*ibid*., p.15). Local and regional heritage is an occasion for communities to create links with their own collective past through the preservation and promotion of symbolic landmarks. Most of world's heritage sites are not internationally known; on the contrary, the majority is found on a regional, or even city level, although 'these kinds of attractions stir emotions and contribute to a local heritage experience' (*ibid*., p.16). Personal heritage is connected to the search for roots and individuals' identities, and it draws people that possess emotional connections to a particular place (*ibid*.). For example, for many US citizens Ireland is known as the original homeland of their families, who moved to the New World in the second half of the 19th century to escape the Great Famine and economic instability of those decades (Michelucci 2009, p.126). In the last thirty years, roots tourism has then become one of the reasons for many Americans of Irish descent to visit the island, looking for the villages where their ancestors came from (Deegan and Dineen 1997). An example is provided by The Gathering Ireland, a tourism initiative held in 2013 that sought to attract overseas visitors with Irish origins back to the island through a series of community-led activities arranged in every part of the country (Miley 2013). While different classifications between different shapes of heritage tourism exist, it is important to understand that they are not exclusive. On the contrary, different forms of tourism activities – and different forms and scales of heritage tourism – can coexist within the same travel experience, testifying the differentiation of activities individuals can undertake during their trips.

Since the 1990s, heritage tourism has been recognised as one of the fastest growing segments within the global tourism phenomenon (Chen 1998) following the expansion and segmentation of the demand for travels and experiences (Timothy and Boyd 2003, p.62). So, economic returns and the value around heritage tourism have also increased. The engagement of tourists with heritage provides a source of income for communities and stakeholders, while it also requires impressive expenses for its promotion, maintenance and safeguarding (*ibid*., p.143). The economic flows generated by heritage and culture have

gradually turned them into a strong economic resource subject to consumption and exploitation, that requires management and control in order to guarantee their accessibility and preservation.

1.3.4. Culture and Heritage as an Economic Resource and their Consumption

Surging cultural tourism demand, and exploiting the recognition of culture's value in the minds of many travellers, countries have begun to profile themselves through their cultural assets to distinguish their tourism offering and attract potential visitors' attention, putting themselves and their heritage on the global map of tourism flows (Richards 2021). Culture has become the catalyst for the establishment of arts amenities in urban contexts, forging new identities and enhancing economic development, drawing in new businesses through building a successful image of the destination (Fletcher et al. 2018). Cultural tourism was also seen as a relatively 'good' and more elitist form of tourism, with high spending and wealthy visitors supporting local cultural heritage and economies (Richards 2001).

The 1970s saw increased attention for cultural tourism as an emerging form of mass phenomenon, and destinations began to tap into the economic potential of this market by opening new museums, monuments and cultural paths and experiences (Richards 2021). During that decade 'the growth rate of cultural attractions in Europe outstripped the growth of cultural tourism demand' (*ibid*., p.2), producing an increasingly competitive cultural tourism marketplace. This period saw the globalisation of cultural tourism, whereas the interest in cultures and traditions was expanding worldwide together with a standardisation of facilities and activities. Globalisation is one of the major trends in the international tourism industry and involves a convergence in tastes, preferences and products. The global firm is one that capitalises on this trend and produces standardised products contributing to the homogenisation of the world tourism market. Essentially this means an increase in worldwide business between multi-national corporations irrespective of the geographical location and can lead to the virtual firm as a transport operator (Fletcher et al. 2018). Similar services were produced and proposed at the same time in different parts of the world, following a demand for certain requests of the tourism experience concerning accommodation, gastronomy and forms of engagement: literally *Fordism* applied to the service sector (Battilani 2001).

As societies have entered advance stages of capitalism, consumption has become a central theme of Western lifestyle. Consumer behaviour studies have shown that as tourism

became more and more central in the lives of people, it became an occasion to satisfy social needs, like self-fulfilment and self-development (Holden 2008, p.42). This consumption was translated in the consumption of local products, but also (cultural and natural) resources, as well as (physical and natural) space. While cultural tourism was taking the connotation of a mass phenomenon – just like traditional beach tourism – concerns about its effects on destinations, heritage sites and the homogenisation of local cultures were emerging (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Pickel-Chevalier et al. 2016).

The different perceptions of cultural tourism (as a supporter for local economies and heritage *versus* a violator that produces commodification and exploitation of traditions and local practices in the destination) created a debate between those who saw cultural tourism as the destruction of authentic culture and identity, and those who recognised culture and identity 'as a worthwhile commodity in the global market' (Debeş 2011, p.236). It is in this context that global awareness and necessity for heritage protection emerged, with some significant steps such as the introduction of the Convention for the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage (known as World Heritage Convention – WHC), adopted by UNESCO in 1972 (Timothy and Boyd 2003).

1.3.5. The Role of UNESCO

Together with other UN bodies, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation) was created in 1945 with the scope to achieve lasting peace, economic and political agreements among nations and states, strengthening intellectual and moral solidarity through mutual understanding and dialogue between cultures (*ibid*., p.115). Thus, its main activities have become the safeguarding, protection and promotion of culture and education worldwide. A fundamental step in UNESCO's history was the aforementioned World Heritage Convention of 1972, established following the international recognition of culture's value – together with a growing interest in its safeguarding – and its role within and for societies and economies. A first UNESCO convention related to heritage protection took place in 1954 and it was titled Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, but the 1972 event was much more influent. The convention introduced the concept of World Heritage Site (WHS), with the scope of identifying cultural features of a territory characterised by significant universal meaning (*ibid*.). This convention also established the World Heritage Committee, whose fundamental responsibility was to create and manage a World Heritage List of cultural and natural elements considered of

outstanding universal value, inscribed in with the scope to enhance their international protection, promotion and preservation (Holden 2008, pp.180-181). Updated data from 2024 show that the List accounts for a total number of 1154 world heritage sites, most of them located in Europe (47.12%), with Italy retaining the highest number of WHS (59 – UNESCO 2024a). There are three separate World Heritage Sites on the island of Ireland: the Neolithic site of *Brú na Bóinne* in Co. Meath; Skellig Michael, a rocky island facing Co. Kerry, famous for its early Christian monastic settlement; the Giant Causeway, a strip of coastline in Northern Ireland featuring over 40,000 interlocking black basalt columns, where geology blends with myth and legend.

This list was originally created following a more "traditional" understanding of what heritage sites were, such as national parks and archaeological excavations or monuments/buildings of prestigious historical significance. Thus, its focus remained on tangible heritage, easier to recognise and protect. However, the perception of what the concepts of culture and heritage are has gradually changed towards a more inclusive, democratic and experiential interpretation and vision (Robinson and Smith 2005, p.8). This means that culture and heritage have been progressively understood not only as arts, but also as aspects of everyday life. This new and holistic vision led to the emergence of the concept of intangible cultural heritage, understood as living practices, stories, languages and traditions and even industrial production (Dei 2016). In order to reply to the demand for recognition, promotion and protection of such ephemerals elements, UNESCO launched in 2003 its Intangible Cultural Heritage List (ICH – Timothy and Boyd 2003), with the scope to pass to humanity's descendants living expressions, traditions and knowledge inherited from communities' ancestors, maintaining cultural diversity and promoting sustainable development (UNESCO 2024a). Intangible heritage in its different forms is recognised to be an additional reason for travelling. Even if it is hard to calculate its economic impact and its role within the tourism industry, the ICH contribution to national GDPs is accepted as a fundamental asset (Petronela 2016), especially within those countries that do not offer other relevant attractive factors (such as coastal areas – Timothy and Boyd 2003).

1.3.6. Criticism to UNESCO and Mass Cultural Tourism

From a tourism marketing perspective, UNESCO is nowadays considered as a brand that guarantees high-quality experiences and uniqueness, and many WHSs have become prestigious tourism destinations (Timothy and Boyd 2003; Alves et al. 2021). As Richards

states: 'attracting global flows is also part of a global power game of cultural labels' (2021, p.62). This situation has increased pre-existing concernments about the exploitation and consumption of culture, fostering the debate about its consumption and "museification". Identifying a place as a world-known cultural destination can have negative impacts over local heritage and practices in multiple ways, and it can also affect the relationship between residents' cultural identity, local heritage and their attitudes towards tourists. Even UNESCO has been receiving critiques against its function and side effects of the WHS label over heritage sites and territories.

UNESCO's funding system has been criticised in relation to what it actually supports, since it seems to be more orientated towards short-terms benefits, such as promotional marketing campaigns, instead of being effectively focused on the restoration and protection for sites and cultural practices inscribed in its lists (Timothy and Boyd 2003, p.120). Another issue arises in the designation process, when it comes about developing countries. The main problem here for those nations wishing to propose sites to be included within the UNESCO's world heritage lists lies in the necessity to demonstrate financial stability, together with technical and political capacities to manage and preserve their properties (*ibid*., p.116). The lack of a strong economy, combined with instable political situations, have prevented many developing countries from applying for the World Heritage status, leaving the organisation and the majority of its sites in the hands of Western countries.

Despite the fact that community empowerment has been recognised as critical for heritage tourism development, another concern of political nature is the form of management and control over heritages sites. The exclusion of local communities from policy decision-making processes and planning has been a traditional paradigm around the world (*ibid*., p.276), and WHS are managed through a top-down approach, leaving limited opportunities for local people to raise their voices in relation to the management of their own resources. Despite attempts to enhance inhabitants' involvement through initiatives such as the UNESCO's World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme, launched in 2001 and including the training and inclusion of local populations in tourism-related activities as key theme (UNESCO 2006, p.1), the loss of control in local decision-making for local communities at UNESCO's WHSs is still questioned (Holden 2008, pp.183-184).

Another outcome of the WHS designation is that it makes destinations internationally renowned, publicising their heritage sites as unique, and shaping general public perception of what heritage is and means (Richards 2021). Thus, the emphasis placed upon them is accused of having turned such places into mass tourism destinations, where commodification

of cultures and overtourism phenomena appear. According to Timothy and Boyd (2003 p.244), most famous WHS are considered to be packaged for mass tourism consumption, favouring a way of engaging with heritage that is distorted and close to "disneyfication" phenomena (Matusitz and Palermo 2014). This leads to the stagnation of cultures and practices, that must remain fixed in a specific moment and shape in order to satisfy visitors' expectations.

Finally, another issues that arises is overtourism and pressures at sites, within the destinations and on communities. Unchecked tourist flows can create overcrowding. The excessive concentration of visitors can strengthen demand and thus cause increases in the price of services, rental fees, and even real estate, leading to increased living costs and inflation (Pasquinelli and Trunfio 2020). An example of overtourism applied to the Irish context is represented by the Temple Bar quarter in Dublin, a destination 'where kitsch tourist shops are juxtaposed with national cultural venues, and second-hand clothing stores sit comfortably between old pubs, new hotels, and chain or independent restaurants' (Dillane and Raine 2023, p.239). Developed as part of an urban regeneration project in the 1980s, this area quickly turned into an important economic generator for the city centre (*ibid*.), with its central pub – "The Temple Bar" – after which the quarter is named, becoming one of Ireland's international tourism landmark. Renowned for its music scene and pub culture (themes that will be addressed in the following chapters), this area has been defined as a "tourist trap" (Hegarty 2004), and suffers from a number of issues associated with massive tourism consumption, including high prices and tensions over the carrying capacity of the urban space, especially during specific events during the year (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Livestream of The Temple Bar surrounded by a huge crowd celebrating St Patrick's Day (O'Hara 2025).

These socio-cultural effects potentially deprive residents of their share of the use of urban facilities, while additional costs like public cleaning and transport services are imposed on them (Koens et al. 2018). According to Song and Abukhalifeh, 'this may result in a weaker sense of cultural identity in residents, reducing their place satisfaction and potentially fostering anti-tourism sentiment' (2021, p.118). Furthermore, this stress over destinations' carrying capacities can actually be a threat to culture preservation and safeguarding, posing 'a significant threat to the sustainability of a community's development' (*ibid*.). Overtourism can instigate congestion and degrade of natural and cultural resources, including water, noise, and air quality, reducing the overall quality of life for residents (*ibid*.). So, the overflow of tourists becomes a risk factor involving irresponsible tourism behaviours and possible damage of monuments and sites (Holden 2008, p.182; Fontanari and Traskevich 2021).

The desire of visitors to distance from mass consumption, commodification and exploitation of resources, together with new trends characterised by a growing number of visitors increasingly searching for authentic experiences and new forms of tourism, has led to further micro-segmentations of the holiday market (Robinson and Novelli 2005). The way visitors experience destinations and their features is changing (Smith and Robinson 2006, pp.8–9), and this has a reflection within the cultural tourism field, where awareness of impacts on visited places, people, their cultural heritage and their identity has emerged. This

is evident especially in the post-pandemic era, where the necessity to avoid overcrowded spaces favoured forms of travelling that facilitated social distancing, offering at the same time deeper engagement with destinations, their heritage and societies, while safeguarding their carrying capacity (Novelli et al. 2022, pp.xxvi-xxvii).

1.3.7. Creative Tourism and the Experience Economy

The concept of experience has been recognised as a key element in shaping tourists' choices concerning destinations and activities (Montebelli and Vavassori 2019), both in tourism as well as sociology studies (Friel 2021). Defined as the participation of a person to a memorable event that becomes part of his/her personal intangible heritage, personality and history (Turco 2012), experiences have emerged as part of the latest developments within the sphere of new cultural tourism, allowing the formation of more creative proposals, labelled as "creative" or "experiential" tourism (Friel 2021). This theme is influenced and shaped by a mixture of elements: supply and demand, the nature of the heritage that has been conserved, promoted and protected and the impacts heritage creates and leaves within regions they visit (Timothy and Boyd 2003). Creative tourism is characterised by the active role visitors have within the destination, and by the numerous possibilities of understanding the visited territory and its features. The active role of visitors in "making their own experiences" has become so relevant that the term "experience economy" has been employed to express the shift in the very fabric of the economy, where consumers value experiences more than goods and services (Pine and Gilmore 2013). According to the two authors, 'experiences are a distinct form of economic output, and as such hold the key to promoting economic prosperity' (*ibid*., p.22) and they affect many sectors, including culture, heritage and tourism. Although experiences are intangible, and perish during their own performances, people greatly desire them because the value of experiences remains long afterward in 'the memory of any individual who was engaged by the event' (*ibid*., p.26). Experiences are now a sort of intangible commodity marketed and sold within the tourism industry, and hence their economic qualities emerge and get recognition internationally.

Within the wider world of cultural tourism, new paths, resources and opportunities are emerging to experience heritage. While they can be defined by using different terms – such as *alternative* or *niche* – these novel forms of special interest in tourism can be translated into local development factors (Cerutti and Dioli 2016, p.291), since they also

contribute in proposing something that is 'more sustainable, less damaging and, importantly, more capable of delivering high-spending tourists' (Robinson and Novelli 2005, p.1).

1.3.8. Authenticity in the Tourism Experience

One of the most widely discussed concepts associated with "experience" is that of "authenticity". Authenticity is a foregrounded topic in both ethnomusicological and tourism studies, and is traditionally recognised as an important aspect visitors search during their holidays (E. Cohen 1979; Hughes 1995), with Dean MacCannell suggesting that tourism is nothing more than a "search for authenticity" (1973). Erik Cohen provided a phenomenology of the different tourist experiences, dividing visitors into five different categories or modes of touristic experience, based on the significance and relationships tourists establish with the destination and their place of origin or "centre". These are the recreational mode; the diversionary mode; the experiential mode; the experimental mode; and the existential mode (E. Cohen 1979). While the first two modes refer to types of tourists looking for some entertainment, chill and recreation, the last three modes refer, to varying degrees, to types of travellers who actively seek to establish a connection with the destinations they visit, engaging with local culture and trying to capture its "essence". Such interest and desire of understanding and discovering holistically a destination can lead to forms of niche tourism (Robinson and Novelli 2005; Marson 2011; Soler and Gemar 2019; Novelli et al. 2022), especially those relating to experiences that are perceived as "authentic" and "traditional".

Authenticity is fundamental for heritage tourism, and its presence is recognised as an essential requirement to promote the destination (Gilli 2009). Authenticity remains an intangible element constructed in relation to concepts such as "spontaneity", "grassroots" and "of the people", in opposition to "manipulation", "standardisation", "mass", "commercial" (Connell and Gibson 2003, p.27). It raised particular interest when societies, under the effects of globalisation, started to feel the need for a rediscovery of particularisms of the local against standardization phenomena (Gilli 2009, p.44). Hughes (1995) recognises that the concept of authenticity is, rather than being naturally given, something produced by a variety of entrepreneurs, marketing agents, interpretative guides and so on. He indeed presents the authenticity debate as part of what has been labelled as a crisis of representation, where its construction is merely a way to face the standardisation of cultures produced by globalisation. The process of modelling authenticity is thus realised by local communities to celebrate their own identity (*ibid*.).

Nevertheless, as the notion of authenticity is usually loaded with positive meanings, this concept is often abused in promotional discourses. While developments within academia 'have undermined the unquestioned legitimacy often attributed to authenticity as a means of asserting individual or collective identity […] cultural producers and promoters still tend to deploy claims of authenticity to confer legitimacy, currency, and popular appeal' (Claviez et al. 2020, p.vii). Authenticity is often encapsulated and offered to outsiders and visitors searching for "authentic experiences" through marketing strategies that emphasize evocative imaginaries, trying to appeal travellers searching for deeper connections with destinations, communities and cultures. Claviez et al. critique authenticity, highlighting its 'paradoxical status' (*ibid*.) as subjective construct, whereas experiences can be considered to be authentic simply because they match prior expectations (Waitt 2000). Authenticity is also associated with the concept of tradition, another word used within marketing strategy to capture the interest of potential visitors attracted by cultural experiences (Schippers 2006).

Authenticity and tradition are often exploited by the tourism industry, with national tourism organisations, tour operators and travel agencies emphasizing the authentic and traditional features of the destinations they promote. Tourism and tourists are recognised as important economic sources, but also as disturbing and altering elements within delicate cultural systems (Francois 2020). Tourism flows and tourists can modify local cultural practices, with businesses in "tourism areas" that become interested in satisfying tourism expectations only, exploiting the presence of visitors to raise costs for services and activities and offering activities targeted solely for them. The presence of tourists and the expectation they have in their eyes (Urry 1990), can contribute in pushing away local people from their own territory, now "contaminated" by the tourism business. It is in such contexts that overtourism and commodification of cultural products (re-adapted for the consumption of tourists only) are identifiable, resulting in the standardisation of packages, experiences and event destinations themselves (Lozato-Giotart 2008).

The proliferation of pseudo-events, artificial products "packaged" expressly for the tourism experience, embraces a false sense of reality. The desire of tourists for authentic heritage, coupled with their lack of discernment between reality and fabrication, can lead to the emergence of staged authenticity phenomena. This theme is quite common within tourism literature. MacCannell wrote some of the early discourse on staged authenticity, defining it as a sort of "fake reality", an experience produced for the visitors' pleasure within a new type of social space (1973). This space is identified as 'an undefined ground in which the "local" is both produced and staged through global actors and discourses, and then

translated to the domain of the mundane and conventional' (Russo and Richards 2016, p.7). Staged authenticity remains a concept involving an ongoing challenge in its understanding, according to new and emerging forms of experiences on the tourism market. Authenticity clearly influences the way in which experiential value is created, particularly in an event setting. As an increasing number of people have been attracted to new experiential forms of holidays, able to provide engaging opportunities and a deeper understanding of local cultures and identities (Friel 2021), staged authenticity phenomena have developed widely within the experiential tourism market. Nevertheless, new innovative and niche markets that combine experiential aspects able to overcome cultural and heritage mass tourism impacts have developed in the last twenty years.

1.4. Niche Tourism

The term niche tourism has its origins in the marketing field. The word "niche" assumes that there is market potential for a product or service that can be sold to a particular customer. Within the travel industry, the concept of niche can be referred to a specific product – like a particular destination, a theme or an experience – tailored to meet the needs of a particular market segment (Novelli et al. 2022, p.xxiii). These were primarily associated with the diversification and expansion of tourism motivation, consumption and production patterns, overseeing shifts from commodified mainstream types of tourism into tailor-made and unique alternative options (*ibid*.).

Niche tourism remains quite hard to define through a single definition, since many different activities can be ascribed within the niche experiences fence. It usually describes an alternative to mainstream forms of mass tourism. While mass tourism is considered to be homogenous in nature (a standardised, uniformed product for a large market segment), niche tourism is defined by its heterogeneous nature (higher demand for a more distinctive and unique product – Marson 2011, p.9). Niche tourism does not involve major economic flows, but it provides opportunities to small communities and little businesses to access the market, enhancing territorial development. Robinson and Novelli (2005) define niche tourism through three different perspectives or approaches. The first one is a geographical and demographic approach based on the location where tourism consumption processes take place, as well as the number and quality of population involved. Locations may include urban, rural, coastal and/or mountainous environments (and their combination), but what matters the most is how visitors and the local communities are engaged with (Novelli et al.

2022, p.xxiv). The second is a product approach, and its highlights are the presence and inclusion of 'activities, attractions, settlements, food and other amenities contributing to the consumer's unique experience' (*ibid*.). These elements constitute the key aspects of the niche tourism destination mix, which is shaped in accordance with specific tourists' expectations, and that constitute the third approach, based on customers' requirements and desires (*ibid*.). Attention is placed on the relationship between demand and supply. This approach looks at what kind of specific activities tourists seek in order to have a satisfactory holiday experience (*ibid*.).

Even if niche tourism reflects a small dimension of the wider cultural tourism field, it can be observed and understood on different levels and through different scales of analysis. A first categorisation of niche tourism experiences can pass through the division between macro and micro-niches (Figure 10). Macro-niches are relatively large market sectors (e.g. rural tourism, sport tourism, gastronomy tourism etc.), each capable of further segmentation that leads to micro-niches (like a form of tourism focused on a very specific gastronomic product or tradition within the wider gastronomy tourism) that would be difficult to split further (Robertson and Novelli 2005, pp.5-6). Such categorisation demonstrates that the tourism phenomenon is no longer as homogeneous as it was in the past, but rather characterised by individuals with specific needs and wants, looking for different experiences and activities within an incredibly fragmented market. Niche tourism products are in fact tailored to meet the needs of specific market segments, catering for particular individuals with a travelling specific purpose.

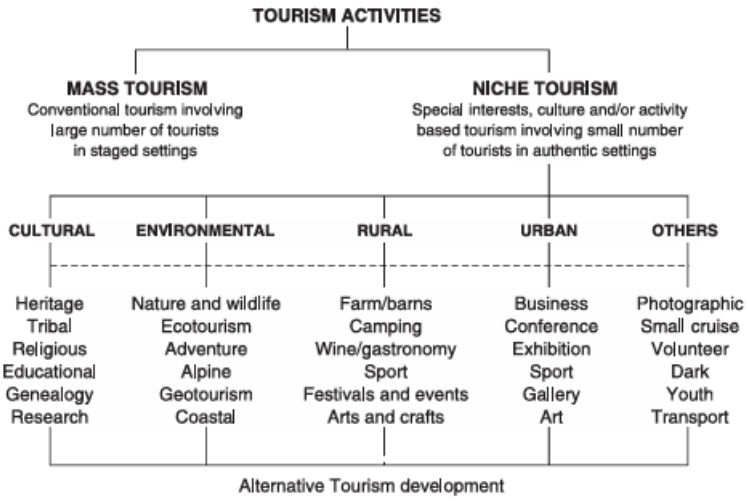


Figure 10: Niche tourism components divided between macro and micro-niches (Robertson and Novelli 2005).

The *Grand Tour* of the 18th century provided early connotations of what constitutes niche tourism today. This manifested as likeminded individuals travelling independently with the desire to visit the native land of Classicism, well before travel and tourism were accessible to a wider socioeconomic spectrum (Marson 2011, p.3). Current niche tourists share similarities with Grand Tourists, mirroring groups of individuals with like-minded characteristics that decide to undertake a journey – or a holiday – searching for alternative, and even elitist, experiences and activities (*ibid*., p.2).

The growth and significance of niche tourism evolved quickly in the last twenty years. Numerous studies emerged in a relatively short period of time, with Robinson and Novelli (2005) providing evidence of its validity as an alternative to mainstream forms of mass tourism. Niche tourism as a theme was preceded by alternative travel paradigms such as creative tourism, but then the niche concept seemed to be more appropriate to include all the unconventional tourism typologies within the same category. Since then, niche tourism has become widely adopted in tourism studies, with growing industry application (Novelli et al. 2022, p.xxiii). A broad range of academic studies on specific niches has emerged since, providing evidence of the deep connections between niche tourism and sustainability theme.

1.4.1. Niche Tourism and Sustainability

While mass tourism is often seen as a potential threat to the environment, affecting socio-cultural aspects of the host communities, niche tourism is considered a more sustainable alternative to engage with destinations and their features (Robinson and Novelli 2005; Marson 2011), providing at the same time development opportunities for small resource-constrained, remote or rural destinations (Russo Krauss 2022; Porfido 2022). Niche tourism can actually be seen as a form of sustainable tourism, with Marson that identifies sustainability as a foundation element for niche tourism practices (2011 p.10).

As niche tourism does not involve huge numbers of visitors, impacts on communities and environments are significantly less than those generated by mass tourism consumption. Niche tourism can play a fundamental role in safeguarding nature and traditions, since it promotes their protection through a visiting experience that is not intrusive. In spatial terms, niche tourism can prevent stress over destinations' carrying capacities. Niche tourism flows can be seasonally adjusted and spread almost everywhere, thus remedying to overtourism and territorial saturation which afflict many prestigious and fragile destinations. Moreover,

they can be able to increase benefits and also help in preserving and valorising local heritage (Bozzano 2019, p.33).

Even if niche tourism does not involve big economic movements, it provides opportunities to spread economic benefits associated with the travel industry, increasing the involvement of local communities. This becomes fundamental especially within development plans for rural areas and less developed countries, where niche tourism can be understood as a mean to foster sustainable development in global and regional peripheries (Porfido 2022; Williams 2022). Niche tourism can involve local control and management of resources, with residents in charge of small-scale nature and culture-related tourism products and utilisation of local knowledge, traditions and networks (Novelli et al. 2022, p.xxvi). Thus, niche tourism has the potential to stimulate inclusive growth, employment and sustainable development, especially on the social side, while also becoming a tool for poverty reduction. Tourism experiences and events run entirely by local communities in rural and depressed poor areas strongly contribute to poverty reduction and territorial development at the same time, generating a more sustainable alternative tourism model (Porfido 2022, p.136). This is why international organisations such as UNWTO and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) view niche tourism as beneficial to the host communities when compared to the more traditional forms of mass tourism (Robinson and Novelli 2005, p.6). Thus, tourism – and niche tourism practices more specifically – can have a role in supporting sustainable development, with opportunities of application within the UN Sustainable Development Goals framework.

1.4.2. Sustainable Development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Impacts of tourism over economies, environments and societies clearly have implications with sustainability. The term "sustainable development" became popular in 1987 with the Brundtland Report (also called Our Common Future), a document based upon an enquiry concerning environmental protection proposed to the UN General Assembly by Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Norwegian Prime Minister at that time (Holden 2008, pp.148-149). Environmental concerns had already emerged in the 1970s, and in 1972 an important report named *Limits of Growth* and focused on population growth, pollution and resources consumption was released by the Club of Rome (*ibid.*, p.67). This document had international resonance and raised public consciousness about environmental impacts of industries and unlimited growth, but the '87 report offered a more holistic vision of what

sustainability meant, and it eventually moved the discourse further, connecting sustainability and environmental protection together with economic growth and respect of human communities. Thus, the concept of sustainable development emerged, and it was defined as a form of development 'that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (United Nations 1987, p.4). The definition was then updated and implemented during other international congress and events, such as the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where the *Agenda 21* was adopted. This document was an action plan to develop sustainable development throughout the world following twenty-one key themes, keeping in mind the three spheres of interest that must guide and be sustained by sustainable development (economy, environment and societies – Holden 2008, p.150).

Sustainable development became so important in shaping the policy strategies international debate that the UN launched a series of objectives named Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in order to guide it on an international level. Adopted in 2000 within the Millennium Declaration, a document ratified by 189 nations, the MDGs had a focus on eradicating poverty globally and promoting equality, especially in developing countries (*ibid*., p.129). Eight objectives were created with the aim to guide the world in reaching sustainability and good life conditions for its inhabitants within the period 2000-2015.

These objectives were then structured in a series of targets, with the scope to guide the achievement of each goal within any nation, geographical and social condition (*ibid*., pp.129-131). In 2012, during the second UN conference on sustainable development in Rio (Rio+20), the necessity to develop a new set of goals emerged. Consequently, in 2015 UN elaborated a new agenda for sustainable development with the intention of covering the period between 2015 and 2030, proposing a new series of seventeenth goals, named Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This new list of intentions (Figure 11) was created with a focus on peace, health, education, prosperity and more generally, social, economic and environmental sustainability, updating and implementing previous 2000's MDGs (SDGS.UN 2015).



Figure 11: Infographic on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS.UN 2015).

Just like the previous MDGs, all goals are then divided into subcategories and targets, in order to respond to different necessities and challenges within the same field. Culture – and music – have a role in reaching these objectives. Their contribution to sustain and spread well-being (3th goal) and education (4th goal) is wide and well documented (Kakkori 2009; Richards and Duif 2019). In addition, it was demonstrated how culture and music provide economic growth (8th goal), while enrich and enhance the creativity of urban environments (11th goal). Nevertheless, it must be noted that, despite its potential, limited attention was paid to music within the SDGs agenda, as it is not directly mentioned as a sustainability carrying factor.

SDGs – and the broader concept of sustainable development – have actually been criticised from a number of scholars, environmentalists and economists in relation to their effectiveness and concrete outputs. The most prominent critique comes from Serge Latouche (2006), who introduced the concept of "degrowth". Developed in the economic field, this concept refers to a deliberate reduction of production and consumption in order to create a more sustainable, equitable, and human-centred society. The idea of degrowth takes a step beyond sustainability, claiming that sustainable development has lost its original meaning as it is now employed only as a label without any practical significance (*ibid.*).

1.4.3. Sustainable Tourism

Although tourism is an economic sector, the Earth Summitt in Rio excluded it from first considerations about the role of industry as environmental actor. However, tourism was debated five years later at the Earth Summit II in New York (Holden 2008, p.150), recognising its role in shaping territories, resources, cultures and environments, but also its potential function as promoter of sustainability and economic growth.

Tourism is a complex phenomenon that shapes and is shaped by a multitude of factors. On an environmental level, tourism acts both on a global, as well as on a local, scale. On a global scale, the growing demand for air transport contributes to the emission of greenhouse gasses in the environment, while on a local scale, tourism tends to place pressures upon natural resources and landscapes, while bad tourists' behaviours contribute in the increase of pollution and waste (*ibid*.). These pressures can bring to different outcomes, such as the transformation of urban and natural environments, but also the rejection of tourists, perceived by the local communities as an element of disturbance, especially where overtourism phenomena are observed (Fontanari and Traskevich 2021; Song and Abukhalifeh 2021). A massive number of visitors can also alter local prices for accommodation and other services, making cities and regions more expensive for their inhabitants (Fletcher et al. 2018). Tourism can alter the local economy, providing new job opportunities, but it can also limit the development of new business opportunities and models, reducing the diversity of local economy that tends to rely on tourism-related revenues only (*ibid*.).

Tourism is so recognised as an important force in relation to sustainability, both from positive as well as negative perspectives. From a cultural viewpoint, flows of tourist (in the form of massive movements of people) may alter traditions and cultural practices of communities that operate and live within the holiday destination, contributing to the development of commodification and staged authenticity phenomena (MacCannell 1973; Lozato-Giotart 2008). Thus, the industry has significant impacts, but it can also provide opportunities for (sustainable) development, if managed and structured properly (e.g. in a sustainable way).

Sustainable tourism then emerges as a chance to transform tourism into a positive vehicle to spread sustainable development internationally, while protecting local traditions and habits. Sustainable tourism is defined as a form of tourism that emphasizes conservation and the need to protect the nature and its resources, while it also enables local stakeholders

and inhabitants to be direct actors, players and "managers" of tourism phenomena within their own territories (Holden 2008, p.161). By the early 1990s, sustainable tourism already emerged as a concept within the academic environment (Coccossis and Parpairis 1996; Hunter 1996), and it '[…] has become more holistic to cover not just environmental issues but also socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions' (Holden, 2008 p.158). Fennell (1999, p.14) identifies five main objectives that lead sustainable tourism:

1. To develop greater awareness and understanding about the contributions that tourism make to the environment and economy;
2. To promote equity and development;
3. To improve the quality of life of the host community;
4. To improve high quality experiences for visitors;
5. To preserve the quality of the environment and resources involved.

So, sustainable tourism must be understood in wider terms, since it is not merely connected to environmental protection, but instead it encompasses conservation and preservation of cultural, political, economic and social dimensions (Holden 2008, p.161). As Richards and Hall point out (2000, p.1), benefitting the community has become an essential element of sustainable tourism. They also state that the rationale for sustainable tourism development 'usually rests on the assurance of renewable economic, social and cultural benefits to the community, and that a holistic approach to sustainability involves the continuing/improved social, cultural and economic well-being of human communities' (B. Quinn 2006, p.290). In this way, sustainable tourism is an important tool in the fight against poverty, while promoting social justice and economic improvement.

SDGs provide a specific list and structure through which to engage with tourism (UNWTO 2015). Tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all seventeen goals. More specifically, it has been included as targets in the 8th, 12th and 14th goals concerning inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources (*ibid*.). Emerging niche destinations are recognised to be potential markets where sustainability can be applied. This is the reason why tourism development can also be connected even with the 9th and the 11th goals – concerning industrialisation, inequality and inclusivity of human settlements – (Williams 2022). Tourism activities whose focus are culture, arts, history and, more generally, heritage, can eventually find application for sustainability through the 4th goal, concerning education, meaning that some forms of cultural-related tourism can sustain end enhance knowledge and understanding globally. Nevertheless, the 16th goal (concerning

peace, justice and inclusive societies) is significant. As tourism produces billions of encounters between people from diverse cultural backgrounds, the sector can foster multicultural and inter-faith tolerance and understanding (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner 2014; Farmaki 2017), sustaining and enhancing peace processes in some troubled regions of the world (*ibid*.). Sustainable tourism, which benefits and engages local communities, can also provide a source of livelihood, strengthen cultural identities and spur entrepreneurial activities, thereby helping to prevent violence and conflict to take root and consolidate peace in post-conflict societies (*ibid*.).

1.4.4. Niche Tourism as Part of the COVID-19 Sustainable Recovery Strategy

According to Novelli et al.: 'the COVID-19 pandemic has outlined the paradox of the global mobility paradigm and the fragility of global economic systems, with travel and tourism being among the most affected industries' (2022, p.xxvi). Ironically, the tourism industry has been at the same time one of the worst impacted aspects of economic and cultural activity but also a vector of the infection, giving the fundamental role air traffic and international movement of people had in the spread of the virus (*ibid*.).

According to Tourism Highlights, one of most important UNWTO's yearly report that proposes global and regional data, 2019 was the tenth consecutive year of sustained growth, totalising 1,460 million international tourist arrivals (UNWTO 2019). However, 2020 was signed by the most disruptive crisis the industry ever faced. International tourism declined approximately of 70% between January and October 2020, bringing its values back to the levels of the 1990s (UNWTO 2020). The decline in the first ten months of 2020 represented 900 million fewer international tourist arrivals compared to the same period in 2019, translated into a 'loss of US$ 935 billion in export revenues from international tourism, more than ten times the loss in 2009 under the impact of the global economic crisis' (*ibid*., p.1). Beyond affecting numbers of tourism arrivals and global air traffic, the crisis most dramatically impacted the less visible components of the tourism value chain, such as seasonal sector workers, renters, small-scale farmers and craft traders, and domestic workers (Novelli et al. 2022). The Arts sector and its actors were also tremendously affected, and they had to face cancellations and/or postponements of several events, festivals and manifestations (Garibaldi and Pozzi 2020; Pessina 2024; Raine and Dillane 2025).

As soon as the pandemic hit, international organisations and national governments sought to develop strategies for recovery. Tourism is a driver of economic prosperity, and

COVID-19 revealed the vital role it plays in global, national and local economies. Moreover, the fast spread of the virus, and how the entire industry quickly fell into crisis, demonstrated the global shape tourism has developed, and how 'globalisation made the world richer but also more vulnerable to crisis' (Keller 2020, p.15). As part of the recovery strategy, a first reaction was the capacity to adapt tourism demand and offer accordingly the unstable situation. More precisely, tourism recovery from COVID-19 was seen as an occasion to demonstrate the resilience of the sector, while also promoting through a more sustainable way.

Sustainability appears as a key theme for tourism development and management beyond the pandemic. Debates about sustainability entered the discourses about tourism since the first half of the 1990s, and they were already characterised by a holistic approach, able to encompass environmental, socio-cultural, economic and political issues (Holden 2008). However, the pandemic demonstrated that modern tourism supply is not sustainable. The expansion of buildings and infrastructures to peak loads, the seasonal character of the employment and the strong dependency of many territories on tourism revenues contributed to make the sector vulnerable to shocks, as the COVID-19 crisis has been (Keller 2020). With the pandemic, the demand for alternative experiences in "hidden" locations, far for standardised consumption models in well-known destinations, emerged. International organisations and governments eventually saw this condition as an opportunity to promote on the market new territories that were never considered before. Alternative means of transport were also considered in new tourism development plans through more sustainable lens. Given that most greenhouse gas emissions from tourism relate to transport, particular attention was placed to promote slow tourism forms, which may forecast the use of public transport service or even bicycles (Holden 2020).

Closer-to-home markets were first to recover, owning to their proximity and easier accessibilities. Potential visitors adapted their behaviour, looking for safer destinations closer to home. According to Keller: 'hotel bookings for domestic holidays started again on a worldwide basis as soon as governments decided to ease their travel restriction after the shock. Domestic tourism lost also less bookings during the lockdown (-49%) than the intraregional and the intercontinental tourism' (2020, p.22). Thus, domestic tourism temporarily became the driving force for the sector. More updated tourism reports show that international tourism reached 97% of pre-pandemic levels in the first quarterly of 2024 (Figure 12), while the overall number of international tourist arrivals is close to be the same as it was in 2019 (Figure 13 – UNWTO 2024).

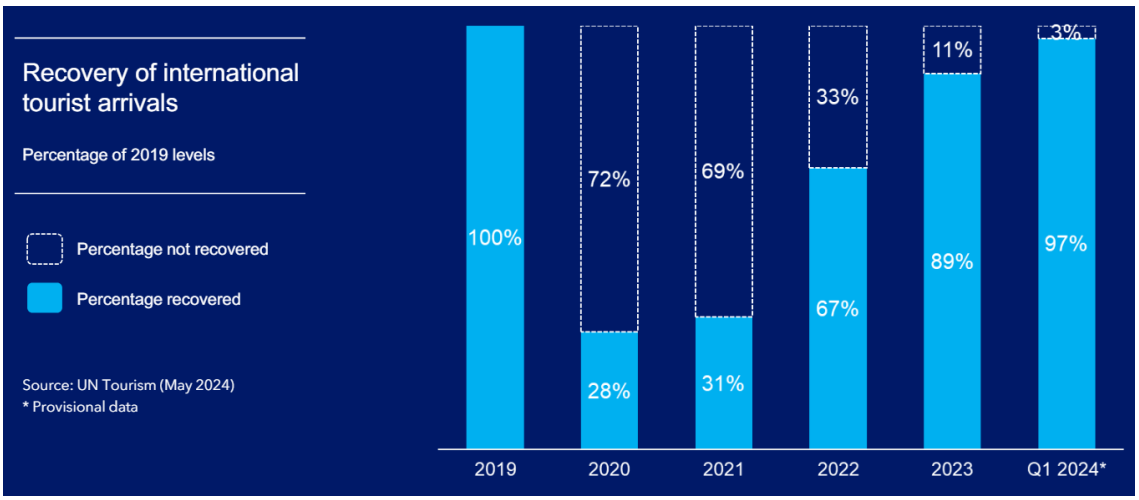


Figure 12: Recovery of international tourist arrivals (UNWTO 2024).

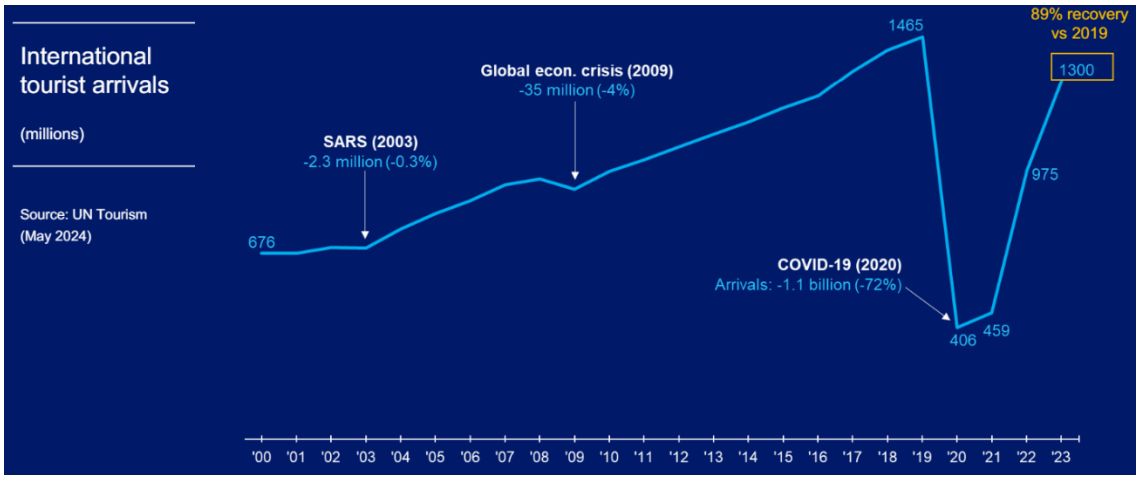


Figure 13: International tourist arrivals between 2000 and 2024 (UNWTO 2024).

Examining international tourism results, it is evident that the international recovery strategy, while contributing to the restoration of an important sector of the global economy, failed in influencing mass consumer behaviours and choices, still attached to traditional ways of making tourism. However, new niche experiences have accessed the market, diversifying and expanding travellers' motivation, consumption and production patterns. Niche tourism can be seen as a means of fostering sustainable economic development in global peripheries, while it provides the opportunity to engage in more meaningful and responsible experiences while travelling (Novelli et al. 2022). Thus, it is fundamental to highlight the role of niche tourism phenomena within discourses associated with sustainability and sustainable development.

Within the framework of sustainability, niche tourism experiences represent an opportunity to pursuit the COVID-19 recovery strategy (Novelli et al. 2022, p.xxviii). The pandemic has altered mobility patterns, causing the disruption of global neoliberal tourism market. In turn, this situation has led to the decline of certain mainstream mass tourism business formats and, simultaneously, the emergence of other novel niche tourism trends. Niche tourism has been regarded as a potential driver in the development of a new experience economy, particularly in relation with the new wave of proximity tourism (engaging in tourism and travelling close to home), a phenomenon emerged as an adaptation mechanism in times of crisis, such as COVID-19 (Andreini and Mangiò 2020; Macchiavelli 2020). Proximity has also environmental implications, since it does not require long-distance journeys, limiting the emissions of greenhouse gasses. In a certain sense, the pandemic offered to different tourism actors and stakeholders a unique opportunity to design and consolidate the transition towards a greener and more balanced tourism growth (Ioannides and Gyimóthy 2020, p.624).

However, akin to mass tourism, the growth of niche tourism may be translated into unsustainable practices, if sustainable aspects – such as community involvement – are left behind (Novelli et al. 2022; Porfido 2022). Social, spatial, environmental and economic inequalities are often associated with insensitive and damaging tourist practices that can be developed anywhere. Through furthering the understanding of the evolution of contemporary tourism, niche tourism managers and operators should explore ways to avoid such predicaments (Novelli et al. 2022, p.xxviii).

Music covers an important role among all the diverse cultural elements that can trigger niche tourism activities within a destination. The way people interact with sounds and music phenomena reveals and opens up to dynamic forms of cultural engagement that offer opportunities for social sustainability, thus becoming a valuable tool within the recovery strategy framework.

1.4.5. Music within Niche Tourism

Among cultural features of a territory, music and sounds represent interesting elements that can motivate tourists to visit a destination. Music, especially in some parts of the world, is seen as a prior vehicle of cultural, social and regional identity, and the derived soundscape of a city, region or country can be analysed and approached in tourism terms. Local, and sometimes traditional, sounds are an aspect of the visited environment that can

enrich and integrate visitors' general tourism experience, but they are also integral to societies development. Despite a general lack of recognition of their role in shaping human attitudes (Schafer 1977, p.23), sounds are a fundamental part of societies' everyday life, that had and still have an influence on behaviours, decisions and communication forms among every human community (Hendy 2013).

The association between music and the geographical regions in which musical production and consumption occur, especially when it is connected with particular sounds, styles or musical approaches (*ibid*., p.14), leads to the recognition of a destination's musicscape. This relationship concurs in the definition of a local sense of place (Cerutti and Dioli 2016, p.295), and enhance cognitive and symbolic representations of music and territory as mirrored into each other within a dialectic process (Connell and Gibson 2003, p.192). Examples are the so-called *Seattle Sound* (Marini 2016), where the Grunge music scene has been associated with this city, or the Liverpool case study (Lashua et al. 2010; S. Cohen 2012; Cohen and Roberts 2013) where the legacy of the Beatles still shapes imaginaries associated with the British city.

Music is part of destinations' intangible cultural heritage, and so it is identified as a tourism-driving force (UNWTO 2018; Friel 2021). Music tourism is an interesting emerging niche market developed in the last twenty years, and through its focus on territories' sounds, it emphasizes contemporary and continuous reconstructions of space through music (Connell and Gibson 2003, p.xi).

1.5. Music Tourism

With a focus on music as a travelling motivator, music tourism is recognised to be a segment of the wider cultural tourism, together with other niche themes such as crafts, creative, art and heritage tourism (Figure 14 – Cerutti and Dioli 2016, p.292).

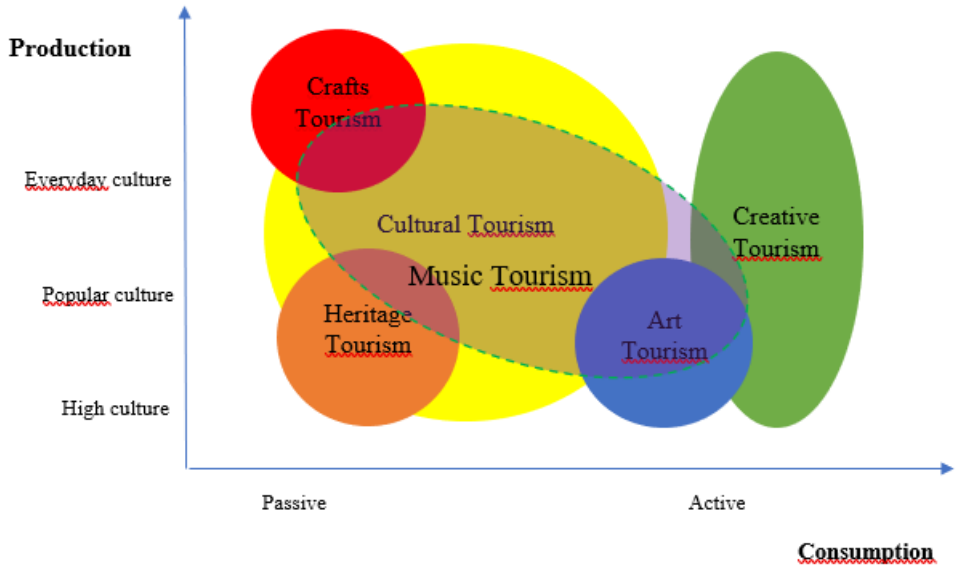


Figure 14: Connection of music tourism with other interrelated tourism typologies (Cerutti and Dioli 2016, p.293).

Music is understood as one of the core elements of destinations' intangible cultural heritage, since music is made of sounds, and sounds have no material persistence, they are eminently temporal objects, their life coincides entirely with the brief process of their duration (Serra 2005, p.11). As part of territories' intangible heritage, music can be analysed, promoted and exploited in tourism terms, if developed and managed properly (Gortan-Carlin and Krajnović 2016, p.207), generating music tourism phenomena. Thus, the soundscape of a city, region or country can be integrated into and explored as part of destinations' tourism experience (Friel 2021).

International scholarship in the study of the connection between music, heritage, performance and territory is led by Gibson and Connell, who define music tourism as a kind of activity 'where people travel, at least in some part, because of music' (2005, p.1). UNWTO identifies music tourism as 'any activity undertaken by a tourist where the primary motivation to travel is music related' (2018 p.13). The growth of music tourism seems to be connected to a general shift in the attraction of culture as a leisure pursuit, with music entering the sphere of mass culture and mass consumption, but with music tourism remaining associated to niche tourism forms (Marson 2011, p.9). The recognition of the value of music as a tourism sources represents an enormous potential for economies and cultures globally (Cerutti and Dioli 2016, pp.293-294). Music can help deliver joyful experiences that are specific to given destinations and successfully promote their historic and cultural background. Driven by the rise of experiential tourism, individuals across all age groups

increasingly seek music-based experiences as a means of cultural and emotional engagement (Friel 2021). Recognising that 'no society is without a musical tradition [including popular and mainstream forms]' (Connell and Gibson 2003, p.19), music tourism practices can be developed everywhere, contributing to the recognition of regions and of their music practices (Friel 2021).

On an institutional level, music has been recognised by governments, councils and international organisations like UNESCO and UNWTO as an important element to promote places, destinations and cultures. Beyond the interest in collecting and protecting sounds and musical testimonies as parts of territories' intangible heritage, in recent years UNESCO has realised a City of Music Network to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity and music as a strategic theme for sustainable urban and tourism development (UNESCO 2024b). A number of "Cities of Music" have been designated since 2006, requiring local authorities to demonstrate the support for local projects concerning creativity, community involvement and education in relation to local music heritage (Bennett 2020). This "music city" construct instrumentalises culture for its image-making and regenerative potential, but it also safeguards parts of a city's live music infrastructure and night-time economy (Cantillon et al. 2022), presenting new strategic discourses to coordinate local governments, music stakeholders between state and market forces (Ballico and Watson 2020). On the island of Ireland, Belfast is the only city included in this project since 2021. The city has expertly developed a strong reputation as creative destination in the recent years, highlighting its music and culture as a fundamental theme of its tourism offer (Wilson et al. 2018, p.606).

UNWTO too has recognised the importance of music in representing and expressing the sense of place of a given territory. The organisation recently promoted the realisation of a report named *Music is the New Gastronomy* (2018); the title clearly compares music to one of the most important themes concerning experiences and territorial marketing strategies in the cultural tourism world, that has obtained considerable interest on a global level during recent years (Friel 2019; Fusté-Forné 2022). Music thus is recognised as a fundamental element for local branding strategies, being – just like gastronomic products – an important cultural feature able to represent and express uniqueness (UNWTO 2018). The document introduces the phenomenon of music tourism, highlighting the role of music and the connections between music and tourism industries. It also emphasizes the experiential component of music, and how it is 'a key component in the development of a wide ranging and varied leisure tourism strategy' (*ibid*., p.15), enriching other initiatives and experiences,

such as gastronomic ones. It then proposes a "music tourism tool box", with suggestions in order to develop successful music tourism strategies, from marketing to the actual development of a strong plan. The final chapter proposes seventeen successful case studies of diverse scale and dimension scattered around the globe that demonstrate the value of music to the tourism sector, providing examples of brands, organisations and tourism boards engaging with music to drive tourism numbers (*ibid*.).

1.5.1. Forms of Music Tourists

Music as a tourism product can be appreciated and experienced by different types of tourists. Following and developing from Cohen's first classification of tourist typologies based on travel motivation (1972), cultural visitors can be classified into:

1. Tourists motivated by culture (attracted to particular cultural events);
2. Tourists inspired by culture (interested in visiting well-known sites);
3. Tourists attracted by culture (they do not plan to visit cultural attractions, but will visit them if they are offered during their stay – Gortan-Carlin and Krajnović 2016, p.290).

The interest for alternative cultural products – as music is – also originates from new attitudes, consumption choices and behaviours of tourists (Holden 2008, p.182). In a world where "making tourism" is now part of most of the planet's inhabitants' lifestyle, many official classifications for tourists and tourism phenomena have been developed, making tourism even more structured than before.

Music tourism responds to different audiences and tourists, and through different forms. Nevertheless, the basic tourism music product can be proposed for, and enjoyed by, all types of cultural tourists, while particular types of products are searched and appreciated with regard to the so-called "intensity" of motivation which characterise the decision of visiting a particular destination (*ibid*.). Four specific typologies of music tourist have been identified; they are the *sans loci*, the *independent*, the *collector* and the *experimenter* (Montebelli and Vavassori 2019, pp.125-126). The term *sans loci* identifies a traveller interested in very well-known events and locations or in following a famous musician. It is a kind of tourist characterised by a good propensity to spend, typically a senior, who relies upon specialised tour operators. The *independent* are tourists who prefer to manage their journey independently. Usually young persons, they look for quality of the musical experience, while they can easily give up comfortable accommodation and services. This

category may thus resemble the famous case study of back-pack travellers (Fletcher et al. 2018, p.179). The *collector* are tourists in the destination not priorly interested in music attractions, but who might be willing to make new experiences related to local music production. Like the previous distinction, the *collector* are independent travellers. Finally, the *experimenter* are tourists already in the destination because of a package, that can – just like the *collector* – decide to enrich their holiday experiences with music initiatives (Montebelli and Vavassori 2019, pp.125-126).

The diversity of music tourists is also revealed by links between musical styles, type of initiatives and audiences. Numerous studies have attempted to correlate the consumption of specific forms of music with social indicators, including income, age, gender, education and similar (Gibson and Connell 2005, p.95). Nevertheless, these analyses reflect generalisations contradicted by a complex reality, where personal attitudes and behaviours are taken into account (*ibid*., p.97). On a more practical level, a clear difference can be established between "passive" listeners, and performing tourists, also identified as visiting musicians (*ibid*.; O'Shea 2008). While listeners usually enjoy and consume music through their ears, travelling with the purpose of a sounding experience, visiting musicians are performers who travel in order to actively engage in the music production. Thus, regardless of social indicators like age or gender, they join other musicians in the destination, usually performing with them a common repertoire (*ibid*.). Ireland in this sense is a renowned destination for visiting musicians, as many reach the island with the intention of joining Irish traditional music sessions, a theme that will be further explored in Chapter 2. Obviously, borders are blurred, and this distinction may present aspects of simplicity, since a musician can also be part of the audience, being a listener, and *vice-versa*. Still, it helps in understanding the phenomenon by providing a clear description of two main categories of music tourists.

1.5.2. Declinations of Music Tourism

Music tourism is a phenomenon observable on different scales, characterised by nuanced boundaries, that can be detected in relation to big events, but can also be appreciated on a niche level. Moreover, music can be the primary – if not the only – focus of a holiday experience, but it can just be a complementary theme, together with other cultural activities. The evolution and segmentation of demand has allowed to the development of different practices of music tourism and different typologies of music tourism destinations, because

many local resources have been successfully recognised as tourism attractors. Music tourism phenomena can be distinguished according to the type of tourist flows they generate, but also – and mainly – through the recognition of the specific music product that generates such flows (Gortan-Carlin and Krajnović 2016, p.210).

Music tourism can be observed mainly where tourists engage with music, whether visits to places or performances, places of musical composition, territories enshrined in lyrics, places of birth or death of musicians or museum (Gibson and Connell 2005, p.1). In this way, "territories of music" like itineraries, landscapes, concerts, events and festivals, places (such as cities, regions or even nations), theatres, museums and cemeteries connected to a musician or a composer become the object of interest (Connell and Gibson 2003, p.224). Music attractions are multiple and can be combined and transformed, but on a basic level they are:

1. Places of performances, concerts and journeys;
2. Music festivals;
3. Music courses and workshops;
4. Museums and exhibitions;
5. Sites associated with music or musicians;
6. Sounding places;
7. Areas of production and craftsmanship of musical instruments.

All of these categories can lead to new relations and implications with host environments, territories and populations, and they can be both positive and negative. In order to understand music tourism from a broader perspective, it is necessary to remember that these elements can be the first motivation for taking a journey, but they can also be integrated into the wider tourism experiences. Prior their analysis, these various forms music tourism can have are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Different shapes of music tourism (source: author).

1.5.2.1.	Places of Performance and Journeys "On the Road"
1.5.2.2.	Music Festivals
1.5.2.3.	Music Education
1.5.2.4.	Museums
1.5.2.5.	Sites Associated with Music
1.5.2.6.	Sounding Places and Urban Environments Connected to Music
1.5.2.7.	Lutherie and Craftsmanship

1.5.2.1. Places of Performance and Journeys "On the Road"

Places of performance have been recognised as tourism sites both within academia as well as in cities and regional tourism marketing plans (Gibson and Connell 2005, pp.62-63). Places of performance must be intended in two different ways: the former meaning is connected to the physical space/building where performances are held like theatres and clubs; the latter instead considers the experiential component of performances as a travelling motivator.

Some places and buildings are associated with particular music genres or artists, while others are simply famous architectural sites, splendours in themselves as much as performative spaces (like the Sidney Opera House, arguably the most popular tourist attraction in Australia – *ibid*., or the *Elbphilharmonie* in Hamburg, the main landmark for the German city). In this sense, of particular significance are the various European centres that have begun to market and promote themselves as classical music cities, exploiting the reputation and artistic beauty of their theatres and opera houses, or their connections to famous composers. Many of these venues primarily serve residents, but they increasingly cater for tourists, who visit them for their historical and architectural value, and as places where it is possible to enjoy music experiences (*ibid*.). Dublin and Belfast have both prestigious spaces to host music. Both the city centres of these capital cities are enriched by prestigious theatres – such as the National Concert Hall and the Grand Opera House – that contribute in establishing their reputation as music destinations.

A concert is 'a highly formalized and focused event, limited in time and space, most often indoors and with one or a small number of successive acts' (Ronström 2011, p.3). It is usually considered a single event happening one night only, involving a live performance in front of an audience. There are different types of "concerts", that differ according to music genre, style, venue, ticket price, repertoire and so on. Regardless of the genre, concerts imply a movement of people, of listeners, that travel in order to attend the event, with the possibility for someone to spend at least one the night outside their usual environment of residence, becoming in this way "tourists", according to the official definition provided by the UNWTO (Holden 2008, p.3). Some travellers with a strong passion for a particular music genre or performer can actually decide to spend their holidays visiting a destination where a concert is held, recognising music as a reason for travelling (Gerosa and Magro 2011, pp.69–71). Concerts remain a tourism motivator for a minority of the audience, but this minority can experience particular forms of movement that go beyond the single/couple of night spent in another city where the event happens. For example, in the case of a tour, musicians are

followed by a crew, and both of them are followed by fans crowd who try to attend as many live performances as they can. Concert after concert, event after event, tour stops define a journey on the road through territories, cities, capitals, regions and even nations, which may be visited before or after the live event (*ibid*.). Such movements motivated by music involve the organisation and further reservation of transport and accommodation services, encompassing traditional products such as flights and hotels, but also informal experiences "on the road", including long driving journeys and camping. Even if the example provided may suit a Rock or Pop music scene (Gibson and Connell 2005, p.43), orchestras too involve an impressive number of musicians and audience, and their movement to reach the venue where the performance is forecasted. This demonstrates the strong connection between music and geographical mobilities, and that 'all music, of "high" or "low" culture, is commercial in some way' (Connell and Gibson 2003, p.7), reinforcing discourses that see music, concerts and the music industry itself as economic valuable.

1.5.2.2. Music Festivals

Festivals are social devices through which humans express their identities, connect with their place and communicate with the outside world (Ekman 1999). They are also contested spaces, where symbolic practices are used and celebrated by community groups to either consolidate or resist prevailing cultural norms and values (B. Quinn 2006). Festivals themselves contribute in local place-making processes, but they are also shaped and influenced by the territories where they are held through a dialectic process in which environments, histories and local communities actively define the event (Lynch and Quinn 2022). Whilst they embody a deep social and cultural complexity, functioning as 'practices through which communities express beliefs, celebrate identities and variously confirm or contest the social structures and value systems that bind them together' (B. Quinn 2006, p.289), "festival tourism" phenomena are now widely recognised (Arnold 2001; O'Sullivan and Jackson 2002). There is a strong association between festivals and tourism: 'abundant evidence is now available to show that countless festivals are marketed as tourist attractions and draw definable tourist flows' (B. Quinn 2006, p.289). For many tourists, festivals have become their primary reason to visit certain places, bringing a particularly strong impact on those areas' appeal (Simeon and Buonincontri 2009). Therefore, small-and medium-sized towns have also invested in the organisation of events and festivals to generate more visits. Festivals are an important way to route the music potential of a place and make it part of a tourism development process. If managed, coordinated, advertised and financed in the right

way the festival, product capable of combining an event with entertainment and territorial issues (Cerutti and Dioli 2016, p.295), is able to aggregate a large public – spectators of different social backgrounds and ages, interested in the (musical) event offered – allowing it to appreciate the genre of music proposed, the valuable landscape offered as context and the relationship between the two.

Music festivals are considered as "top music experiences"; they offer a mode of experiential tourism – whereby people are motivated by the desire of connecting with places, cultures and inhabitants whilst learning history and stories of the territory (Friel 2021). They also give locals the possibility to actively impact on the local-culture-shaping-process (Kearney and Commins 2024), promoting participation and sustainable practices (Smith et al. 2022). Music festivals offer a mode of experiential tourism. There are hundreds of typologies of music festivals, distinguished by dimensions, music genres, activities and people involved. Nevertheless, the focus always remains on music.

Music festivals have been the focus of increased attention within the last twenty years as part of the wider research on festivals and events (B. Quinn 2006; Smith et al. 2022). Gibson and Connell propose an historical account on the development of music festivals, noticing how these events are in the broadest sense, 'the oldest and most common form of music tourism' (2005, p.210). Music festivals also give locals the possibility to actively impact on the local-culture-shaping-process, being thus beneficial to both hosting communities and the visitors they attract. Even though event and festival tourism is an established area of research, there are not so many studies about the tourism impact of music festivals. Two examples are Tohmo (2005), who considers an input–output analysis of music festivals to critically include potential benefits for a place and economic benefits for local economies, and Gibson and Davidson (2004), who consider the impact of a music festival on creating an identity for a place in which the festival is located. The two authors describe the case study of Tamworth, an Australian city that has become well known as the 'Country music capital' of Australia. Its annual Country and Western Music Festival has become a leading event of its type in this nation, attracting over 60,000 visitors every year (*ibid*., p.387). The authors note how the festival, and Country music more generally, have become central to the town's identity, observing how Tamworth's status has also been deliberately exploited as an outcome of strategic place marketing, undertaken by local tourism authorities, promotional companies and local council representatives and tourism marketing strategies. In addition, the scholars highlight and discuss the reaction of local residents to the construction of the town's identity as "Country music capital", and the mutation of their

perception, interest and appreciation of the event during the years (*ibid*., pp.398-399). In Ireland, while the national and regional landscape is mainly associated with traditional music and traditional music festivals – an aspect discussed in Chapter 2 – other music initiatives have been investigated through various lens and themes, such as nonformal education (Roche et al. 2016) and the impact of major music festivals on the workload of local hospitals (Nix et al. 2006).

Kearney and Commins (2024) have instead described the experience of Speyfest, a Celtic music festival held in the village of Fochabers, Scotland, reflecting (through their positionality of musicians coming from abroad, but also performers and festival workshops' facilitators) on the expression of localness, culture, authenticity, and meaning, with particular consideration for the conceptualisation of 'Celtic' music as a musical and commercial term within the context of a music festival. Ireland is another 'Celtic land' whose culturescape is enriched by the presence of many music festivals all along the year. While Chapter 2 introduces some of the most prominent Irish traditional music festivals like Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann and Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy (while also acknowledging other non-Irish traditional music events), Chapter 3 and 4 explore a series of niche music festival from the north-east of Ireland, like Féile Patrick Byrne or the Drogheda Traditional Music & Singing Weekend.

An important element that arises in cultural and ethnographical literature associated with festivals and events is the concept of festivalization (Getz 2013), a theme that can affect every festival, despite dimensions, focus, and recognition on the international market. Historically, festivals have been important forms of social and cultural participation, used to articulate and communicate shared values, ideas and identities central to their local communities (Bennett et al. 2014). Festivals may retain this function in the contemporary world, but they often suffer the pressures of globalisation, and an increasingly popular experiential economy, that transform festivals in remunerative tools to pack and sell cultural performances, generating extra income (*ibid*.).

Festivalization involves the implementation of festival-like programmes (such as traditional music, dance and art exhibitions) in other types of events (such as sport and conference events) as a form of side entertainment (Getz 2013), flattening local cultures on specific festival themes. Festivalization is also connected to the touristification of festivals (Picard and Robinson 2006), a concept that problematise the raising of the profile of festivals through tourism. Festival and event tourism represents a precious tool for sustainable development, especially when the festival or event takes place in a context and with the

involvement of the local community (Porfido 2022, p.124). However, while tourism can be an important regenerative element of events, it can also alienate the very communities the festivals were designed for (Picard and Robinson 2006, p.23), leading to staged authenticity phenomena. Festivalization and culture reification demonstrate how festivals – and even music festivals – are not immune from the shifting in the understanding of the event mission, passing from a community-oriented perspective to a profit-oriented one (Falleti 2020). In India, alternative aesthetics and imaginaries associated with spirituality, but also loss of control and drug consumption, have shaped imaginaries associated with the city of Goa, a small coastal state whose northern beaches were "discovered" by hippies and alternative tourists in the 1970s. Flows of overseas tourists searching for spiritual connections as well as entertainment, interested in 'taking drugs, swimming in the nude and listening to rock music' (Saldanha 2002, p.44), has turned this destination into a cradle for a series of psychedelic raves, which contribute significantly to the local economy.

1.5.2.3. Music Education

In a postmodern world, boundaries between cultural themes have progressively blurred, leaving space for hybridisation between activities originally considered as distant, such as tourism and education (Urry 2003). Educational tourists make up today an important part of all heritage and museum site visitor numbers internationally (Kelly 2005). Museums obviously provide opportunities for education, but learning processes can also be encountered within masterclasses and (music) courses. Through the decision of attending a course as part of their holidays, tourists learn and engage with culture in an active way, becoming no longer passive visitors, but engaged actors that actively sustain the meaning-making process and promotion of local heritage and arts (Smith 2021).

Music courses are dedicated to pupils and music students, but also to amateurs interested in a particular type of music or attracted by the sound of the instrument subject to the course, and whose intention is to increase their musical competences (Montebelli and Vavassori 2019, p.123). These experiences provide opportunities for non-professional and community groups to learn, make practice and eventually perform in front of appreciative audiences through a final recital, which can help to develop confidence amongst a community of musicians (Kearney and Commins 2024) and to undertake peak performance experiences (Sinnamon et al. 2012). Central to the experience of attendances is a complex, hierarchical learning process, in which the daily rhythm of the workshop, the location and

the teachers all played a pivotal role (Bolderman 2023). Music courses also provide opportunities for musicking, a term developed to intend an holistic understanding of the music process, understood as made by actions beyond the singular performance (Small 1998). Music masterclasses are examples of niche music tourism forms at the periphery of both music and tourism worlds (Bolderman 2023), that let participants (beginners and amateurs as well as advanced musicians) becoming part of and connecting with their genre during the workshops (*ibid*.).

Most of the time these courses are held in rural locations, from which music (or at least folk and traditional music) is imagined as emerging (V. Commins 2019). Even if the impacts of music courses and masterclasses over the territories where they take place are most of the time underrated, they can host hundreds of participants (*ibid*.), that produce outcomes over the local economies, especially when they are held in rural areas. Richards and Duif recorded the role education covers in small cities and rural contexts, arguing about the importance of creativity and the creative use of educational proposals for local development (2019, p.44). They saw learning opportunities as part of an integrated strategy that combines creative and cultural consumption and production together with creative education and environmental sustainability (*ibid*., p.110). Several music masterclasses are internationally organised in small and remote destinations, where students can focus on their learning process, while their presence and their expenses benefit local businesses (Marchioro and Miotto 2019, pp.90-92). Thus, music education can be seen and recognised by local authorities and businesses as an economic opportunity, turning the cultural realm into economic capital (Urry 2003, p.79). Courses' participants enjoy discounts or concessions thanks to agreements stipulated between organisations and local stakeholders, such as restaurants or local transport services. The presence of students – and sometimes of their families too – in small cities and rural territories can provide additional income for local service suppliers, but music courses and recitals at their conclusion also propose cultural and entertainment, enriching the cultural life of the host site (Marchioro and Miotto 2019, pp.90-92).

Music courses and similar initiatives offer visitors and outsiders the opportunity to learn about and engage with music while discovering a new place, having moments of entertainment and joy, experiencing so forms of "edutainment". This term, defined as 'a mixture of popular education and commercial entertainment' (Urry 2003, p.15), has emerged in the last thirty years following the 'gamification' of culture and museums' expositions, and reflects a convergence of the two sectors (e.g. education and entertainment) into a "curious

amalgamation" (Balloffet et al. 2014, p.5). Understood as "learning while having fun", edutainment experiences emerge as an interesting theme for different niche tourism proposals, being opportunities to involve audiences who are hungry for creative and entertaining activities (*ibid*., p.14). In Ireland, many music initiatives such as festivals and workshops provide opportunities to explore edutainment, and part of this research examines the potential that education-focused music initiatives have to enrich the tourism offering of the north-east of the island. This aspect will be discussed in the later chapters of this dissertation.

1.5.2.4. Museums

Even if they are not related to live performances, museums and exhibitions too contribute to the local music offer, providing additional opportunities for education. Museums, like historical archives, can perform a fundamental role in bringing out unknown facts, famous people's stories and their relationships with places and territories, and can sustain and promote research and conservation programmes (Ledda 2019). The original purpose of museums was to house relics for scholarship and research. However they evolved to be places where artefacts are protected and displayed to visitors (Timothy and Boyd 2003, p.23). Museum space has been recognised as an environment where visitors engage in meaning-making processes (Schoch 2013), and where information is delivered through a mix of devices to stimulate the visiting experience. The majority of recent literature concerning museology has switched from traditional themes concerning heritage conservation and recreational elements (Balloffet et al. 2014) to interpretative analyses centred on new approaches related to the quality of expositions and 'the interpretive interplay between museological space, content and narrative throughout the construction of meanings by museum visitors' (*ibid*., p.193). Emotions associated with museums and the use visitors make of these spaces to reinforce their personal heritage also enriches academic knowledge (Smith 2021). Nevertheless, music museums have received relatively limited attention within the academic realm, being processed and analysed similarly to more traditional arts and heritage expositions.

All over the world, many cities offer museums devoted to the history of local culture and its features, such as music. Museums dedicated to local music usually propose exhibitions focused on a particular (traditional) instrument, or to more general exhibitions of ethnic musical instruments. They can also display photographs, clothing, awards, albums

and other related equipment (Timothy and Boyd 2003, p.23), challenging music's perception as solely intangible heritage. International examples are the MIM (Musical Instrument Museum) in Brussels, Belgium, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, Ohio, and the *Museo del Violino* in Cremona, Italy. The history of the Italian city is undoubtedly linked with the figure of Antonio Stradivari, a great luthier and musician of the 17th century, whose violins are still considered among the best in the world. The museum dedicated to his figure and his work is probably one of the more complete exposition devoted to the violin internationally, presenting a path where it possible to get information concerning the origins of the instrument, its spread and development as a very common instrument all over the world and the related bowed instruments making. In Ireland, a prestigious example is the Irish Rock 'n' Roll Museum Experience in Dublin, an exposition dedicated to the history of Irish Rock music and its most famous representatives, such as Thin Lizzy, Van Morrison, Rory Gallagher and U2. This museum, set in the middle of the famous Temple Bar quarter, enriches Dublin's cultural offer, giving visitors the chance to discover an important aspect of Irish pop culture, that contributed in the definition of current Irish capital's soundscape (Dillane and Raine 2023).

Ceol, the Irish Traditional Music Centre – the only museum dedicated to Irish traditional music in Ireland – was opened in 1999 but then closed between 2001 and 2002 as it was struggling to attract enough visitors (The Irish Times 2001). However, the Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA), founded in 1987, is home to the largest and most comprehensive collection of Irish traditional music, song, and dance in the world, providing exhibitions and a shop. The Archive's mission is to be the national public centre for Irish traditional music, song and dance (ITMA 2024), while it gives full in-person access to its building and resources, allowing visitors to come inside and discover valuable recordings, photographs, manuscripts, and other archived materials associated with this music genre.

1.5.2.5. Sites Associated with Music

Certain places are so strongly and uniquely identified and linked with music or a particular musician that they have become tourist destinations, perceived and experienced as "sacred sites" by music enthusiasts and fans (Gibson and Connell 2005, p.43). Places where famous recordings were made, that hosted internationally famous music scenes, and houses or cemeteries associated with musicians are considered the most commercially successful music tourism examples (*ibid*.). In Italy, many houses once upon a time owned by very well-

known composers, such as the House Museum dedicated to Pier Luigi da Palestrina in Rome, or the *Domus Magna* in Bergamo, which houses a museum dedicated to Gaetano Donizetti, have become sites of interest open to visits. On the other side, many cemeteries host the remains of glorious composers and performers, like the burial site of Jim Morrison, Beethoven's grave in Vienna or the Graceland memorial dedicated to Elvis Presley (Gibson and Connell 2007). Defined by Connell and Gibson as the most famous music tourism site in the world, the Graceland memorial has become a focal point for the quasi-religious cult that has surrounded the figure of Elvis since his death in 1977 (2003, p.224). Graceland intensifies the Elvis myth because it locates all that Elvis encompassed in an easily identifiable, specific site. It provides a focal point for a large community of fans that continually reproduces the mythology and sanctity of the "King of Rock 'n' Roll" (*ibid*.).

This example introduces the concept of music pilgrimage, a recurring theme within music tourism studies, and that can be identified in different geographical, as well as music, contexts. Acting like devotees, whose interest is visiting holy sites, many music tourists resemble pilgrims in several ways. Through their journeying to the destinations music visitors may hope for enlightenment, contact and significance with the main purpose of their journey (e.g. the musical encounter), just like a traditional pilgrim may search for a spiritual connection with the holy (O'Shea 2008, p.78). They could also pay the debt to death performers buried in special sites, just like a Christian visiting a sanctuary of a very famous saint (Connell and Gibson 2003, p.223). Ireland has many sites associated with folk music and music pilgrimages and O'Shea (2008) described music devotees in the west of the island as pilgrims. In her words, they resemble 'pilgrims in several ways: in they journeying to "holy sites" where they hope for enlightenment in the trials that are consoled by fellow pilgrims and in the higher status that completion of this journeys earns them on their return home' (*ibid*., p.78).

1.5.2.6. Sounding Places and Urban Environments Connected to Music

The Elvis Presley example, and how his figure is mirrored and absorbed within the urban contexts of Memphis, standing as musical landmarks, highlights how music and sound contribute to the construction of a local identity for different environments and settings. According to Gibson and Connell, such identification relies on a sense of "authenticity" being created through the encounter of music and place (2005, p.43). Thus, a music style or the history of a performer/musician/composer can become an attraction for audiences and

fans, that want to experience the social and cultural environment within which the music is originated (*ibid*., p.44).

A good example of the relationship between environment – and urban contexts in particular – and music is provided by the city of Liverpool, UK, where the music of the Beatles has completely shaped and transformed the local soundscape, turning the city into an international tourism destination for millions of fans. Liverpool itself figures prominently in Beatles' music, with song titles and lyrics referring to different sites of the city – that have become part of tourist trails associated with the band and its four musicians (*ibid*.). The legacy of the Beatles have been deeply marketized by the music and tourism industries, that used local culture and creativity to remodel and rebrand the urban space and its reputation on the market (Cohen and Roberts 2013, p.37). An example is *Sound City: A Guide to Liverpool's Music Heritage*, a tourist map produced when Liverpool was nominated in 2008 as the Capital of Culture, and where the majority of the sixty two sites featured have some sort of Beatles connection (Lashua et al. 2010, p.138). Visit Britain, the UK government-funded national tourism agency, has promoted different initiatives to exploit the commercial appeal of Liverpool's music scene, as well as other initiatives focused on British music capital, like the tourism guide *One Nation Under a Groove: The Rock and Pop Map of Britain*, or the campaign *Britain Rocks!*, realised in collaboration with EMI (Cohen and Roberts 2013, pp.37-38).

Beyond institutional campaigns that sought to represent the official musicscape of Liverpool, other low-profile, community based projects have emerged to raise the voice of city's inhabitants and tourists in defining their personal perception of what the Liverpool sound is (S. Cohen 2012). While hidden aspects have emerged, all of them recognised the process of heritagisation surrounding Beatles' music emerged in the last thirty years (Lashua et al. 2010), meaning that the band and its history have been gradually recognised as place and identity making themes, and a fundamental part of local culture heritage (Cantillon et al. 2022). In December 2015 Liverpool was awarded the title of England's UNESCO City of Music. Inside this nomination, enormous centrality was given to the Beatles and their history, through which the city became globally known as music tourism destination. Nevertheless, the successful bid reveals the contradiction that the Beatles pose for Liverpool. The risk for the city is in fact to continue to bask in the glory of this band without recognising the rest of its local rich music scene and heritage (Jones 2020, pp.82–83). In Ireland, an interesting example is represented by the city of Cork and its relationship with blues guitarist Rory Gallagher; this symbiosis is discussed in Chapter 2.

Since 'music is everywhere' (UNWTO 2018, p.7), sounding places can also be traced outside of the Western world, with examples coming from different parts of the globe. In Colombia, local music heritage – a mixture of instruments and rhythms originating from its African, European and American influences – has been employed as the core strategy to promote the country as a rich and diverse destination (*ibid*., p.33). Two major Colombian cities, Medellin and the capital, Bogotá, have been eventually inscribed within the UNESCO's City of Music Network (*ibid*.). In South Korea, the phenomenon of K-pop has been recognised as a relevant feature within national intangible heritage in a way that even companies like Hyundai have recognised its appeal and role in representing Korea's identity abroad, targeting K-pop fans for tourist campaigns centred on this phenomenon (Hyundai 2024).

1.5.2.7. Lutherie and Craftsmanship

Many cities in the world boast of traditional and artisanal productions of musical instruments, and these productions can be part of the tourism proposal for a specific territory. Lutherie and craftsmanship are a productive reality that enriches and diversifies local economies, occasionally enabling territories to "live upon music" (Montebelli and Vavassori 2019, p.123). People usually travel to meet a music instrument maker to purchase a musical instrument or to get some restoration work. However, visiting a lutherie and artisans means to live an experience able to immediately show visitors how a secular tradition may be renovated and handed down today, creating thus a direct link between a historicized knowledge and contemporary sounds and performance (*ibid*.). Sometimes the produced instrument becomes a symbol for that territory, like the fife in the Italian region of the *Quattro Province* or the bagpipe in Scotland, and it can be used and proposed in marketing strategies of promotion.

The already mentioned city of Cremona in Italy is highly connected with the violin, whose shape and sound contribute in establishing the reputation of this city as classical music centre (Sabatini and Trimarchi 2019). Beyond the museum dedicated to the instrument and the historic production of Antonio Stradivari, the city is known for being a cluster of luthiers, with more than one hundred fifty instrument makers continuing this noble activity, selling their instruments on the international market. This cluster of high cultural value contributes to the local specialisation of the (musical) offer, linking the music product(s) together with other territorial aspects and attractions (Marchioro and Miotto 2019). Many of these luthiers

open the doors of their ateliers for organised tours, allowing for intimate experiences within their ateliers. Here they present their work and explain the procedure to make a violin nor a cello, showing the production chain that starts in woods and ends in complete instruments sold to professional musicians, and demonstrating the interrelations between lutheries and tourism. The example of Cremona, similarly to others coming from different geographical contexts such as rural Scotland (McKerrell and Hornabrook 2022), demonstrates the relevance of lutherie and craftsmanship within the music tourism scenario, recognising the value micro-enterprises have in adding value to the local cultural visiting experience.

1.5.3. Music Tourism System Management

The tourism system, including cultural tourism and its different forms, presents a dynamic and complex system that must be systematically managed. Consequently, the music tourism system requires forms of management common to other typologies of cultural experiences. If music tourism is recognised as an alternative form of tourism, it then requires sustainable management practices, that include communities' participation and appreciation of the spatial capital. As Holden recalls, 'the sustainable tourism debate has become more holistic to cover not just environmental issues but also socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions' (2008 p.158). Such affirmation highlights the wider implications of tourism, that, in order to be sustainable, must be managed responsibly, with destinations' inhabitants as active stakeholders in expressing and respecting local perspectives and beliefs.

Traditional tourism development is associated with top-down strategies of decision making. This kind of development tends to avoid inclusion of opinions and values of key stakeholders in the destinations, and the results are social relations where unequal power relationships prevail (Pennington-Gray and Carmichael 2006). New forms of strategies are now contemplating bottom-up approaches, and one of the main forms in which these are applicated is through the involvement of local communities in decision-making and resource management processes. No one knows a territory better than who lives it every day. Participation practices for the managing and the representation of tourism destinations which involve local people become therefore fundamental for an inclusive and sustainable development. These are real social empowerment actions that lead to the possibility for local inhabitants of producing and proposing knowledge of a destination within new strategies and, at the same time, to let communities recognise the touristic value of their own territory (Burini 2015).

Participation has potential to transform tourism into a vehicle for territorial regeneration in places recognised as potential destinations. Through different participative practices, it is possible to collect the "spatial capital" (e.g. territorial knowledge) inhabitants own, thanks to their strong, durable and well ingrained connection with their territory (*ibid*., p.54). An example is participatory cartographic practices, that express through spatial representations knowledge associated with a territory and social values attributed to a landscape by its living community (Casti 2009).

When examining participative practices, stakeholders in the destination include governments and local authorities, tourism boards, accommodation services and companies, institutes of research, media, urban planners, and finally citizens. In order to enhance local culture and advance economic returns, these actors can establish partnerships and collaborations, but they also fall within internal competitions, competing with each other for control over a lucrative resource (Seddio 2013). Their interrelation and coordination is translated into a horizontal networking (Figure 15), whereas an effective tourism development plan must be able to balance different goals and interests. The management of all the stakeholders' needs and desires require in fact an organisational design, supported by managerial tools like GANTT strategies and SWOT analyses. This form of planning represents a key aspect, as this is the organisational model adapted to manage the complex and delicate system of public-private partnership of which it is composed (Gortan-Carlin and Krajnović 2016, pp.213-214).

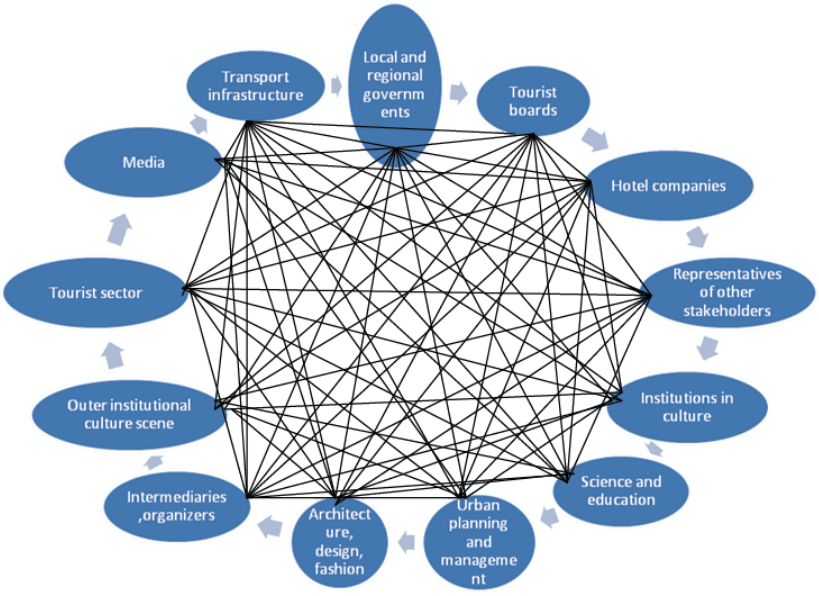


Figure 15: Horizontal networking of stakeholders in the cultural (and music) tourism model (Gortan-Carlin and Krajnović 2016, p.214).

Stakeholders in (music) tourism destinations also include people who actively work with music, such as artists, organisations, promoters, labels, instrument makers, and audiences (McKerrell 2022). Together, they form a music ecosystem that contribute to the visibility of music in the destination, generating local and international interest (Hernández-Acosta 2020, p.140). Music ecosystems develop relationships – fully or partially – with music tourism management models, as well as with the rest of social and cultural activities in the destination (Figure 16). These relationships provide economic benefits and opportunities to enlarge income and markets, but also create impacts on both sides, evidencing a dialectic situation whereas tourism influences the music scene, but also where music events have a weight on tourism development, expenses and flows (Ballico and Watson 2020).

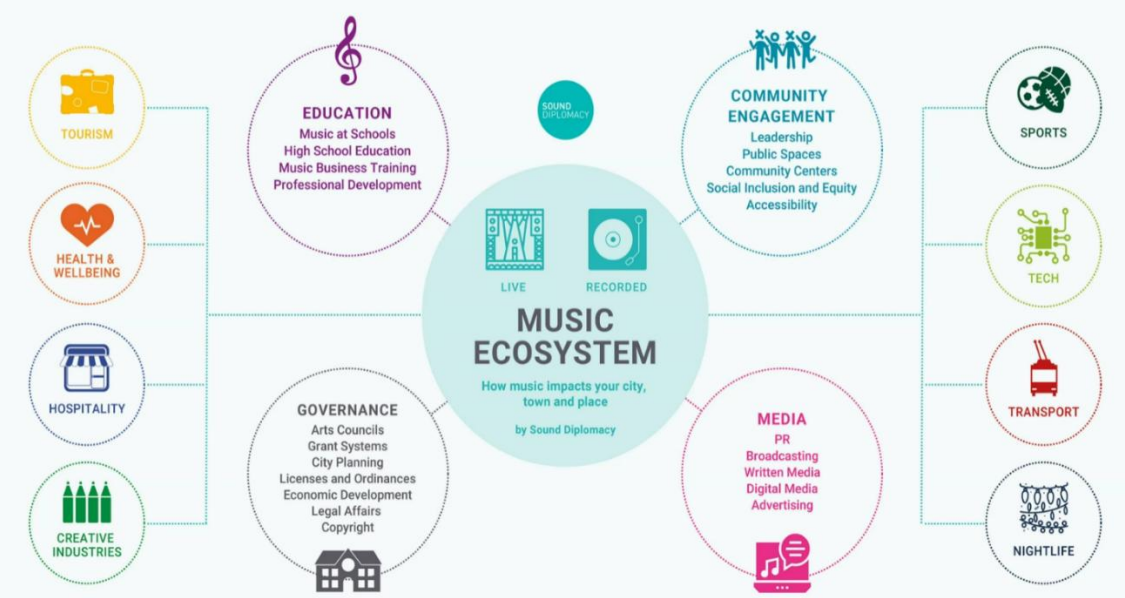


Figure 16: The Music Ecosystem (Sound Diplomacy 2024).

Within the European Union, the networking of stakeholders for tourism development is recommended in different Directives for strategic tourism destination management, which state that the destination must be managed by a model of strategic partnership (Gortan-Carlin and Krajnović 2016, p.216). The whole music tourism destination strategy must be discussed and monitored, including the aspects focused on its planning, organisation, realisation, and control. In addition, it is necessary to create a network of all segments involved in tourism and culture to be able to create music tourism products for specific music and cultural destinations (*ibid*.).

1.5.4. Authenticity in Music Tourism

Both in tourism as well as in music terms, authenticity is understood as something associated with genuineness of a territory and of its culture (and of its music practices). Traditions, activities and contacts with the visited population have become increasingly important for experiential tourism, and music – especially if it appears as "traditional" – is easily subject to this choice of interest, as it happened in Argentina after the recognition of tango as national music par excellence (Goertzen and Azzi 1999). From a musicological perspective, authenticity is understood as a complicated but essential argument. While some authors critique the notion of authenticity applied to music, considering it is just a slogan or a cliché (Cook 1998), with Connell and Gibson arguing that 'in terms of more fluid and ephemeral aspects of culture, such as music, it is impossible to measure authenticity against any given scientific criteria' (2003, p.28), authenticity can actually emerge according to different perspectives of analysis. When it comes to artists, authenticity is often connected to discourses of genuineness (Mardhatillah et al. 2023), while it generally means "real, actual, genuine" (as opposed to imaginary, pretended). In music, authenticity has been equated with "historically correct" and "placed in the original context" by early ethnomusicologists (Schippers 2006). However, notions of authenticity applied to music derive from how music is valued and understood, and how the shifts in such values are perceived and disembodied from their social and cultural origins (Minidio 2005). Scholars recognise that concepts such as authenticity arise mainly when connected to "traditional" folk music, where a supposed direct connection with the past is established. It is in traditional music studies where authenticity emerges as a term associated with roots, identity and traditions (A. Moore 2002). In popular music studies instead, authenticity is more often linked with debates on commercialism and the industry (Umar Rauf et al. 2023). Nevertheless, Schippers (2006) suggests that an exploration of such concepts (tradition and authenticity) is not an easy task. Since music is understood as a living practice – being something that constantly evolves in time (Kaul 2009; Rosenberg 2019) – ideas of tradition that fix music in an invariant situation and model – thus limiting music discourses, performances and development – cannot be considered as "authentic".

The combination of music and tourism provide interesting opportunities to critically consider how authenticity is approached and challenged over time. Within this sector, even music events (conceived by the tourist gaze as a genuine, pure and authentic living practices) can be subject turned into packaged experiences. The sphere of commodification, and the consequent music consumption, have expanded enormously, especially because of music's

fluidity and mobility (Connell and Gibson 2003), but also because music is at the same time closely linked to the emergencies posed by technological development, globalisation, economic dynamics and intercultural exchange (Minidio 2005). Tourism presents many challenges related to the commodification of music. Attempts to preserve music as cultural heritage has often led to 'the paradox of constructing staged authenticities with music treated as a market commodity' (Titon 2009, p.119). The fact of passing through the "lens" – and the "wallets" – of tourism and tourists means that music has become commodities, an 'objects of economic value' (Appadurai 1996, p.3) to be sold and consumed.

Music, like other aspects of a destination's intangible heritage, can provide meaningful experiences, particularly within niche contexts. Niche music experiences can help express social bonds within communities of practitioners, even when these are joined by outsiders. Social interactions among those involved in making, consuming, or simply enjoying music can be understood as forms of "local" authenticity, made of authentic social interactions. In destinations where tourism has not heavily impacted local music practices, niche music tourism offers opportunities for this type of engagement. This aspect is further explored in Chapter 4, where it is analysed in the context of my fieldwork in the north-east of Ireland.

1.5.5. Music Tourism Marketing and Place Branding

Music is accepted to be a fundamental element for local branding strategies (UNWTO 2018) and the recognition of the potential of music in marketing and destination branding is evolving. Resources on a given territory (like a traditional and artisanal production of musical instruments) are not a tourism attraction *per se*. In order to be considered attractions, they must be recognised as resources, and this recognition may arise through exogenous factors (Montebelli and Vavassori 2019, p.117).

A tourism attraction is a cultural quality of the territory defined through a multiple scale process (Turco 2012). On an international scale, attractions' quality is determined by perception, by the way it is marketed and promoted (e.g. the quality of its image and reputation) and by dominant cultural elaborations of them. Quality and attractions are in this way subject to a constant branding policy (*ibid*., p.75). Defined as 'the process of building the brand of a given place by drawing on its identity and by promoting the formation of a positive image of the place toward stakeholders' (Pedeliento et al. 2015, p.94), place branding must be considered as a reinforcing element of territoriality, and local practices,

'as constitutive element of local cultures, create a place brand communicating territorial social value' (*ibid*., p.91). The interest in place branding is now so acknowledged that new companies focused on the branding of places as their primer business have emerged in the market.

As the main goal of place branding is to favour the development and maintenance of a positive and consistent image of a place, brand policy must meet what is now considered as appetible by tourists and interested parties. This should be approached by emphasizing the cultural traits and the connections between culture, identity and image. These connections are particularly relevant when a new place brand needs to be crafted anew by focusing on some values that can provide differentiation to a determined territory. Scholars have underlined the necessity of connecting local cultures with branding activities highlighting that it is by the very means of the specific local cultures that place brands can be developed and can provide differentiation (*ibid*., pp.92-96).

The evolution and segmentation of music tourism demand has allowed the development of different music tourism practices and destinations, marketed to different targets. In Ireland, marketing strategies have usually favoured rural idyls and the sense of nostalgia for a mythological past, together with "imaginary geographies" concerning the island's green landscapes and the generosity of its people (Markwick 2001). Music is a leading element within Irish cultural experience, and new marketing campaigns published in the last twenty years, as well as tourism products such as tourism guidebooks and brochures, include references to local music (Wilson et al. 2018). This highlights the prominence music has received in marketing and branding strategies, being perceived – both by visitors as well as tourism planners – as a prominent aspect of Irish culture and of the holiday experience in Ireland.

1.6. Conclusions

This chapter has exposed an international overview of the tourism phenomenon, moving through general notions of tourism management and the history of tourism development. Culture and heritage have become central themes in the travel industry, as their importance and relevance have progressively increased over the years in response to emerging tourism trends. While culture and heritage tourism seem to offer "alternative" experiences – in contrast to other forms of leisure tourism, such as seaside holidays – they can still maintain features of mass consumption, as they involve large numbers of tourists

"consuming" a place, its resources and its heritage, posing a challenge to the destinations' carrying capacities. Niche tourism – a form of tourism tailored to meet the demand of very specific market segments (Novelli et al. 2022) – thus emerges as a chance to approach cultures and ecosystems in a more sustainable way. While it does not involve major economic flows, niche tourism includes activities which allow for a deeper understanding of local identities, providing opportunities to small communities and little businesses to access the market, enhancing territorial development. Niche tourism practices can actually become a stratagem to pursuit several UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially those involving education, improvement of working conditions and economic development, and peace-keeping strategies.

The focus on cultural heritage tourism, through the lens of niche experiences, allowed to introduce music tourism as an interesting segment of the wider cultural tourism realm. Identified as a form of tourism 'where people travel, at least in some part, because of music' (Connell and Gibson 2005, p.1), music tourism sees music as a primary driver for travelling. Music is recognised as part of destinations' intangible cultural heritage, enriching local tourism offer and opportunities. Different forms of music tourism experiences have been highlighted, together with the impacts and contributions they carry into destinations, communities and music practices. While music tourism is not necessarily a form of niche tourism, it involves a wide range of actors and players, and can be traced in a variety of contexts and shapes. Music festivals appear as "typical" examples of music tourism phenomena, but this form of tourism can also involve educational practices or be connected to a given town or village's soundscape.

Just like other components of destinations' heritage, music has being employed in marketing strategies and promotional campaigns, especially within those destinations with strong music traditions. In the context of Ireland, music has been recognised as a primary element within the island's tourism offer, and it is now heavily marketized as part of the Irish tourism experience. The next chapter will examine the relationship between Ireland and its music, critiquing the connection between tourism and music that has led the island to become an internationally renowned music tourism destination.

Chapter 2: Tourism and Music Tourism in Ireland

2.1. Introduction

The second chapter explores the relationship between music and music tourism in Ireland. In the first section I introduce Ireland as a tourism destination, highlighting the main themes and characteristics that make the island a unique destination within the international tourism market, while also presenting recent data concerning tourism results and the importance of this industry within the national economy. The analysis continues with a second section that shows how tourism development occurred in Ireland since the 1920s, encompassing the years of the Celtic Tiger, the economic crisis of 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic. This unit ends with a presentation of current tourism development strategies and plans for the future. I also analyse and critique regional brands and strategies realised by Fáilte Ireland – the national tourism board. The third section analyses tourism imaginaries associated with Ireland, and the themes historically exploited by marketing strategies to promote the country as an "authentic" destination. This passage presents a particular focus on the pub as experience, where music enriches the full enjoyment of the so-called *craic*. The discourse then focuses on music tourism in Ireland, analysing the relationship between Irish identity and local musicking (Small 1998). While I give consideration mostly to Irish traditional music and its relevance within contemporary tourism discourses, I also mention other music opportunities that constitute part of the overall national music tourism offering, like the prestigious Irish rock music scene (IMRO 2017).

2.2. Ireland as a Tourism Destination

Ireland is an established tourism destination within the European context. Located on the periphery of Europe with a low population density, it has much to offer to the tourist seeking an experiential holiday (B. Quinn 1994; Hanrahan 2017). Surveys from 2023 have identified *exploration* as a key holiday need for tourist visiting the island, evidencing how Ireland is a versatile destination, able to offer holidaymakers of all ages and budgets both short and long breaks all along the year, providing both indoor and outdoor activities (Tourism Ireland 2024). Every year this island attracts millions of visitors (mainly from Europe, Great Britain and North America – Figure 17), while marketing and promotional

materials such as brochures and tourism guides depicts Ireland a as a little country[2] characterised by a landscape "out of time" and by the "innate friendliness" of its inhabitants, as well as a land with important historical and cultural remains (Markwick 2001; Wilson et al. 2018).

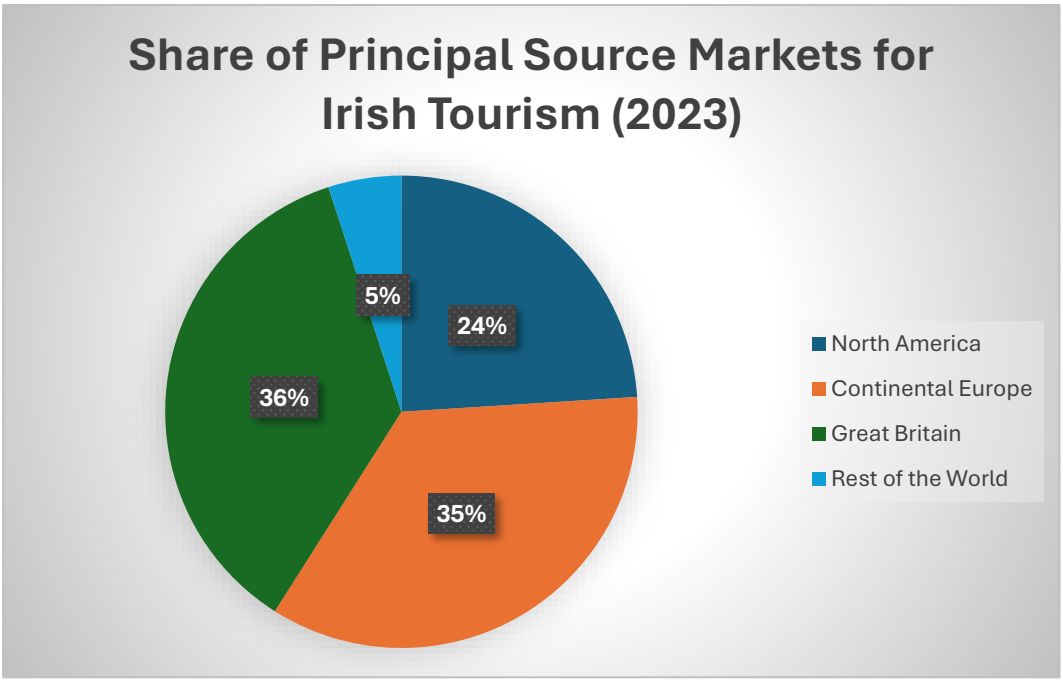


Figure 17: Share of principal incoming tourism flows to the Republic of Ireland (ITIC 2023a).

According to Cronin and O'Connor, 'tourism has been and continues to be a major shaping force in Irish society. General and specialist interest in Irish tourism parallels the increasing importance of tourism within the Irish economy and culture' (2003, p.1), while Clancy acknowledges that international tourism arrivals and receipts to Ireland between 1986 and 2007 grew faster than the overall economy (2009, pp.1-2). In 1991, the contribution of tourism to Irish GDP was estimated to be 7.3% (Gillmor 1994). Between 1986 and 2007, international tourism arrivals more than tripled, growing from less than 2

[2] There are two states on the island of Ireland; the Republic of Ireland (ROI) – an independent country – and Northern Ireland (NI), which is part of the United Kingdom (UK). In tourism discourses as well as in the imagination of tourists, it is difficult to differentiate between the island and the political entities. Each state has its own tourism body that collects and publishes data about tourism outcomes every year. Additionally, Tourism Ireland, a cross-border organisation operating in both jurisdictions, presents data through an "all-Ireland" approach. Despite this political and administrative division, promotional campaigns that target tourists outside of the UK and Ireland tend to refer to "Ireland" as a wider and holistic geographical and cultural destination. Moreover, scholars and researchers sometimes combine the datasets from the two jurisdictions, further reinforcing this conceptual imbalance. Within this thesis, while I use the term "Ireland" to refer to the entire island and discuss tourism in relation to both ROI and NI, when it comes to statistics and figures I will clarify their scope each time as necessary.

million visitors to 7.7 million. Earnings during that same time period nearly quintupled, growing from €927 million to just over €4.9 billion. Tourism exports represented 3.4 percent of overall exports in 2005 (Clancy 2009, pp.1-2). Recent data prior the COVID-19 pandemic reflect a diversification of Irish economy, with tourism accounting for around the 4.8% of total GDP (GOI 2019). From an "all-Ireland" perspective, tourism remains a central pillar of job creation (Clancy 2009, p.11), with 12.3% of Irish workforce currently employed in the sector, with peaks and disparities in the west of the island (Figure 18), and with a business value estimated to be €9.5 billion (OECD 2022).

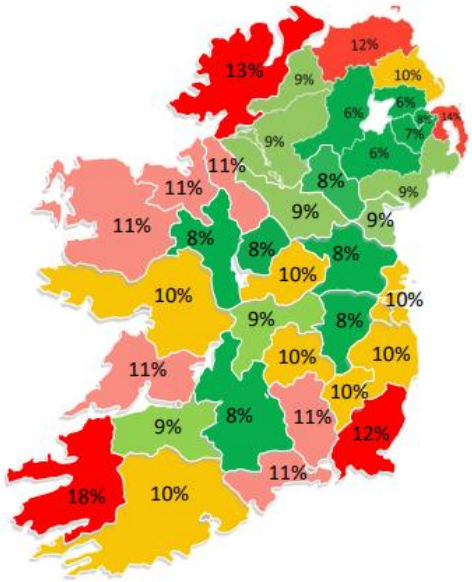


Figure 18: Proportion of workforce directly depending on tourism per county (McLaughlin 2020).

2.2.1. Principal Irish Destinations

Tourism in Ireland today is directed toward four main typologies of areas: tourism centres, rural tourism areas, touring areas, and special interest centres. The former category is a designation for the major urban settlements of the island like Dublin, Belfast, Galway and Cork. The second one identifies areas outside of main tourism centres, while the third assemble coastal, mountain, river valley, lake shore and heritage sites along car, coach or cycle trails. Finally, special interest centres are places able to offer good opportunities for particular activities, that can be sports-related, nature-related, lifestyle and culture-orientated (Gillmor 1994, pp.30-32).

The spatial distribution of tourism within the Republic of Ireland 'reflects the geographical distribution of the various tourist attractions, the regional level of development,

investment and promotion' (*ibid*., p.26). There are many unique aspects to Ireland's landscape and settlement – it is predominantly rural, agricultural oriented and, therefore, contrasts directly with urban environments of the European and North-American source markets. Since the Irish agricultural economy has been relatively underdeveloped for so long, landscapes and settlements have been comparatively unchanged in the European context. Unlike other parts of Europe, much of the Irish countryside remained untouched and is considered today as one of the most well-preserved in the continent (Duffy 1994).

Dublin, the capital of the Republic of Ireland, is the single most important focus for tourists, and a key access point for visiting Ireland, as it is often the first and/or last experience visitors have of the country (Fáilte Ireland 2023a). By the 1990s, tourism in Dublin accounted for more than 20% of the national revenue and visited by two-fifths of overseas tourists (Gillmor 1994, p.26). Updated data illustrates the city's primary role within national and international tourism even further, with Dublin accounting for over two thirds of all overseas tourists to Ireland (Fáilte Ireland 2023d). For many overseas consumers, the capital is their only experience of Ireland. The city welcomed 7.7 million tourists in 2018, receiving €2,395 million in tourist expenditures during the same period (Fáilte Ireland 2023a). This reflects the various attractions of the capital in addition to its being one of the country's main international gateway.

Alongside a focus on Dublin, tourism is strongly orientated towards the coastal zone, with maritime counties receiving most of the revenue (while being particularly dependent on tourism, as Figure 17 shows). The western part of the country is the one which has the greatest appeal to tourists, and which has been marketed the most over the last forty years (Clancy 2009). This is because of a combination of its physical assets of a long attractive coastline, together with the supposed character of its human landscape, people and traditional culture (Gillmor 1994, p.26). Moreover, the west of Ireland is considered as the place where the essence of Irish Gaelic identity is held and preserved (Kneafsey 2003; Nic Eoin 2003), with traditional music understood as an important aspect in developing the gaze associated with this territory (Vallely 2008; Kaul 2009). If the west of Ireland is known for its scenic views and wild landscapes, the remaining portions of the island, namely the east coast and the Midlands, are historically characterised by the presence of major historic sites, great houses and exhibition gardens (Gillmor 1994, p.26), but also by smaller numbers of visitors.

Within the Irish landscape, Northern Ireland and the cities of Belfast and Derry have become prestigious destinations too. For over thirty years (from the end of the 1960s until

the end of the 1990s), these territories have been associated exclusively with the "Troubles", an historical period characterised by sectarian violence and military tensions (C. Moore 2019), which had repercussions over the development of strong regional tourism infrastructure (Timothy and Boyd 2003). Nevertheless, the number of tourists in Northern Ireland (coming both from the rest of the island as well as from overseas territories) has rapidly increased over the years, as testified by a total of 4.7 million overnight trips in 2024 (NISRA 2025). This is due to a series of successful marketing campaigns aimed at promoting Northern Ireland's scenic landscapes and heritage sites (including the Giant's Causeway, UNESCO's World Heritage Site), as well as emphasizing the connection between the destination and a number of renowned TV series that were filmed here. Nevertheless, the traces of the Troubles have led to development of dark tourism practices in some quarters of Belfast and Derry. Here, elements like murals or battlefields have become part of local heritage and attractions (McDowell 2008; Skinner 2016; Skinner and Jolliffe 2017).

2.3. Development of Tourism in Ireland

Managing tourism flows in Ireland, while also promoting it on the international market, requires effective tourism policies and adaptive development plans and strategies. The Irish Government has long been a leading international marketer of tourism, and in the 1990s became a pioneer in the area of "nation branding", meaning the usage of marketing techniques and channels to convey and celebrate local identity and pride (Clancy 2009, pp.1-2). Tourism in the Republic of Ireland is currently organised and managed by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, whose mission is to lead the sustainable development of tourism and media, and promote participation in culture, arts and sports, while also sustaining the Irish language and its use. The Department seeks to sustain Irish competitivity (enhancing North-South cooperation), together with favouring appreciation for Irish heritage, landscapes and creativity globally. Efforts to develop Ireland as a tourism destination already began in the first half of the 20th century. Table 2 represents major key development phases and events of Irish tourism history.

Table 2: Key developments phases for Irish tourism (source: author).

Year	Event	Purpose/Consequence
1925	Creation of the *Irish Tourism Association* (ITA)	To promote Ireland and Gaelic identity
1939	Realisation of the Shannon Airport	To provide the country with its first transatlantic airport
1944	First commercial flight landing at Shannon Airport	A new era for Irish tourism industry
1948	Establishment of *Tourism Northern Ireland*	To promote tourism within NI
1952	Creation of *Bord Fáilte*	To manage all areas of tourism development in the Republic
1963	Establishment of the *Centre for Education, Recruitment, and Training* (CERT)	To assist Bord Fáilte in training tourism operators
1973	Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC)	To access European's free market
1984	Establishment of the *Irish Tourism Industry Confederation* (ITIC)	To develop strategies and promote policies for Irish tourism growth
1993	Maastricht Treaty	To strength connections between Ireland and Europe, leading to the years of the *Celtic Tiger*
1998	*Good Friday Agreement*	Official conclusion of the Troubles in Northern Ireland
2003	Bord Fáilte is replaced by *Fáilte Ireland*	To coordinate and increase tourism in the Republic
2003	Establishment of *Tourism Ireland*	To promote Ireland (both ROI and NI) on the international tourism market
2014	Establishment of *Wild Atlantic Way* (WAW)	To promote western Ireland
2015	Establishment of *Dublin*	To expand Dublin city as a tourism destination
2016	Establishment of *Ireland's Ancient East* (IAE)	To promote eastern heritage, counterbalancing WAW
2018	Establishment of *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* (IHH)	To raise tourism awareness for inner Ireland
2020	*Shared Island Initiative*	To imagine Ireland's future, with implications for experiential tourism
2021	*Peace Plus Programme*	To provide funding for border regions of Ireland, with implications for cross-border tourism
2022	Fáilte Ireland's *Regional Tourism Development Strategies 2023-2027*	Frameworks to lead sustainable development of Fáilte Ireland's regional brands
2023	*Vision 2030*	To outline steps to lead tourism growth until 2030

2.3.1. From the 1920s to the 1990s

Initial tourism development in Ireland occurred in 1925, when the Irish Tourism Association (ITA) was created during the Eamonn de Valera administration. De Valera was a prime figure in the postcolonial Ireland's Gaelic revival, and tourism was seen as a way of

glorifying Gaelic heritage through advertisements designed to focus on a narration centred on homeland discourses and the traditions of an ancient and resilient ethnic group – the *Irish* (Costa 2009, p.113). Substantial development occurred in the 1950s, when in 1952 ITA created – eventually merging within it – Bord Fáilte (literally "Welcoming Board"), the first national tourism board for the Republic of Ireland (Kockel 1994, p.2), realised 'to encourage and develop touristic traffic, to engage publicity and to license hotels and other accommodations' (Deegan and Dineen 1997, p.21). In 1963, the Centre for Education, Recruitment, and Training (CERT), was also established. This was a national organisation that coordinated education, recruitment, and training in the tourism industry, that worked together with Bord Fáilte to plan and implement programmes specific to Ireland's tourism necessities (Costa 2009, p.113).

In terms of infrastructures, important development occurred since October 1944, when the first commercial flight from New York landed at Shannon Airport. As Kaul recalls, 'in 1944, the commercial use of an airport on the County Clare side of the Shannon River […] opened the door for a new era in tourism, not only for County Clare, but for all the west of Ireland' (2009, pp.29–30). Built in the late 1930s in Co. Clare, on the south-west coast of Ireland, this airport – the first one in Ireland together with Dublin's one – became for many years the main gateway for airline traffic crossing the Atlantic Ocean, and the principal American access gate for Irish tourism, especially in the west (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016, p.6). The presence of this airport represented the beginning of mass tourism in Ireland, a new destination later more accessible to all classes, while it also influenced the development and recognition of some areas of the island as more "tourism-appetible". The west coast in particular became the focus for international tourism flows, and it is still considered as the Irish most interesting tourism region. Clare in particular became the first door for those first groups of American tourists with Irish ancestors in search for their "roots", becoming recognised as a "top-flight destination" (Deegan and Dineen 1997, p.17).

Despite substantial positive trends in tourism growth until 2019, the industry also suffered different moments of interruption and decline (Gillmor 1994, p.17). The major setback to the growth of tourism in Ireland before the COVID-19 pandemic was in the period 1960-1972, when the visitors' numbers fell by one-quarter. This resulted mainly from the deterrent effect on potential visitors caused by the Troubles. The Troubles continued to impact significantly on Irish tourism until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, while in Northern Ireland those three decades of violence have been explicitly considered as "lost years" in terms of tourism growth and development (Timothy and Boyd 2003, p.78). Another

setback occurred in the early 1980s, but it was related more to the international recession. During those years, the percentage of growth of international visitor numbers was lower than how it was in the 1960s (Gillmor 1994, p.19).

Despite the economic stagnation and tensions north of the Irish border, the declining trend was reversed in the late 1980s as the numbers of visitors rose rapidly. The real annual growth rate in the second half of this decade was as high as 9%, which exceeded the world average by about one half. Several factors contributed to this expansion. The Government gave a high priority to tourism development, while tourism prices benefitted greatly from a decline in inflation to very low levels. In 1984, the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC), a nongovernmental organisation that serves 'as a lobbying watchdog for all stakeholders in the industry in Ireland' (Costa 2009, p.115), was established with the scope to advocate for policies and strategies to sustain the sector. A major influence on visitor numbers were also increased return visits by recent emigrants. Even if a slight decline in the number of visitors was caused in 1991 because of a new recession in the USA and UK markets after the effects of the Gulf War on travelling, Ireland was now facing a major growth in arrivals mainly from continental Europe (*ibid*., pp.19-20). Substantial changes in the nationality structure of visitors to Ireland have occurred over the years. If, for a variety of geographical, cultural and historical reasons, the USA and the UK have historically formed the main source markets for the tourism industry (B. Quinn 1994, p.62), the Troubles discouraged those potential British tourists who were not of Irish ancestry to visit the country, causing a decrease in the role of the UK tourism market. Incoming travel from North America also had a decline since the first half of the 1990s, but this was compensated by many young visitors coming from continental Europe. This was due to an improved accessibility, transport development, improved accession to the Internet, and by media coverage and good tourism marketing strategies, but also because European visitors were less deterred by the violence in Northern Ireland (Gillmor 1994, p.20).

2.3.2. The Turn of the Millennium: From the Celtic Tiger to the 2008 Economic Crisis

Ireland changed significantly during the 1990s. In previous years, the island was depicted as a very impoverished and rural country, with high rates of emigration (O'Shea 2008; Kaul 2009). With the establishment of the *European Union* (EU) and the *Maastricht Treaty* in 1993, Ireland was beginning to witness what has been referred to as the Celtic Tiger, an upsurge in its economic power (Costa 2009, p.42). This was a period of rapid

economic growth fuelled by foreign direct investment (Ní Chonaill 2023, p.50) that took off in the early-to mid-1990s, leaving dramatic impacts over the national economy, landscape and society (Kaul 2009, p.18). Two important development processes led to the explosion of economic prosperity in Ireland. Firstly, the Government attracted multinational corporations to set up shop in the country through a series of grants and taxation measures, and by allowing companies to repatriate all of their profits without investing in Ireland (Gottheil 2003, p.725). Secondly, Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community (now European Union – EU) in 1973 led the country to progressive free trade policies and economic outcomes linked to globalisation. Ireland was also able to draw on huge amounts of EU money. A UN report from 2002 eventually described Ireland as the fourth richest nation per capita in the word (Kaul 2009, p.18). During these years, Ireland switched from being one of the poorest countries in western Europe to one of the richest. In 2009, Ireland eventually detained the fourth highest GDP per capita in the world and was ranked fifth in the UN Human Development Index (Clancy 2009).

During this period of strong financial economic expansion, tourism was recognised as a key driver of economic growth, leading to the development of a structured and widespread tourism governance. In 2003, Bord Fáilte was replaced – through the National Tourism Development Authority Act – by Fáilte Ireland (ISB 2003), the current national tourism authority. With the scope to work in partnership with tourism stakeholders, and to coordinate them while sustaining Irish tourism development and competitivity within the international market, Fáilte Ireland's mission is 'to increase the contribution of tourism to the economy by facilitating the development of a competitive and pro table tourism industry' (Costa 2009, p.114). In order to promote Ireland as a tourism market, and to collect data on a national level, Fáilte Ireland works closely with the Department of Tourism, who assigns it responsibility for supporting regulations and marketing strategies. As a new, and enlarged, authority, in 2003 Fáilte Ireland also absorbed CERT's competencies (*ibid*.).

Tourism development at the turn of the new Millennium was also influenced by positive events in the north of the island. In 1998, the Treaty of Peace known as the Good Friday Agreement, officially posed an end to the experience of the Troubles, their violence and the associated political instability of Northern Ireland, leaving the condition for the development of a local leisure industry (Timothy and Boyd 2003).

Tourism in Northern Ireland was already identified as a relevant field for the national economy back in the 1940s, when Tourism Northern Ireland was established to support the industry and to advertise Northern Ireland as a tourist destination (Tourism Northern Ireland

2025). Nevertheless, the Troubles and their violence never allowed to disclose tourism potential in the region (Timothy and Boyd 2003, p.78). With the peace agreement, tourism in Northern Ireland was identified as a key theme to boost local economy and enhance peace processes (Anson 1999, pp.58–59; Boyd 1999).

Tourism Ireland, the "all-island" tourism agency, was then established in 2003 as one of the "six areas of co-operation" under the framework of the 1998 Agreement (Tourism Ireland 2023a). Tourism Ireland is a cross-border tourism organisation which seeks to increase tourism to the island of Ireland and to support Northern Ireland to realise its tourism potential. It works closely with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland, and it is the organisation responsible for marketing the island as a holiday and business events destination on the international market (*ibid.*). One of Tourism Ireland's key objectives remains to encourage more regional tourism spread away from iconic destinations (mainly Dublin city and the western coast). Thus, the organisation encourages local communities to develop new product offering especially in more hidden regions and to encourage off season travel.

The global economic crisis in 2008 had a significant impact on the Irish economy. While Ireland experienced the fastest economic growth rates in the OECD between 1994 and 2007 (Whelan et al. 2015), the financial boost and results of the Celtic Tiger and the wealth associated with it were not equally distributed around the country (Costa 2009). They eventually left enormous inequalities, and the economic growth associated with this historical moment turned out to be quite ephemeral and illusory. When the crisis took place, Ireland was the first country to face a period of hard recession. The high inflations developed during the years of the "Irish miracle" led to an unsustainable level of real estate prices, which in turn set the base for a speculative bubble (Spitali 2011, p.76). Many new buildings, built with the purpose to be sold as secondary and renting houses on the most scenic landscapes of the south and west coast, remained vacant, abandoned or even unfinished. The combination of the global economic recession, the banking crisis, and the domestic property bubble 'led to an unprecedented contraction in national output and income and to a fiscal crisis resulting in Ireland having to accept a "bail out" from the European Central Bank, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund' (Whelan et al. 2015, p.504). Thanks to severe austerity policies imposed by the Government that cut public expenditure by 7.5% (among the most severe in all Europe), the economic default was avoided, but unemployment increased from 6% in 2008 to 13,3% in 2009 (Spitali 2011). The decline also involved job earnings and in net income due to wage cuts, particularly in the public sector, and tax

increases (Whelan et al. 2015). Nevertheless, the Irish economic system survived, and since 2011 the national GDP recorded an annual increase by around 2% (Spitali 2011), also thank to the contribution of tourism and tourists expenditures as part of the recovery strategy.[3]

2.3.3. Fáilte Ireland's Regional Experience Brands

In order to fulfil its scope, in 2006 Fáilte Ireland allocated a first €5 million fund in order to establish strategic marketing alliances between adjoining tourism regions in Ireland for the purposes of overseas promotion (Costa 2009, p.130). The idea was to develop a concept of "super regions", thematic areas to be promoted and sold on the international market, kept together by common themes and geographical proximity. Moreover, the scope of these regional brand was to let rural areas around main cities getting involved in the tourism development, allowing them to benefit from tourism flows' positive outcomes, spreading them all over the country. Thus, Fáilte Ireland realised four regional experience brands, namely *Dublin*, *Wild Atlantic Way*, *Ireland's Ancient East* and *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* (Figure 19). Although these brands are presumably marketed to an external audience, the content of branding says a great deal about the Government's vision of the territory, speaking also to its own citizenry (Clancy 2009, pp.1-2).

[3] The following section outlines important details regarding the Republic of Ireland's national tourism board. Since Co. Louth is located within the ROI, my thesis will rely more on Fáilte Ireland's outputs rather than the wider Tourism Ireland campaigns.

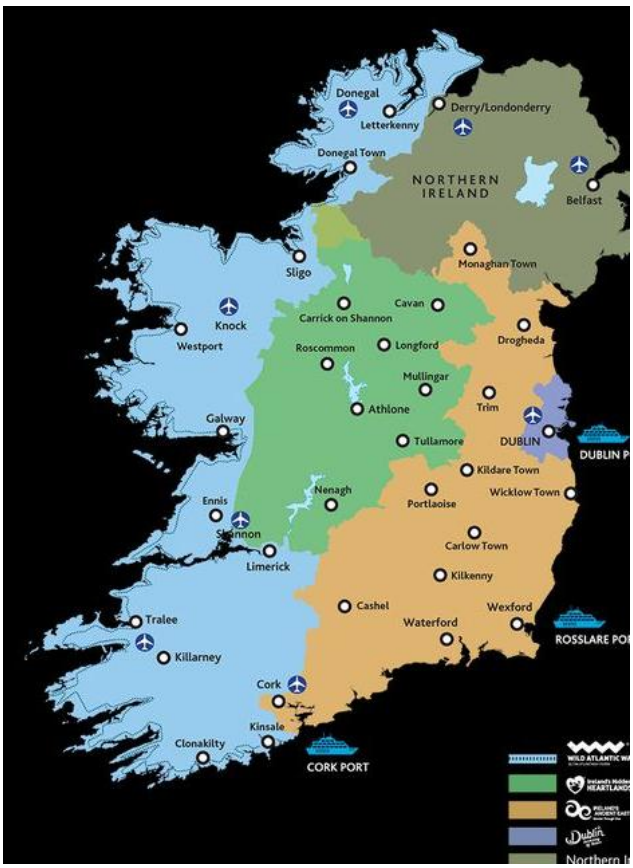


Figure 19: The four Fáilte Ireland's regional experience brands (Ó Conghaile 2022).

Launched in 2014, the Wild Atlantic Way aims to promote the wild landscapes of western Ireland facing the Atlantic Ocean. Centred on a large-scale drive tourism routes, the Wild Atlantic Way is in fact a long distance path stretching alone the coast for 2500 km from Donegal peninsula to west Cork. This brand was the first to be created, and it is the one that receives the highest number of domestic tourists, as well as major attention by international visitors besides Dublin. A significant attribute of this route is that it is based on the extreme periphery of Europe, being at the same time the longest coastal touring route in the world, incorporating many small coastal settlements, along with larger town and cities (Hanrahan et al. 2017). This route passes through many of most popular Irish destinations and villages/towns, such as the majestic Cliffs of Moher, the village of Doolin and Galway city.

Fáilte Ireland launched the Wild Atlantic Way in response to the 2008 global recession which left the west coast facing challenges linked to economic depression and depopulation phenomena. The brand was designed to re-imagine the west coast, with the ambition of unifying the region through a continuous, defined and catchy product able to attract visitors and provide an economic benefits on a regional level. In different consumer testing, the brand showed itself to be a motivating reason to visit Ireland, while economic

contributions of tourism have been impressive, with the brand proving itself to be particularly compelling in the US, British, German and French markets. In 2023, the Wild Atlantic Way and its coastline accounted 32% of total overseas tourists and 40% share of domestic trips (Fáilte Ireland 2024a). The fascination of the Irish west coast brought here different world-renowned movie productions such as *The Quiet Man*, *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars,* that exploited local wild sceneries to represent iconic and dramatic movie sequences. This contributed in the promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way and of its coastline, leading also to some forms of film-induced tourism phenomenon (Beeton 2005). Intangible cultural heritage is fundamental for the marketing, branding and experience of the Wild Atlantic Way, shaping the gaze of tourists and contributing in creating imaginaries associated with this region (Nic Eoin 2003). Irish traditional music is integral in the creation of imaginaries associated with this destination (Kneafsey 2003; Vallely 2008; Sweeney 2017), as it enriches consumer experiences and expectations through cultural and "authentic" engagement (Kaul 2009).

Dublin itself has become a brand in the gaze of international tourists, while it also attracts domestic tourism flows for its cultural and business related events. Fáilte Ireland has recognised the importance of constantly developing and expanding the Dublin tourism product to host and welcome tourists with a world-class destination offering (Fáilte Ireland 2023a, p.12). The brand *Dublin* was established between 2015 and 2016 as a platform to develop and coordinate the Irish capital and its surroundings as a tourism product for overseas consumption. Three key themes – *Dublin Docklands*, *Dublin Coastal Train* and *Dublin Mountains* – were identified to propose a comprehensive experience of the capital on the tourism market (*ibid*.). Today, Dublin welcomes approximately the 39% of overseas visitors (being the most visited region by international tourists).

With an €18 million investment (Fáilte Ireland 2016), Ireland's Ancient East (IAE) was launched in 2015 as a branded visitor experience encompassing the rich heritage and cultural assets of the eastern side of the island – from north Co. Louth up to east Co. Cork (Jackman 2016), providing a counterbalance to the Wild Atlantic Way. This programme does not include Dublin, as the Irish capital has its own promotional plan. Contrary to the western brand, the Ancient East's tourism trail was not designed as a driving route, but instead it seeks to highlight various sites throughout thirteen counties between Leinster, Ulster and Munster. As the name of the brand suggests, Ireland's Ancient East showcases Ireland's living culture and ancient heritage and brings it to life through stories that create unique visitor experiences, unite stakeholders and support vibrant communities (Fáilte Ireland

2016). The focus thus is on built heritage, history and traditions, as the eastern side of the island preserves the majority of Irish tangible heritage centres, together with sites where important myths and tales originated. While Irish traditional music remains integral to the marketing of the Wild Atlantic Way, music and musicians have been less prominent in the promotion of Ireland's Ancient East where the focus remains on historical ruins, distilleries and architecture.

The scope of this campaign was to create awareness about Irish eastern heritage, and to spread tourism economic impacts to those areas of Ireland previously excluded from tourism development and consumption, in line with Government policy. The south and east of the country presents a very different tourism challenge, since these regions have not been considered as tourism zones for a long time, being perceived most as "transit zones" from Dublin and its airport to Northern Ireland nor the west coast. While some of the territories included in the programme still suffer this condition, in 2023 Ireland's Ancient East had a 25% share of overseas visitors to Ireland, and 35% share of total domestic trips (Fáilte Ireland 2023b).

Finally, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands is the newest brand, developed in 2018 from a segment of the Ancient East programme – the one associated with the Irish Midlands. This programme offers 'unparalleled opportunities to get "active in nature" and to get "off the beaten track" with a latticework of vibrant waterways and myriad walking trails' (Fáilte Ireland 2023c). The brand is centred on sport activities, forestall parks, the River Shannon – the longest river in Ireland – and its various tributaries that crosses the inner part of the island. Just like the Ancient East programme, the Hidden Heartlands brand was created with the intention to raise tourism awareness for this part of Ireland and to distribute tourism benefits even in its countryside. As Costa highlights through the words of one of her interviewees, '"People don't go to the Midlands" […] "They go through the Midlands"' (Costa 2009, p.109). This region is traditionally perceived by tourists as one of main Ireland's highways, a modern-day esker making transport from one side of the island to the other simple and straightforward (*ibid.*). Despite being received very positively by both visitors and industry, in 2019 Ireland's Hidden Heartlands had only a 4.1% share of overseas visitors and a 6.7% share of domestic visitors (Fáilte Ireland 2023c), demonstrating how the Midlands are still a minority destination within the Irish tourism system.

In order to summarise the information listed in this paragraph, together with a better understanding of the weight and significance of each regional experience brand in relation

to both international visitors and domestic tourists, Figures 20 and 21 represent an interpretation of data gathered from various Fáilte Ireland reports.

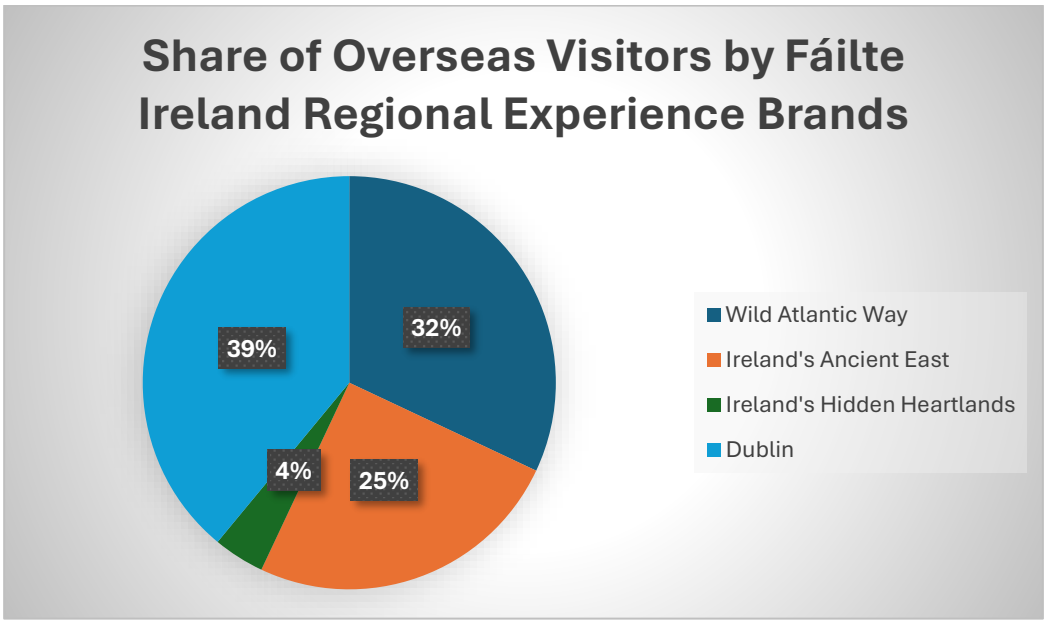


Figure 20: Share of overseas visitors by Fáilte Ireland regional brands (source: author – retrieved from a number of Fáilte Ireland reports).

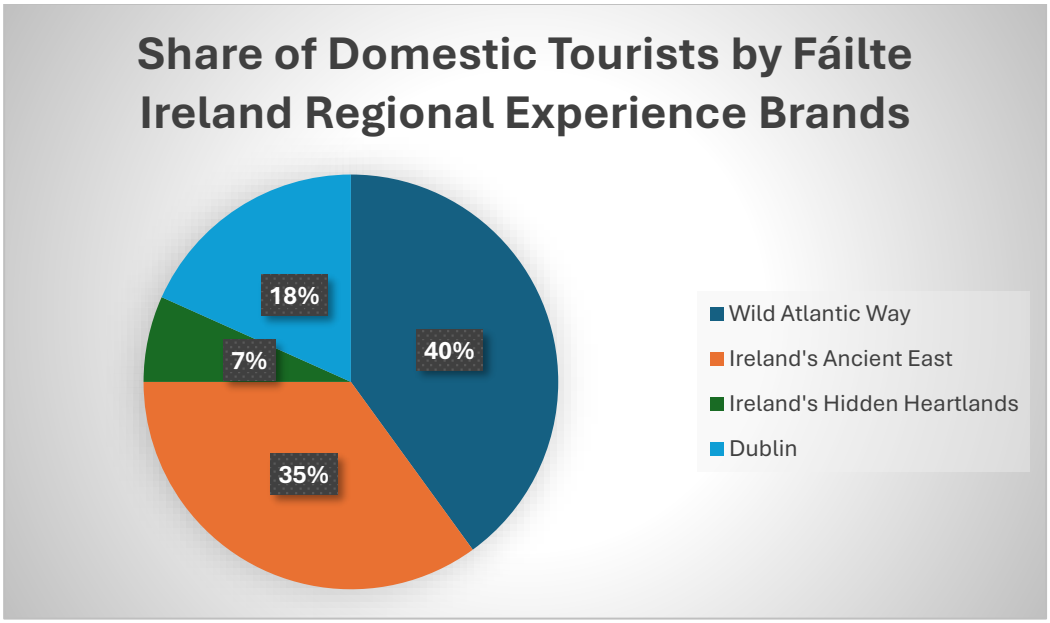


Figure 21: Share of domestic tourists by Fáilte Ireland regional brands (source: author – retrieved from a number of Fáilte Ireland reports).

2.3.4. From 2019 to 2024

The years immediately before and after the COVID-19 pandemic represent a critical phase of Irish tourism industry. Moreover, this is the period that is almost concurrent with my research project. The decade after the economic crisis saw a continuous growth of tourism arrivals in the country. The advent of Brexit in the UK, while threatened an historical source market for Ireland, contributed to change the Irish tourism arrivals' landscape, more and more orientated towards welcoming overseas tourists from mainland Europe (Hanrahan 2017). After nine years of consecutive growth, 2019 was an extremely positive moment for Irish tourism, with a record of 11.3 million tourists (of which, 9.6 million composed by overseas visitors – Tourism Ireland 2019). After this record-breaking number, the COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted on the Irish tourism system, affecting especially international journeys. The loss of 2020 has been enormous, and it still has not been completely overcame (Figure 22).

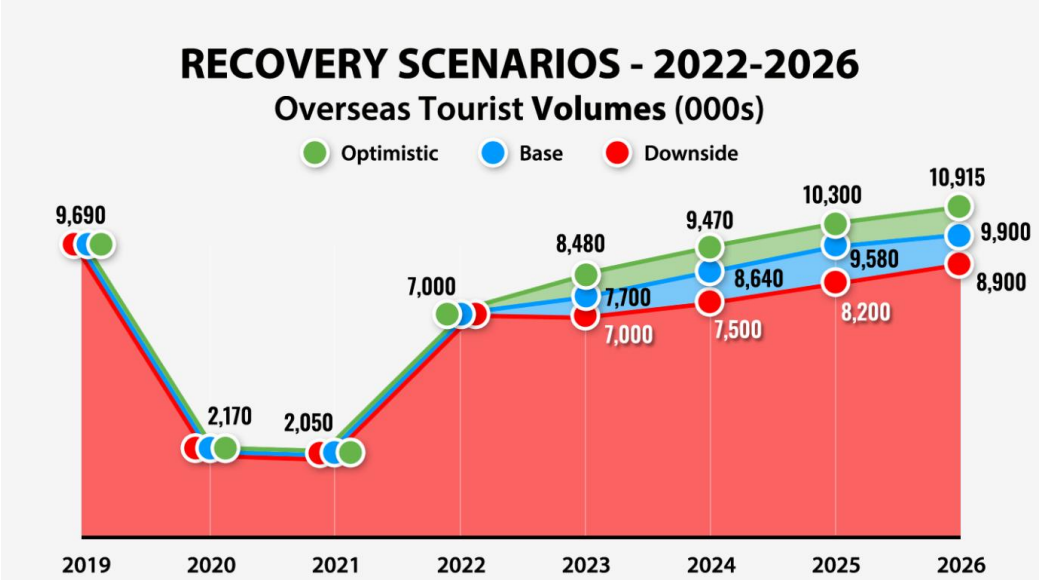


Figure 22: Recovery scenarios with forecasts until 2026 (ITIC 2023b).

The pandemic had extremely serious economic consequences for tourism operators. The impacts of COVID-19 saw the tourism share of employment fall to 10.3% in 2020, while international tourists decreased, from an original target of +2% growth in overseas visitors set out by Tourism Ireland for that year, by almost 80% compared to the record of 2019 (OECD 2022). The period witnessed the closure of hotels, visitor attractions, bars and restaurants, as well as the cancellation of events, conferences and sporting activities. During the year, there were major restrictions on travel and the closure of borders, with Europe's

skies closed to all but a small number of repatriation flights. Despite the decline, domestic tourism temporarily became the main source of tourism revenue, generating over €1.5 billion in 2020 and €1.3 billion in 2021 (i*bid*.), and thus sustaining the sector. 7.7 million domestic trips were estimated in 2020, and 5.7 million domestic overnight trips in 2021 (down 51.3% compared to 2019). Domestic tourism represented over 85% of the Irish's total tourism economy in 2021 (*ibid*.).

As part of a national recovery strategy, Tourism Ireland commissioned a large programme of research in Ireland's major tourism markets – to assess the impact of the pandemic on travel intentions, to help identify when consumers would be ready to consider holidaying again and which of the markets would offer the best short-term prospects. Findings from this research have demonstrated that the fundamental desire to travel was still persistent; however, closer-to-home markets were likely to be first to recover, together with domestic tourism phenomena (Tourism Ireland 2020). "Reconnection" appeared as a recurring theme, and it was applied to visiting friends and relatives, as well as destinations which are more familiar (*ibid*.). The framework for the recovery forecasted a three-phase plan divided into restart, rebuild and redesign demand. Until travel promotion resumed, Tourism Ireland's focus has been on creating the conditions to effectively restart the industry and survive this crisis. Activity continued to highlight the island of Ireland through effective social media and digital campaigns (Figure 23), supported by innovative publicity and travel trade initiatives (*ibid*.).



Figure 23: A Tourism Ireland's post promoting scenic attractions along the Wild Atlantic Way (retrieved from public Instagram content, April 2026).

In 2021, Irish tourism began a slow recovery, with June that recorded 57,100 overseas arrivals, which was a 180% increase from previous year, even if it was still far below the pre-pandemic arrival levels of the same period in 2019 (ITIC 2021). During the summer of 2021, 63% of Irish accommodation businesses were already open again, even if non-hotels facilities (like B&Bs and Airbnb) remained largely empty because of the absence of overseas visitors (Fáilte Ireland 2021b). October was still an optimistic month, but the winter period saw an increase of new infections caused by a different version of the virus, and many facilities were forced to remain closed again.

Recent years were characterised by an optimistic tendency, whereas Ireland demonstrated remarkable resilience. In first months of 2022, a new process of national and international reopening facilitated new arrivals. 2022 turned out to be a positive year for the Irish tourism industry, with the value of the overall business up by 68% in comparison with 2021 (Fáilte Ireland 2022). Domestic market played a key role on that year, while overseas visitors, especially from tourists North America exploiting the current strength of the Dollar, also contributed in the recovery process (*ibid*.). However, while the market was finally stably growing again, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the following sanctions against Russia represented a new threat for international tourism, giving the inflation and growing fuel costs that followed this tragic event (Finn 2022).

The Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC) estimated that €5.3 billion excluding fares was spent by international visitors to the country in 2023, with North America being again the biggest single source market (ITIC 2023a). Despite geopolitical upheaval, economic and social uncertainties, tourism in Ireland started to grow again with increasing numbers of overseas visitors, although full recovery to pre-pandemic levels have not been reached yet (*ibid*.). However, growth came at a slower pace than in 2022, while 2024 is being even more disappointing. Inflation, the rising operation and accommodation costs are considered as main negative factors, together with issues concerning accessibility and flight ticket prices (Fáilte Ireland 2024b). Moreover, the stock of tourist accommodation – especially in "secondary destinations" – was constrained by up to 20% by the Government and local authorities to provide humanitarian housing from those fleeing Ukraine and increasing numbers seeking International Protection (*ibid*.), eventually causing clashes and tensions among the local communities (Hogan 2024).

2.4. Present and Future: Development Plans, Strategies and Funding

COVID-19, the war in Eastern Europe and their consequences have posed the necessity for the Irish tourism industry to enhance its position on the market. While a strategy that was supposed to lead the sector up to 2025 was already published in 2015 (GOI 2015), the disruptive events of 2020-2022 outlined the necessity to update new prospectuses, targets and objectives in a contemporary way. In 2022, Fáilte Ireland launched four new Regional Tourism Development Strategies dedicated to its main brand and campaigns, namely Dublin, Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East and Hidden Heartlands (Fáilte Ireland 2023d). They contain a five-year strategic framework – from 2023 up to 2027 – for the sustainable development of Fáilte Ireland's most important regional brands. By capitalising on the uniqueness of each marketing campaign, these strategies set a clear path ahead for the development of new and enhanced visitor experiences, building greater capacity and capability into the industry, and provide a clear strategy for attracting visitors that will stay longer and spend more (Fáilte Ireland 2023b). The Regional Tourism Development Strategies are activated across every territory through a series of local area action plans, defined as Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDPs). The purpose of the DEDPs is to co-ordinate all tourism development activities – owned by both public and private sector stakeholders – in a precise locality. This approach provides the overall strategic framework for every DEDPs for each brand (*ibid*., p.5).

In September 2023, ITIC launched a project named *Vision 2030*; this is a new strategy that outlines steps to lead tourism growth for the next six years. This project recognises that tourism can be worth €15 billion to the national economy, employing up to 350,000 people and delivering €3.5 billion tax receipts to the exchequer each year (ITIC 2023c). In order to achieve these results, the industry needs to be innovative and dynamic, with policies able to provide support and resources to local enterprises. In parallel to this, the carbon footprint of the sector can be significantly reduced. *Vision 2030* identifies opportunities and challenges, proposing thirty-eight key actions that the industry, Government and Agencies need to take responsibility for. With an eye to sustainability and SDGs, actions required to reach tourism success by 2030 encompass competitiveness, connectivity, career development, supply constraints, investments, policy and support frameworks (*ibid*.).

In order to enhance participative tourism policy and make it as more accessible as possible, Catherine Martin, former Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, launched in March 2024 an online survey seeking the views of the public to help finalise a new national tourism policy framework for the period to 2030. Building on

previous stakeholder consultation, this survey was a key part of the consultation process, providing an opportunity to inform policy development. Amongst the topics covered in the questionnaire were questions aimed at encouraging tourists to visit less established destinations and to travel outside of peak season. According to the Government's webpage, 'the new policy framework will aim to provide the foundations to ensure this strong performance continues in the years ahead but also that tourism is founded on sustainable principles and plays its part in achieving national climate targets' (GOI 2024).

Beyond new strategies and plans that seek to guide the industry throughout the upcoming years, two further schemes and funds with relevance for tourism have been realised. Since 2022, Tourism Ireland has begun to align its activities with themes included in the Shared Island Initiative. This initiative was launched by the former *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) Micheál Martin in 2020 to foster dialogue on a shared future on the island (GOI 2022). It brought people together to discuss key concerns for the future, opportunities for cross learning and understanding the full potential of cooperation through the framework of the Good Friday Agreement. More than €190 million were allocated by the Government since the launch of this campaign, while over €7 million were destinated for tourism initiatives (*ibid*.). The programme offers a number of key themes:

1. Cooperation in tourism and the role of Tourism Ireland;
2. Strong connectivity and well-developed infrastructures;
3. Tourism contribution for the economic prosperity;
4. COVID-19 common recovery strategy;
5. Development of sustainable tourism on the island;
6. Digitisation;
7. Shift of tourism towards a more experience-oriented industry which can benefit regions and areas outside traditional tourism "hot spots".

The Peace Plus Initiative is a new European Union (EU) funding programme running from 2021 until 2027, which forecasts a €1 billion investment in the social, economic and environmental development of Northern Ireland and border counties of Ireland. This is realised through funding activities that promote peace and reconciliation across six themes (SEUPB 2021):

1. Building peaceful and thriving communities (€250 million);
2. Delivering economic regeneration and transformation (€170 million);
3. Empowering and investing in young people (€123 million);

4. Healthy and inclusive communities (€172 million);
5. Supporting a sustainable and better connected future (€303 million);
6. Building and embedding partnership and collaboration (€52 million).

The programme provides a number of opportunities for engagement by the tourism sector, since tourism is an area which offers considerable occasions for cross-sectors and cross-border collaboration, and peace. Moreover, Peace Plus funds have been included within Tourism Ireland marketing plans for Northern Irish tourism growth (McGormac 2023). The positive impact of tourism on efforts at generating peace is widely recognised in academic studies (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner 2014, pp.31–61; Farmaki 2017, pp.528–540), while several studies have outlined this in the context of Northern Ireland (Anson 1999, pp.57-61; Timothy and Boyd 2003, p.78). Notably, all of these strategies and initiatives put an emphasis on experiential aspects of the Irish tourism offer, whereas intangible heritage and meaningful experiences are recognised to be the key factor for securing tourism development and growth in the future.

The contribution and significance of these funding schemes and development plans for music lie in the potential recognition this cultural feature (Nettl 2005; Agawu 2016) can have in promoting and enhancing cultural tourism experiences in the destination. With regards to Co. Louth, these strategies provide opportunities to strength the relevance of music within the local cultural offer, while also developing – and getting funds for – new projects that highlight aspects of the regional musicscape.

2.4.1. Ireland's Ancient East Regional Development Strategy 2023-2027 and Ancient DEDP

Giving the centrality for this study of Co. Louth and its music practices, it is therefore essential to contextualise current tourism development strategies applied in the east of Ireland. While the focus of the Ireland's Ancient East programme has always been on built heritage, including fortress, churches, burial chambers and distilleries, the new Development Strategy seeks to enhance the experiential component of visiting the region through five main objectives:

1. Motivate the domestic and international consumer to visit Ireland's Ancient East;
2. Provide visitors with more reasons to stay, increasing the economic impact of tourism;
3. Ensure the region is easy to access, navigate and consume;

4. Enable and assist the industry to grow and create sustainable jobs in local communities;
5. Build committed stakeholder and industry partnerships (Fáilte Ireland 2023b).

The Ancient East Strategy is then supported by eleven Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDPs) focused on sections of the Ireland's Ancient East programme. The first one, named *Ancient*, is dedicated to counties Louth and Meath, and is the roadmap to achieve objectives connected to the five main theme of the Strategy. Focused mainly on the Boyne Valley region, this plan invites to shift away from the traditional product view associated with this part of the Ireland, giving more emphasis to life enhancing moments (Fáilte Ireland 2021a). The document challenges the one-dimensional narrative associated with built heritage in the east of Ireland, requiring a more expansionary outlook on experience creation to achieve the goals of the DEDP (*ibid*.). The plan examines also the opportunities connected to evening and night economy, in the forms of night events but also after-dinner entertainment (*ibid*.).

Locations in the north-east have the opportunity to increase their relevance within Irish national tourism scheme thanks to their intangible features. Given the experiential qualities of music, the musical traditions of Louth and the various ways of experiencing them align with this strategy, supporting and enhancing the achievement of its objectives. It is possible to integrate musical activities from the north-east of Ireland into the local tourism promotion strategy targeting experiential music tourists in search of new and alternative experiences from a hidden context, outside from main Irish tourism destinations circle. Mark Mohan, Ireland's Ancient East representative for counties Louth, Meath, and Monaghan, recognised the importance and contribution of music in enriching the overall travel experience for visitors in Ireland:

> Music can be the reason to go to a destination, and I suppose […] it can also be a real part of the experience when you come here. You come to Ireland for different reasons, including music, but you can integrate it within other intangible and "softer" elements of local culture (interview with the author, July 4th, 2023).

Music is an aspect of human creativity, and according to my interviewee, it can inspire people, influencing and enriching other elements of local culture, such as craftmanship and gastronomy.

2.5. Marketing Ireland: Irish Main Themes, Imaginaries and Stereotypes

Ireland is internationally recognised for its main attractions, which can be generally ascribed as scenic rural and wild landscapes, quiet and relaxed pace of life, a distinctive heritage and culture and – at least until the first years of the 21st century – a perceived absence of mass tourism (Kockel 1994, p.9; Hanrahan 2017, p.4). The focus of Irish tourism marketing, centred on showcasing its land, history and people, resembles national branding strategies, where the marketing of a destination enhances and emphasizes constructive narrations of local identity and pride (Clancy 2009, p.11). Tourism promotional materials such as web portals and holiday brochures are a fundamental means of promoting destination images and imaginaries associated with them. The most overwhelming promotional message is that Ireland is a world apart from modern society (from where, it is assumed, visitors come) that offers vast open spaces of unspoilt landscapes (Figure 24).



Figure 24: A jumbo tram in Milan, Italy, "wrapped" in a tourism promotional campaign featuring the Cliffs of Moher (Tourism Ireland 2023b).

As B. Quinn already noted thirty years ago, 39% of brochures space was devoted to the landscape theme, evidencing how Ireland was already promoted as a green untouched destination of great significance, while "just less than 10% of scenes depicted in brochures were urban settings (1994, pp.64-65). Rural landscapes and coastal sceneries are still an important theme for Irish marketing and imaginaries associated with the island, as

demonstrated by the recent Tourism Ireland Sentiment Tracking (2024). Nevertheless, Alice Mansergh, Tourism Ireland's CEO, recognised the importance of cities and urban landscapes too enrich the overall Irish tourism offer (RTÉ 2024).

The following sections present an analysis focused on people, landscapes, and how imaginaries associated with Ireland are the outcomes of movies, tv shows and marketing strategies. The role of alcohol consumption in forging Irish identity and culture is also highlighted in relation to important celebrations and festivities such as St Patrick's Day. Drinking is also connected to the pub, a prominent experiential "attraction" and indoor environment where visitors usually enjoy – or consume – music, in the form of traditional sessions or drinking songs while *searching for the craic* (Irwin 2010). Interest in Irish traditional music and dancing has increased in the aftermath of Riverdance (1994), and this music spectacle remains deeply connected to discourses of Irishness (O'Shea 2012; Zenker 2013). Nevertheless, music – and music tourism opportunities – in Ireland extend beyond the traditional realm, encompassing global flows and international influences and styles (T. Quinn 2024).

2.5.1. Representing Irish People, Culture and Landscapes

Images representing Irish people themselves too are of great importance. Inhabitants are usually characterised as welcoming, easy-going and in old-style clothing, and brochures propose the stereotypical image of the Irish native: a middle age or elderly man, dressed in simple clothing, complete with boots and the requisite cap and stick (Figure 25).



Figure 25: Promotional image featuring a man from rural Ireland dressed in stereotypical clothing (ConnolyCove 2025).

These stereotypes reinforce the 'romantic gaze' of tourists in relation to Irish inhabitants and their way of life (Markwick 2001). The concept of Ireland as a society where traditions and old values have remained intact is further communicated in the projection of images associated with mythology that are immediately recognised by an international audience, such as medieval ruins. The *Celtic myth* is also exploited to enhance cognitive connection with Irishness (*ibid*.), a term used to identify what is Irish and what is not, as well as the sensation and perception of "being Irish" (Zenker 2013). The choice of particular pictures – such as those of old ruins and Celtic crosses – simultaneously establish the strong religious element (both Christian as well as Pagan) which dominated Ireland's past, together with Irish majestic tales (B. Quinn 1994, pp.64-65). The country is steeped in history in a way that legacies remain evident and widespread to the present day, and marketing uses these themes to reinforce this association in the minds of the travellers, shaping their imaginaries associated with the island. This relates to Markwick's concept of the cultural creation of place, which refers to how territories acquire meaning, identity, and symbolic value through cultural processes including narratives and marketing strategies (2001).

2.5.2. Film-Induced Tourism in Ireland

Irish landscapes and sceneries are a key reason for many tourists to visit and explore the country (Tourism Ireland 2024, p.13). Imaginaries and stereotypes concerning Irish landscapes and people are also constructed through cinematic representation (O'Shea 2012). Film-induced tourism studies emphasizes the impact that movies have in shaping tourism development, but also ideas travellers can develop in relation to a particular destination (Beeton 2005; Nicosia 2015). In Ireland, the film industry has contributed to establishing imaginaries and stereotypes of associated with the island (and its western side in particular) and its socio-cultural features. Historically, movies set in Ireland with an international resonance emphasized the pace of Irish way of life, together with the importance of fairytales and mythology. Two examples are the Oscar-winning John Ford movie's *The Quiet Man* (1952), and Walt Disney's *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* (1959). Both of these movies saw the presence of internationally renowned (non-Irish) actors – John Wayne and Sean Connery – and engaged with a representation of Ireland that in some ways still shapes current imaginaries concerning Irish rural communities. *The Quiet Man* in particular had a deep impact on the village of Cong, Co. Mayo, where it was filmed (Irwin 2010, p.192). The movie became a tourism attraction which, in turn, led to the development of tourism infrastructure. Nowadays, this small town still preserves several amenities connected with the movie, like a bronze statue celebrating the two main characters (in the shapes of John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara), while the legacy of *The Quiet Man* has transformed the urban space. Different facilities, including a bar, a café and one hostel, have been named after the movie, while the pub where many indoor scenes were recorded (Pat Cohan's) proudly highlights this aspect with a panel at the entrance (McCarthy 2001). Beyond turning Cong into a famous destination within the Irish context, this movie brought on the screen a picturesque Ireland made of old ruins and friendly people riding carriages who love to spent their time drinking in public houses.

Other examples of the way in which Ireland was portrayed in the film industry are *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), starring Robert Mitchum, and *Far and Away* (1992) with Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman. Both these movies were filmed in Co. Kerry and contributed to the popularity of the Dingle peninsula, the Lakes of Killarney and the Ring of Kerry as tourism destinations, incorporating different approaches towards Irish traditional music (O'Flynn 2022). The former includes references to Irish nationalism and anti-British feelings, while presenting the Dingle Peninsula – one of the most important Irish destinations and an icon of Irish landscapes – to a wider public. The latter highlights the miserable

conditions that forced many Irish people to leave their own country, searching for new fortune in America. The wild and dramatic landscapes of the west and north coast of Ireland have been exploited by the movie industry again over the last fifteen years. Other famous examples include the TV series *Game of Thrones*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* and *Star Wars VII*, where the Cliffs of Moher and Skellig Michael have been used to film takes that highlight the dramatic scenery of the territory. A more recent internationally acclaimed movie that have portrayed Ireland with a focus on its western landscapes is *Banshees of Inisherin* (2022). Urban environments have also been featured in recent TV programmes such as *Derry Girls*, an acclaimed series that has gained popularity across the UK and even in the US, which depicts urban life in the city of Derry during the 1990s.

In movies and similar products, music covers an important part as it carries and vehicles emotions and meanings, often emphasizing them (A. A. J. Cohen 1993). The association of Ireland with its music is something quite unique in the European context and such musical tropes are often able to express the sense of Irishness (Zenker 2013), creating associations between specific landscapes and their perceived "sound", and enriching the scenes with evocative tunes and songs. Traditional music and music instruments are often used as an important signifier of Irish identity (Kneafsey 2003, p.21). For example, 'the soundtrack of the movie *Titanic* illustrates how these musical representations of Irishness are now so deeply ingrained that they denote not only an Irish ethnicity, but also those qualities that "Irishness" is assumed to incorporate' (O'Shea 2012). Writing about the specificity of different musical styles and traditions that become associated with particular places, Connell and Gibson recall that:

> Many sites, or wider geographical regions in which musical production and consumption occur, become linked with particular sounds, styles or musical approaches. This […] may be attributable to a process of mythologizing place in which unique, locally-experienced social, economic and political circumstances are somehow 'captured' within music (2003, p.14).

This statement reflects the cognitive relationship between music and place, a connection enhanced and strengthened in visual representations and marketing campaigns.

2.5.3. Products of Ireland

Product advertising also contributes to establishing a sense of Irishness within tourism marketing (*ibid*., p.39). Traditional products of Ireland like wool jumpers and local

gastronomy are well inserted within this kind of narration. Food and drinks in particular have a major recognition over the international market, where famous firms like Guinness reinforce stereotypes in the association of Ireland with alcoholic products and an Irish alcohol-centred identity (McGovern 2003; Irwin 2010). Guinness is one of the most recognisable brand names in the world and undoubtedly the most well-known commercial Irish symbol, whereas the Guinness Storehouse remains among the most visited places in Ireland (Costa 2009, p.139). Alcohol consumption is also deeply connected with St Patrick's Day, Ireland's most famous celebration, and a relevant "experiential product" exported worldwide that contributes in refining Irish marketing imaginaries and strategies (Skinner and Bryan 2015). Holiday-making in Ireland is nowadays synonymous with drinking (Costa 2009, p.139), and while the binomial between alcohol consumption and tourism is well known and recognised (Foster 2008), the link between the Irish drinks industry and an local "drinking culture" is partially the product of a series of stereotypes developed since the mid-18th century (McGovern 2003, pp.83-92). Images of Irish culture and social life are inextricably bound up with alcohol production and consumption in the minds of many tourists, and drinking is recognised to be both a local attitude as well as a "must" within the Irish holiday experience. The "traditional Irish pub" thus becomes a primary subject connected to both Irish culture and tourism marketing/experiences. Nevertheless, research by Tourism Ireland (2024) suggests that for tourists, going to the pub is more about experiencing a community setting and enjoying live music than consuming large quantities of alcohol.

2.5.4. The Traditional Irish Pub and the Search for the Craic

The concept of the "Irish pub" is crucial to Irish tourism, and pubs in Ireland are not only important "to the life of local communities" in small towns and villages but even in larger cities, where they have become central to the overall tourism product (McGovern 2003, p.83). The traditional Irish pub is more than a service provider. Over the last decades the Irish tourist industry has seen the "pub" as an interesting attraction and as a good key marketing motif, while an overwhelming percentage of tourists in Ireland (both overseas and domestic) have visited at least one pub during their visit to the island (Costa 2009, p.139). In large part this is due to the idea visitors have of Ireland pub's culture, regarded as one of the most distinctive and attractive elements of modern Irish society.

The idea of the typical Irish pub is often foregrounded in tourism promotion for Ireland. Tourism contributes in providing revenues opportunities in major urban centres, but it also potentially sustain rural areas economic development (Kneafsey 2003). In Dublin, the pub life has always been a leading element within traditional promotional materials together with the city's cultural heritage (B. Quinn 1994). Electronic media have also promoted the availability and commonality of the "pub experience" in Ireland with significant presence on a variety of sites. A brief perusal of websites such as *The Irish Pub Guide* emphasizes Dublin's pub scene as central to Irish culture (Costa 2009, p.139). The pub has become such an institution within Irish celebrations that even St Patrick's Day is associated, beyond parades, with drinking in this context (Skinner and Bryan 2015). Spending some time in an Irish pub can represent a deep sensorial experience, occasionally characterised by revelry and excess connected with exaggerated alcohol consumption (Cotter 2022). Nevertheless, going to a pub usually represents an opportunity to engage with an interesting social construct named *craic*.

Craic, a term already in use since the 15th century (Carson 1996), is an Irish word used to identify a spontaneous "good time" or a moment of shared emotion and well-being generated in specific places already endowed with a strong sense of belonging (Kaul 2009, p.146). A pub, considered as a social centre, is a space where people have the opportunity to enjoy the craic. As most of the time a trip to Ireland is characterised by the search of experiences, and these require an opportunity for a sense of contact with local people themselves, then 'the Irish pub and the craic emerge as a key dimensions of the tourist visitors' emotive experience of Ireland' (McGovern 2003, p.95). What is expected and perceived by visitors are precisely those elements of culture which are lacking in their everyday life (e.g. a work-oriented, modern world) which can engage with people in an easy and relaxing way. Pubs thus provide an opportunity to "consume" Irish people and culture (Cronin and O'Connor 2003, p.8). Despite the fact that this term has heavily entered tourism discourses, being occasionally identified – as Irwin (2010, p.38) recorded – just as a notion for tourism consumption ('it doesn't exist […] that stuff's just for the tourists. It's not real') the craic is a strong concept within Irish society, that has been absorbed into common use. One of the main elements that characterise the pub atmosphere, necessary for experiencing the craic, is music (Hong and Share 2025).

2.5.5. Music in the Pub

Tourists often consume music in a pub, and traditional music in particular – in the form of drinking songs or instrumental tunes – produces the proper soundscape in order to obtain a complete "Irish experience" (Kearney 2013b). 'The marketing of Ireland is not just about leprechauns, shamrocks and pints of Guinness any more' (Irwin 2010, p.23); actually, the marketing of a romanticized Irish music is 'inseparably linked to the marketing of Irishness' (Foster 2008, p.155) by the tourist industry. Music in a pub constitutes part of the typical Irish soundscape, whereas traditional songs and dances are poured into an environment 'where even the mugs of beer and the voices of the patrons seem to sing' (Minidio 2005, p.251). In fact, operators of the restoration industry work for the promotion and diffusion of Irish music (especially traditional, but not only) as a complementary experience where people are invited to enjoy traditional melodies while eating or drinking local products (*ibid*., p.74). Irish folk music is traditionally associated in tourism literature with pubs and alcohol consumption (Kaul 2009; Cotter 2022; Pessina 2024) to such an extent that the drinking industry actively promotes and sustain live Irish music scene – hoping for a thirsty audience experiencing the craic from every perspective (Minidio 2005; Foster 2008). Nevertheless, the relationship between music and tourism in Ireland is a far more complex phenomenon, that connects economic, historical and cultural realms.

2.6. Music Tourism in Ireland

Music is an important aspect of a destination's intangible cultural heritage, through which communities express identities and belongings (Stokes 1994), but it is also a tool that helps in delivering experiences that are specific to that territory (UNWTO 2018; Friel 2019; Friel 2021). Nevertheless, tourism and flows of people and money can impact music within a destination, leading to concerns about commodification of musical practices and culture more broadly (Kneafsey 2003; Kaul 2007; Titon 2009; Chaney 2025). The tourism industry, scholars and the general public recognise Ireland as a prestigious music tourism destination of international relevance, characterised by strong music traditions that enrich the tourism experiences of many visitors travelling around the island. Traditional music has been recognised as a leading theme for tourism in Ireland (Fáilte Ireland 2009), while its practice and consume reinvigorate discourses about Irishness. A considerable part of the Irish identity is in fact built upon and expressed through traditional music, possibly leading to a cognitive

association of Ireland as a place for, and made of, sounding phenomena, where music traditions are mirrored into a wider Irish identity and *vice versa*.

2.6.1. Irish Traditional Music and its Commercialisation

According to my experience in the field, Irish traditional music is a form of cultural expression that combines characteristic melodies, rhythms and sounds, evoking imaginaries associated with Irishness. More institutionalised – and complete – definitions of Irish traditional music describe it as an aesthetic practice that produces (Irish) identity (O'Shea 2008, p.23), with O'Connor highlighting oral transmission's aspects – e.g. the way this music is "traditionally" transmitted (2001, p.3). The author then highlights the aspects that characterise this form of music, such as rhythms, ornaments and ways of playing, and the instruments and their timbres that make it unique (*ibid*., pp.3-11). Nowadays, the common repertoire is generally rooted in the popular music of the 17th and 18th centuries. It mainly consists of instrumental music (originally connected to dance) and songs – in English but also in Irish, comprehensive of the so call *Sean Nós* singing style (*ibid*., p.5; O'Shea 2008).

The development of music in Ireland and its contribution in defining an Irish identity is linked to important historical events that shaped the island's history, such as the 1845 Great Famine (*an Gorta Mór*, also called the Hunger – see Taylor 1976), the mass emigration of millions of Irish people to the New World (USA and Canada), and a broader resistance against British rule (Vallely 2011; O'Shea 2012; Ó hAllmhuráin 2016; Smith 2017; T. Quinn 2024). Nevertheless, the Irish diaspora to the New World represented a moment of development and commercialisation of Irish traditional music. Migrant musicians brought their music in new contexts (especially the USA), interacting with new instruments and new music genres (Connell and Gibson 2003, p.170; Ó hAllmhuráin 2016, p.73). Irish traditional music entered in contact especially with jazz and other influences, while musicians started to adopt banjos, mandolins and melodeons, providing examples of modernisation and adaptation (O'Shea 2008, p.30). At the same time, traditional music in the New World became an element to maintain bonds within emigrant communities, favouring the development and diffusion of transcriptions and collections among American people with Irish descendants (*ibid*., pp.19-21). The interest among Irish immigrants in listening to the music of their origins brought to the emergence of a new market niche interested in recordings Irish musicians to be sold or broadcasted on the radio, that eventually contributed

in spreading this music genre to an international (American and then European) audience (*ibid*.).

The recognition and affirmation of Irish traditional music as a global phenomenon, able to generate huge economic and marketing impacts, occurred in the mid-1990s, during the Celtic Tiger period. In 1994, the Eurovision Song Context was held in Dublin. During the event, 'an intermission act entitled Riverdance received such a tumultuous reception from the audience that the (Irish) winning entry almost eclipsed' (O'Connor 2001, p.154). The performance involved haunting melodies and captive dances involving both men and women, including stars Michael Flatley and Jean Butler, and it soon became theatrical phenomenon of global relevance (Smyth 1996). Through TV broadcasting, a specific representation of Irish traditional music and dancing entered into the houses of 300 million people (*ibid*., p.35), shaping imaginaries associated with them. This show brought together virtuoso dancers with both traditional and contemporary musicians, presenting a showcase of Irish cultural elements filtered and adapted to the lens of spectacular stage and TV representations.

The huge commercialisation that followed Riverdance had wider impacts over Irish traditional music forms and consume. There is a perception that 'Riverdance rescued Irish dancing […], reclaiming its sensuality […] while celebrating its traditions and skills passed through generations' (Smyth 1996, p.15). Ethnomusicologist Susan Motherway identified Riverdance as being a fundamental point in Irish cultural tourism history that captured the essence of globalisation 'along with the energy and drive of a nation on the cusp of an economic boom' (2013, p.2). The Riverdance operation made Irish traditional music and dancing internationally renowned as nothing before it, guaranteeing the association between Ireland and its music traditions in the gaze and minds of the many. The globalisation and commercialisation of Irish culture following the aftermath of Riverdance at the end of the 20th century (Ó Cinnéide 2002), generated a global interest in and market for Irish traditional music, which has been exploited by the tourism sector (Figure 26 – IMRO 2017).



Figure 26: "Traditional Irish music session" in a leaflet produced by Lonely Planet for Tourism Ireland (Tourism Ireland 2022).

Tourists imaginaries of Irish traditional music were influenced by the Riverdance phenomenon (Figure 27), a non-authentic musical representation *par excellence*, and an illustration of staged authenticity in action (Sweeney 2017, p.348).



Figure 27: Promotional image for Celtic Nights, a show featuring music and dance performances alongside a three-course meal in Dublin city centre (Tripadvisor 2025).

2.6.2. Irish Traditional Music Tourism in Ireland

As cultural tourism has become "mainstream", with traditional music being central to making Ireland an attractive holiday destination (Ní Chonaill 2023, p.18), the conceptualisation of the relationship between tourism and traditional music presents a considerable challenge, not least because both practices can be theorised from a multitude of perspectives drawing from a variety of disciplines such as tourism studies, cultural researches, sociology, geography, ethnomusicology, anthropology and popular music analyses (Kneafsey 2003, p.22).

Traditional music is an integral part of Irish culture, and it is enjoyed and performed by a large number of people in the world in a variety of places, social and geographical contexts (Kearney 2009; Mangaoang 2023). Moreover, Irish traditional music has been recognised by academia (Kneafsey 2003, p.22) as well as well as in official tourism statistics and reports (Fáilte Ireland 2009) as a valuable component of the Irish tourism product. Different tourism brochures and guides now offer some info concerning Irish folk music, presenting it as something that 'involves every features of existence' (Spitali 2011, p.81), being presented as one of the most exuberant traditional forms of music from western Europe (Wilson et al. 2018).

The relationship between Irish traditional music and tourism has developed following two main features of local folk tradition: sessions and festivals (Kaul 2009, p.47). In tourists' eyes, these two subjects are able to offer deep, "authentic" and "real" experiences of what the Irish music culture is (Ní Chonaill 2023, p.18). From a geographical perspective, the attention and interest of tourists in relation to traditional music focuses on particular places as music regions of the west of Ireland, namely Co. Clare and Co. Sligo, but also Galway city and Donegal, which are heavily promoted in the tourist literature (Wilson et al. 2018). This causes an uneven distribution of the music offering (Ní Chonaill 2023, p.20), or at least of music tourism marketing. Despite the fact of not being the biggest music industry in Ireland, Irish traditional music is certainly the most important genre in relation to tourism development in the island, as it is linked to perceptions and imaginaries of the destination, while it is a symbol of Irishness and a cultural practice with historical depth and significance, readily available in various settings and shapes.

2.6.3. Irish Traditional Session

It is in the context of the traditional Irish pub that people can encounter an important practice within the Irish intangible cultural heritage realm, which is also a fundamental theme within music tourism studies in Ireland: the session. Sessions are not concerts. They are 'more casual gatherings of musicians who generally share a common repertoire of traditional music from the Irish and Scottish instrumental traditions. Sessions are social events as much as they are musical events' (Kaul 2009, p.1). The standard form of a session forecasts a gathering of musicians, performing different instruments (from fiddle and guitars to more specific Irish instruments like the uilleann pipes and the bodhrán), sitting around a table – reserved for them by pubs' owners – facing towards each other in a circle, playing sets of tunes in an unpredictable sequence (Kaul 2007, p.704). Traditionally, sessions have a particular etiquette (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016, p.160). The behaviour in a session is largely controlled by the relative status of people playing, with higher status musicians exercising more control over the way the session develops. This status depends mainly on the musicians' age, competence, reputation and instrument played (O'Shea 2007, p.6). The seating arrangement is an important aspect of session behaviour; musicians tend to form a closed circle with the leader in the middle of the group. This disposition does not allow to face the audience, as it would be for a concert (*ibid*.). Every session has a key number of players. The standard practice is to defer the oldest player, unless someone else is invited to begin. Sessions' repertoire generally consist of dance music, but may also involve occasional solos, ballads and famous Irish drinking songs (Ó hAllmhuráin 1998).

Sessions, in the form known today, started to be performed in the 1960s, and they involve both instrumental dance music as well as singing (both in English and Irish). Developed and implemented by young revivalists (O'Shea 2007), imaginaries of the session were created both in Ireland and abroad, and even if these were formed mainly in urban contests, they reflected the idealisation of a practice that found its origins in the rural west of Ireland. Sessions aimed at recreating the celebrative and mundane spirit common to house parties, weddings and wakes idealised as part of western Ireland's rural lifestyle. Even if sessions are the product of a recent innovation, nonetheless they establish a line of continuity between the sociality of the house dance and the new social context of the pub (*ibid*., p.12). Over the past fifty years, sessions have acquired the patina of tradition, and at the same time they have been institutionalized through their codification in tourism guides and in studies presented by sociologists, geographers and ethnomusicologists (Kearney 2007). From a cultural perspective, the celebration of Irish music has become such a globalised

phenomenon that now sessions have proliferated in several geographical territories and social contexts, dislocating Irish music all around the world (O'Connor 2001, pp.156-157; Kearney 2009; Mangaoang 2023).

The Irish tourism industry has recognised the appeal that sessions have in the mind of many travellers, absorbing this practice in many promotional discourses and marketing strategies (Kearney 2013b). Tourist interest in music sessions is confirmed by observations and conversations with publicans and musicians (Kneafsey 2003, p.31). The relevance of Irish traditional music in the form of sessions within the average holiday experience was already registered in 1993, whereas 69% of visitors surveyed by Bord Fáilte indicated that 'traditional Irish folk music was either "a very important" or a "fairly important" factor in considering Ireland as a holiday destination' (Kaul 2009, p.74). A slightly more recent survey from 2003 collected in Co. Mayo focused on a group of randomly selected visitors, showing a similar imbalance with 60% of interviewees that wanted to hear or play traditional music as a prime part of their visit (Kneafsey 2003, p.31). Every year, thousands of people attend traditional music sessions all over Ireland. These sessions take place in city bars, on street corners, and in small rural pubs (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016, p.160). In a typical day of holiday 'tourists commonly walk the country lanes, hike through the stony landscape called the Burren, take daytrips to the Aran Islands, lounge around at the seaside, or drive up to the Cliffs of Moher […]. At night they flock into the pubs for a meal, for drinks, and to hear a session' (Kaul 2009, p.2), in a romantic search for "authentic folk culture" (*ibid*., p.50). The session is an inherently social event and it is much more than simply listening to, or playing, music. Other sounds are also constitutive of the session, like instruments being tuned, conversations between musicians a public before playing and during the performance, laughs and so on (Kaul 2007).

Imaginaries associated with sessions and similar music initiatives come from tourism marketing, but also from the music industry, which contributed to establishing a "standard" for Irish traditional music. The widespread influence and diffusion of early recordings of Irish American musicians and Sligo performers in particular is noteworthy and played a major role in establishing the average style of playing (Kneafsey 2003; Kaul 2009; Sweeney 2017). In 1921, Michael Coleman and James Morrison, two musicians from Co. Sligo, were asked by the Columbia company to record some tunes. They played in the so-called *Sligo style*, a fast way of playing characterised by a rich ornamentation (O'Connor 2001, p.71). Recordings by Irish traditional musicians in the USA in the early part of the 20th century had an extraordinary impact in popularising Irish traditional music within an historical period

dominated by radio broadcasting, making their regional style a model that still dominates the traditional music soundscape (Irwin 2010, p.224; Kearney 2013a). Coleman's legacy and history in particular is still well celebrated in Co. Sligo and in the village of Gurteen, where he was from. Here a monument and the Coleman Irish Centre remember the contribution of this musician to Irish music, while this territory is recognised as prestigious music destination within the traditional music world (Irwin 2010, pp.225-226). The Sligo style is particularly appreciated by tourists, that identify it as the purest expression of Irish instrumental music tradition, and which expect to hear during their holiday experience (Kneafsey 2003; Kaul 2009; Sweeney 2017). The already discussed Riverdance phenomenon too contributed in creating imaginaries of what Irish music and dancing are (Motherway 2013), and now these standards extends beyond the gaze of tourists musicking in Ireland. Beyond in sessions, these elements also had an impact on competitions and festivals, which have occasionally been accused of discriminating alternative and more experimental sounds in favour of an idealised "pureness" (Henry 1989).

2.6.4. Irish Music Festivals

In Ireland, Irish traditional music festivals enrich the island's events calendar during the entire year, with the Irish Music Magazine providing a detailed list of Irish traditional music events taking place both in Ireland and abroad (2025). They are both small-size events as well as internationally renowned manifestations, but most of them involve fun and performances together with education and discovery. Besides the promotion and celebration of the Irish traditional music, they contribute to place-marketing or city-branding and impacts for the host territories have been multiple. Even if these festivals are dedicated to a very specific activity (e.g. traditional music), they cater to a wider group of interested people, composed of tourists but also local residents, who are attracted by several factors, such as a general cultural exploration (Crompton and McKay 1997) or a particular desire to attend exclusive activities like competitions (Moley 2015, p.9). Festivals in Ireland have historically flourished wherever enthusiasts have acted to meet an artistic need within a determined place. They tended to emerge as small-size events and local in scale initially, even if since the 1970s they came to be recognised as catalysts for arts development at both local and international levels. The role festivals had in Ireland cannot be confined only to infrastructural development. They have encompassed advances in community animation, development of local resources, business expansion, an increase of (foreign) audience and recognition of local identity (B. Quinn 2006, p.291). Within the global community of Irish

traditional music enthusiasts, two large scale festivals with high levels of attendance that have been analysed both on a musicological as well as on a tourism and level are Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the main festival promoted by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann[4], and Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy (Willie Clancy Summer School). Although it is not analysed in this dissertation, it is worth considering Temple Bar TradFest, a traditional music festival held every January in Dublin. This event has become a cornerstone in the city's calendar, attracting a substantial number of visitors, generating considerable tourism benefits, and enriching the visiting experience of the Irish capital (Dillane and Raine 2023).

2.6.4.1. Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is the main festival promoted by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, and is the culmination of a series of solo and ensemble music, song, dance, and language competitions, featuring competitors from all over the world (Kearney 2013a; Ní Fhuartháin 2024). It is a significant festival that attracts an international audience composed by musicians but also enthusiasts in the carnival atmosphere that it creates (Fleming 2004). Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann was integral to the successful development of CCÉ as an international organisation centred on an imagined community of musical practice (O'Connor 2001; *ibid*.).

The Fleadh is not connected to a particular town or county, but it can be displaced all over the island. Its committee identifies a new host destination (among a list of candidates) where the event is held for the next two years. The first Fleadh took place in 1951, with competitions held within easy reach of Dublin, but since the 1970s they have moved to more western locations (Figure 28) with the town of Listowel, Co. Kerry, becoming for a long time a regular host (Kaul 2009, pp.50-51; Kearney 2009). The Fleadh was not held in Northern Ireland until 2013, when the city of Derry/Londonderry, designated as the UK City of Culture for that year, hosted it for the first time (Kearney, 2013a, p.79). After the two-year period of 2022 and 2023, with the event being hosted in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, the Fleadh was held in Wexford in 2024 and 2025. In 2026, the event will return to Northern Ireland – this time in the city of Belfast, for the first time ever.

[4] The largest cultural organisation worldwide involved in the preservation and promotion of the Irish traditional music.

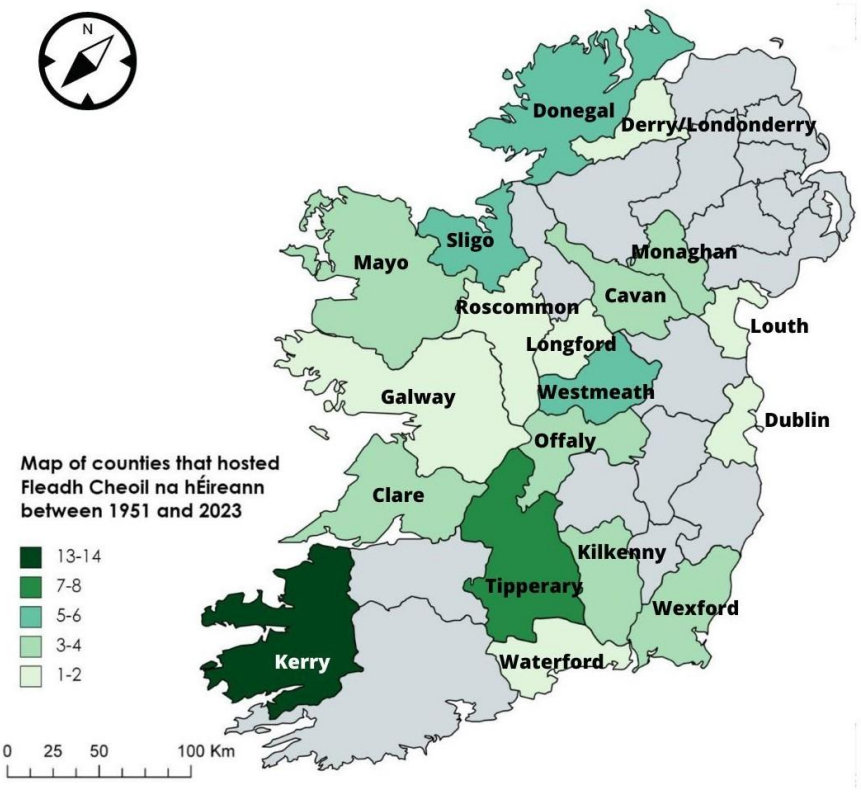


Figure 28: Map of counties that hosted the Fleadh between 1951 and 2023 (Pessina 2024).

Apart from promotion and celebration of Irish traditional music, Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann has been identified over time by Fáilte Ireland as an important tool for promoting host towns (Kearney, 2013a). Only after a decade after its creation, thousands of people were attending this event, demonstrating its relevance as cultural – as well as a tourism – phenomenon. While historically the Fleadh has been hosted mainly in the west of Ireland, traditionally considered as the "home place" of traditional music, in recent years the Fleadh has been used also for promoting secondary areas of Ireland beyond the west coast and Dublin city. The location of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Cavan during the years 2010-2012 raised the profile of the town, putting this little and peripheral urban settlement into the international circle of music lovers, but also triggering local development in terms of infrastructures and services (*ibid*., p.84).

Something similar happened with the town of Drogheda, Co. Louth, that hosted the last two pre-COVID-19 editions of the Fleadh, in 2018 and 2019.[5] This was the first time the county held the event, and it had a significant economic impact, producing €50 million each year (Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann 2019) and reaching an audience of 500,000 people in

[5] In July 2025, Drogheda hosted the Leinster Fleadh, the regional Irish traditional music festival involving the eastern province of Ireland. It serves as qualifying round for the All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

2018 and then 750,000 in 2019 (Kearney and Burns 2022). The event had a great resonance, shaping the town's public spaces and leaving imprints in Drogheda's streetscape through murals and plaques (Figure 29), which are visible still today (*ibid*., p.232).



Figure 29: A mural within Drogheda's town centre celebrating the Fleadh (Pessina 2024).

Through the Fleadh, Drogheda demonstrated its potential as a destination catering for large numbers of tourists, having the chance to host thousands of visitors and gaining a reputation for its music-related opportunities. The Fleadh was a flagship event that led to the recognition of Drogheda as a "Destination Town" by Failte Ireland (*ibid*., p.245). However, with the arrival of the pandemic, the town was not completely able to capitalise on the recent outcomes, as social restrictions limited international and domestic travels, and all kind of cultural activity.

2.6.4.2. Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy

Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy is a week-long summer school of traditional music and dance held annually in Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare, in the south-west of Ireland. This little village close to important Irish tourism attractions such as the Cliffs of Moher (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016) explodes every July with visiting musicians from all over the globe (Kaul 2009, p.108), where they join hundreds of Irish musicians in classes, sessions and concerts.

Centred on the figure of Willie Clancy, a local but nationally renowned uilleann piper considered as model of the Irish traditional music revival of the 1960s that performed and lived extensively between Clare and Dublin (O'Shea 2008, p.89; V. Commins 2014), the Summer School is defined as 'a weeklong celebration of Irish traditional music, its practices of transmission, performance, and commemoration […] in keeping with Clancy's own philosophy with regard to music' (V. Commins 2019, p.276). The school maintains a focus on teaching through workshops, with lessons on traditional instruments and dances. Afternoon and evening classes are devoted to lectures on Irish traditional music, reeds production, exhibitions, radio broadcasts and archive projects and recitals, while pub sessions take place throughout the town and surrounding villages (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016; Culliney and Pessina 2022).

The figure of Clancy was fundamental in the development of what is currently one of the most important events within the Irish traditional music landscape. His reputation as musician owes much to the circumstance that 'he joined the economic migration from rural Ireland to find work in urban centres, despite the fact that […] his music has been identified exclusively with his rural place of origin' (O'Shea 2008, p.88). He soon became a model of the Irish traditional music revival (*ibid*., p.89). After his death in 1973, the affective power of his music, and the importance his figure had for Miltown Malbay were demonstrated by an immediate compulsion to commemorate, leading to the heritagization of his figure. Hence the initiation in the same year of the Willie Clancy Memorial Fund and following launch of the Summer School. In order to commemorate the figure of the piper, a sculpture has been placed in the prominent position of the town's Main Street in 2013 (*ibid*., p.289). With its particular location, 'this statue has fashioned an additional dimension to the organisation of the local public space […] creating a lieu de memoire, a symbolically loaded site that conflates memory, history, time and space' (*ibid*., p.290). This "in-placeness" demonstrates, visually and materially, the current status of Clancy, the uilleann pipes and the traditional music practice as local signifiers for the local community (*ibid*.).

After the official opening, the main pedagogical work begins with classes on traditional instruments and dances. Afternoon classes are devoted to academic lectures on Irish music, from aesthetics to its history. Evenings feature instrumental and vocal recitals and sessions in overcrowded pubs (with even multiple sessions within the same indoor environment) around the town and in the surrounding villages until late at night, filled with dozens of musicians (Figure 30). Secondary lessons and workshops focus on reeds production, exhibitions, radio broadcasts and archive projects (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016, p.212). Since its foundation, masters and teachers have been carefully selected from throughout the Irish music world; many come from rural regions of Ireland, while others come from academic circuits of institutes, universities from Ireland and abroad.



Figure 30: A session in a beer garden during Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy 2022 (source: author).

The effects of this school have been multiple. Miltown Malbay has capitalised on it, presenting itself as ‘an authentic and authenticating site iconized by its heroic tradition-bearing son Willie Clancy’ (V. Commins 2019, p.293). The success of this initiative led to a high and massive presence of outsiders in the town during the week dedicated to the piper, while the village remains mostly empty during the rest of the year. Summer school attendees

are bound up inevitably in a system of economic exchange such as bed nights, hospitality, provisions, and ticket sales. 'Its commercial intensity expands to bolster the local economy against shortfalls that can occur during the remaining fifty-one weeks of the year' (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016, p.213). Luckily, the majority of money spent by visitors remains in the local economy since these expenses are translated in accommodation and food & beverage costs, tickets entrances and music shops opened during the event only (V. Commins 2019, p.291). As a result, the local community sustain and support school's activities, because it reflects their lifestyle and their cultural priorities. Since the instructive role the school and the following festival have played, 'there was no one creaming off the commercial spoils of culture here' (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016, p.214).

2.6.5. Music Tourism in Ireland Beyond Traditional Music

Although Irish traditional music receives the majority of attention when it comes to national music history (O'Connor 2001; O'Shea 2008), place and inhabitants' identities (Kearney 2018) and music tourism in Ireland (Kneafsey 2003; Irwin 2010; Kearney and Burns 2022), other music genres and musicians too contribute in enriching these processes and the Irish soundscape (McLaughlin and McLoone 2012; O'Flynn and Mangaoang 2019). As evidenced by Gibson and Connell (2024), popular culture is now a rationale for travel, and even if Irish traditional music leads tourism discourses, Ireland has a notable pop and rock music scene, that enriches the island's music tourism offer (O'Flynn and Mangaoang 2019). Some territories of Ireland have developed their own tradition in relation to particular music genres. For example, Co. Monaghan, a small county nestled between Co. Louth, the Midlands and the Irish border, is nationally known to be connected with country music of American origins (Gilmore 2018). Another example is provided by rock musicians from the 1970s to the 1990s. The figures of Phil Lynott, Rory Gallagher and even U2 have promoted Ireland abroad as an important land for the international rock music scene, and these musicians and their work are now celebrated in the urban contexts where they lived and "musicked" (Prendergast 1987; McLaughlin and McLoone 2012; O'Flynn and Mangaoang 2019). In addition, these musicians and bands have contributed to "export" Irish music in a contemporary shape to a global audience, increasing the value and weight of Irish music internationally.

An example of music tourism in Ireland not connected to traditional music is linked to the figure of Rory Gallagher, a blues guitar player, considered as the third driving force in

the electric guitar revolution after Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix (Prendergast 1987; McLaughlin and McLoone 2012). His hometown – Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal – and the city where he lived – Cork – became attractions for fans searching for a "spiritual connection" with him, following the routes he used to walk. In Ballyshannon a statue dedicated to his memory has been erected in one of the main crossroads of the town, while the *Rory Gallagher International Festival* was established in 2004 to celebrate the legacy of this musician (Rory Gallagher International Festival 2025). In Cork city, a square has been nominated after him and a sculpture dedicated to him has been erected, while all the city is surrounded by references of his figure. These towns reflect today the passage and the importance of this bluesman, which has become a sort of musical landmark. Many tourists pay the tribute to Rory Gallagher visiting these cities and the cemetery where he is buried, near Cork. In January 2025, a commemorative statue dedicated to the musician was unveiled in front of the Ulster Hall in Belfast to commemorate Gallagher's connection with the city together with its commitment in regularly performing in Northern Ireland during the years of the Troubles (McKee and Allen 2025).

Classical and Art music also compose part of Ireland's musical heritage and offer, even if it represents just a niche aspect of it. International case studies demonstrate the important relationship opera and high music forms have with the territories were they originate and/or where they are proposed. Renowned classical music festivals are promoted on the tourism market, where events managers make agreements with tour operators, integrating their specific offer with the wide destination they are inserted in (Friel 2019, pp.13-16). In particular, opera festivals attract a large public interested in enriching their artistic knowledge or in experiencing a superb event (Friel and Nelayeva 2019). Prestigious examples include the Austrian Salzburg Festival held in Austria (*ibid*., pp.15-19) and the Donizetti Opera Festival, held in Bergamo, Italy. These events attract an international audience (with the 2018 edition of the Italian event registering a percentage of public coming from outside the Bergamo province of 56% – *ibid*., p.36).

Composers such as Michele Esposito, Hamilton Harty and Charles Villiers Stanford integrated Irish tales and music influences within classical compositions (A. Commins 2023), suites and symphonies, bringing a taste of Ireland in prestigious concert halls, especially in Britain (Kennedy 1980; Dibble 2013; Carpenter 2017; Scott 2018). Concert halls and arts centres have also developed in the country, becoming the hosting place for important events and shows, attracting a national and international classical music audience. Examples include the National Concert Hall in Dublin, or the Opera House in Wexford, with

its Festival Opera. Established in 1951, the festival is now the most internationally renowned event on the Irish artistic calendar, attracting in the town audience flows of approximately twenty thousand people during the period between October and November (B. Quinn 2006, p.291). The festival is, and has always been, 'unambiguously driven by an ambition to produce rare and unjustly neglected opera to the highest of international standards' (*ibid*., p.292) and is now one of the most important classical music events in Ireland. The festival is not a tourist attraction *di per se*, but its success has been its effective use of tourism as a vehicle to achieve its aims (*ibid*.).

Beyond classical music, Ireland – and Dublin in particular – has become a frequent destination within world tours for international rock and pop artists, making the country and the city more specifically a temporary music destination of global relevance. In 2024, renowned musicians such as Eric Clapton (Figure 31), Taylor Swift and Coldplay have performed in the Irish capital, while in 2025 Dublin hosted the reunion of Oasis as part of their international touring schedule. Beyond hosting occasional concerts and tours, Slane Castle (Co. Meath) and Malahide Castle (Co. Dublin) have become prestigious and renowned venues for international rock and pop artists, while numerous music festivals – including Electric Picnic – have raised the profile of Ireland within the international music festival landscape.

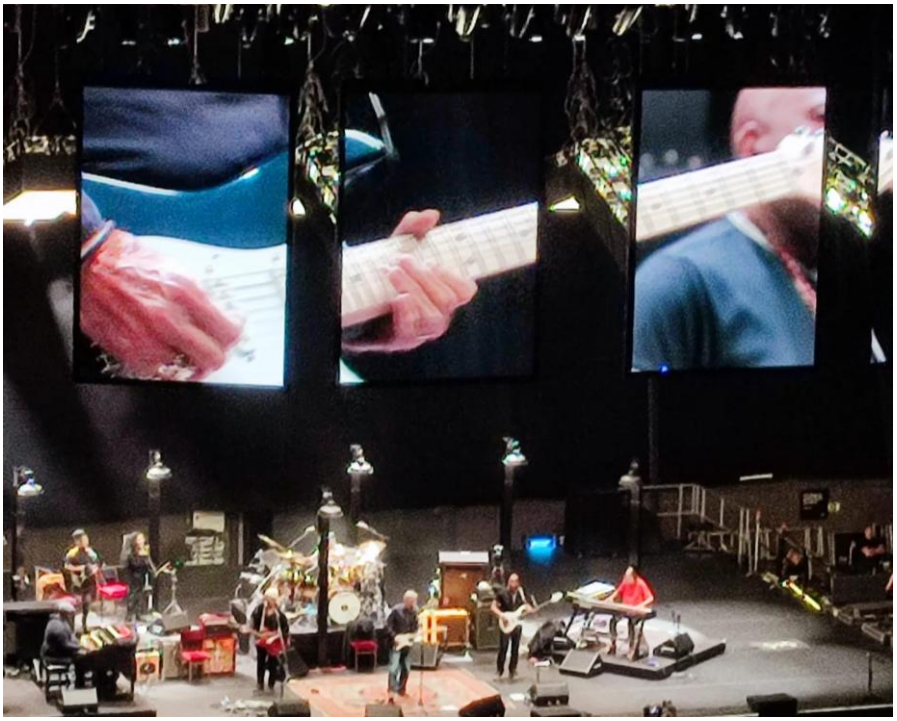


Figure 31: Eric Clapton performing at the 3Arena in Dublin, May 2024 (source: author).

These events fill important music halls, theatres and even stadiums (3Arena and Croke Park), while they have an important impact over the city system. They result in positive economic income for many retailers and firms working for the tourists, but they also bring impacts that question the sustainability of these big events. In a moment where Ireland is experiencing high inflation and a growth in tourism costs, private owners exploit the high demand for accommodation in the city during live events, doubling the price to increase their profits via platforms such as Booking.com and Airbnb. This was evident when Taylor Swift announced her *Eras Tour*, that immediately triggered a spike in accommodation prices in the city (O'Brien 2023), while something similar happened again with the Oasis performance in 2025 (Figure 32).



Figure 32: Oasis "hotel mayhem" in summer 2025 in UK and Ireland (Duell 2024).

While the centralisation and magnification of the engagement with music in the form of major events attracts large sums of money spent by fans worldwide, there is a lack of engagement with local scenes, with smaller venues and emerging artists striving to survive. While there is a wider necessity to sustain local small music scenes as they are parts of destinations' social structure (S. Cohen 1993), small urban environments – such as the towns of Dundalk and Drogheda – can raise their profile and develop reputations as places to visit to experience emerging artists in quality venues.

2.6.6. Contribution of Music to the Irish Economy

Beyond representing an important signifier of Irish identity, music has relevant implications within the national economy. The Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO) launched in 2017 a report where the socio-economic value and impact of music in and for Ireland was accounted. This document recognised the importance and recognition of Irish music and musicians, with many performers that have featured in foreign charts and different medias like tv programmes and movies from the 1950s to date, encompassing all genres, from blues to classical, and of course Irish traditional music.

Data from 2015 show that the overall contribution of the industry (including music related consumer expenditure and supply chain impacts) stood at €703 million (0.3% of GDP), which represented a 48% increase over a previous data collection from 2012 (IMRO 2017). The contribution from the core music industry stood at €445 million, an amount driven by the commercial success of a number of Ireland's leading acts and successful live performances (*ibid*., p.7). Music in Ireland remains a core industry that offers different employment opportunities. As Figure 33 shows, the sector currently supports, directly and indirectly, more than 13,000 jobs (*ibid*.). The activities in the Irish music industry also have positive impacts on the wider economy, leading to further benefits of €257 million to sectors supplying the music industry, as well as those firms which benefit from music related consumer spending. This resulted in a total 'narrow' economic contribution of €703 million in 2015, an increase of 48% over 2012 (*ibid*., p.14).

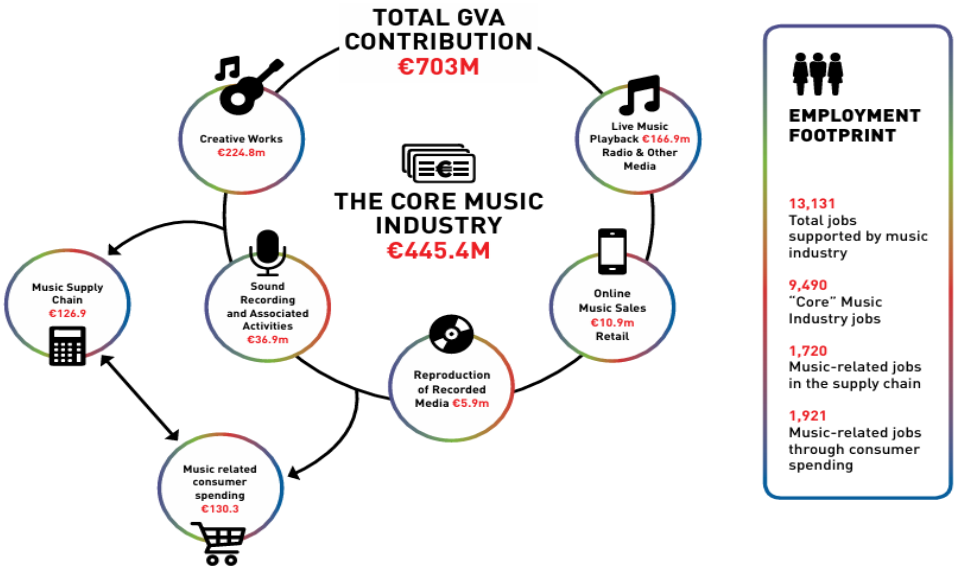


Figure 33: Total contribution of music within Irish economy (IMRO 2017, p.11).

The influence of the music sector extends far beyond its direct effect on GDP and employment, and the report also looks at its indirect economic and social impact. Music has an indirect impact on a number of sectors of the economy, most notably tourism where the experience of live music (be it traditional or otherwise) brings Irish culture to life and greatly enhances the tourist experience. Ireland's reputation abroad is entwined with music, plays a key role in the country's international reputation for creativity, which is increasingly vital in an economy driven by ideas and innovation (*ibid*., p.7-14). For example, the Irish live music sector has recorded a significant growth in the number of summer festivals, whereas many of these make substantial contributions to towns and cities across the country (*ibid*., p.13). Nevertheless, while the document provides detailed insights about the role of music within the Irish economy and society, connections between music and tourism are only mentioned as an example of collaboration between creative industries (*ibid*., p.14).

Music also has a range of individual, social and cultural benefits, which are difficult to quantify, though they are no less important for that. Given the right support, the Irish music industry has the potential to contribute even further to the national economy. The analysis undertaken suggests that if effective policy initiatives are implemented successfully, the sector could contribute a further 5 to 8% in GVA (Gross Value Added) terms, while providing additional employment opportunities (*ibid*., p.9).

2.7. Conclusions

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the Irish tourism system, delivering details on main destinations, principal visitor source markets, and the history of tourism development on the island. In order to understand the future of Irish tourism, fundings and opportunities are also described, with particular emphasis placed upon Fáilte Ireland's main destination brands and the current development strategy for Ireland's Ancient East, the regional programme for the eastern side of the country.

The discourse continues highlighting the themes that characterise Ireland as an international tourism destination. The ways in which people, culture, landscapes and most renowned products of Ireland are marketed and portrayed in tourism strategies – and stereotyped through the tourism gaze – leads the analysis to the pub experience, where music emerges as an important element to complete it. This passage connects the first half of the chapter to the second one, where music tourism in Ireland explicitly arises as the leading theme. Here, I illustrate the importance of music within the Irish tourism system, both as a

stand-alone product as well as a component of the overall visiting experience. When discussing about music tourism in Ireland, Irish traditional music appears as the most prominent and interesting aspect, as this form of performance is deeply connected with the concept of Irishness, being consequently a focus for tourists searching for "authentic" experiences during their stay. The commercialisation of Irish traditional music was amplified by the Riverdance phenomenon, and impacts on Irish sessions and festivals, like Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann or Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, which attract music tourists in Ireland. Irish traditional music emerges as relevant and primary within the Irish musicscape if applied to tourism, but this music genre is not the only one attractive to visitors, as the island can provide a wide range of music experiences enjoyable through tourism lens, while main stages of Dublin and Belfast attract international performers and worldwide fanbases.

While the weight and development of tourism for the Irish economy, together with its relationship with music, has been addressed on a national level, it is important to understand that some regions receive a major percentage of tourists that consume and enjoy local music, because of the reputation of local intangible cultural heritage. This imbalance leads to process of tourism dependence and commercialisation of music, but it also raises the profile of those destinations – mainly the south-west and Dublin city – within the international tourism market. Nevertheless, the presence of music festivals – like the Fleadh or Willie Clancy Summer School, or again Electric Picnic – prestigious pubs known for their music scene – such as Temple Bar and the Cobblestone in Dublin, or Matt Molloy's in Westport, Co. Mayo – or statues and plaques that connect music and musicians to the territories where they belong – examples are Rory Gallagher's monuments in Cork, Ballyshannon and Belfast – can raise the profile of a given place, turning it into a renowned music destination. However, despite having all of this, some regions of Ireland are left outside of main tourism road circles, receiving a more modest number of visitors. Tourism is traditionally polarised in bigger cities and on the Atlantic side of the island, but this does not mean that heritage, and intangible heritage in particular, is absent in less renowned counties. The north-east of Ireland, with Co. Louth at its forefront, proposes alternatives to engage with music and culture in a less "touristified" environment, with opportunities to develop deeper engagement with the local community of musicians.

Chapter 3: Co. Louth and the North-East of Ireland

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes Co. Louth, its surroundings, local heritage and music, demonstrating the potential to integrate this knowledge into future tourism experiences and strategies, as many aspects are not known beyond a small community and are not integrated, currently, into a tourism strategy or narrative for the county. The chapter provides context for the interpretation of the territory through a geographical account, but also – and mostly – through an analysis of its music resources, identified and recorded through ethnomusicological activities and fieldwork experiences. While the focus on night sessions and music festivals is left for a following discussion concerning their experiential aspects, here I identify sub-regional differences that relate to different aspects of local music including song traditions, céilí bands, and the emergence of a community of fiddle players who are part of an international Irish traditional music scene. I also consider cross-border identities and shared music heritage represented by the Oriel music tradition. A following analysis identifies music venues and spaces where music is enjoyed or consumed, such as churches, theatres and concert halls. This section leads to a consideration of participatory cartographic practices, which emerge as an interesting opportunity to analyse Louth music from a geographic perspective, aimed at simplifying the potential tourism enhancement discourse. This is translated into a "music map" of Co. Louth and of its surroundings, realised during the data gathering process, presented at the end of the chapter and inspired by similar initiatives developed in the area.

3.2. Contextualising Co. Louth

Co. Louth, the smallest county of Ireland, is located on the eastern side of the island, facing the Irish Sea. It is part of Leinster, the eastern province of Ireland. The main urban centres are Drogheda and Dundalk, two of the largest towns in Ireland by population (in 2022 Drogheda was recorded as the largest town in Ireland with a population of 44,135 – CSO 2022). Other important urban settlements are the towns of Ardee, Dunleer and Carlingford, and the village of Omeath, once the last original eastern Gaeltacht of Ireland (Ní Uallacháin 2003; Oram 2007). Co. Louth is located alongside the Dublin-Belfast

corridor (Figure 34), surrounded by neighbouring counties Meath and Monaghan, and the Irish border (Figure 35).



Figure 34: A road sign in Drogheda reflecting Co. Louth's role as a transit hub (source: author).



Figure 35: Location of Co. Louth within Ireland (source: author).

Its position, at the crossroad between the two principal Irish urban centres, together with an efficient railway and public transport system (Geraghty 2017), guarantees easy accessibility (at least between North and South). This territory is also crossed by the M1, one of the motorway segments developed in the years of the Celtic Tiger, that provides fast connection between the two centres of government of the island and what is between them.

Despite the relatively small size of the county, two regional identities are identifiable in Co. Louth. The southern area, close to Dublin and to the ecosystem associated with river Boyne and its valley, and the border territories of the northern side close to Ulster, the northern province, now almost completely included within Northern Ireland. Actually, North Louth was historically part of south-east Ulster, and it retains some cultural connections with this territory such as the Ulster Gaelic song tradition (Ní Uallacháin 2003).

From a morphological perspective, despite being between Dublin and Belfast, local landscape preserves aspects of rurality – with the exception of Drogheda and Dundalk – and offers many themes that are central to the Irish tourism literature, such as green fields and the seaside. Moreover, the northern side of the county presents interesting reliefs such as the Cooley Mountains, that provides a dramatic backdrop to the village on the shores of the Cooley Peninsula (such as Carlingford). Further north (just beyond the border) the slopes of Slieve Gullion – the highest mountain of Co. Armagh, a hill of historical symbolic value – are crossed by paths that allow hikers to enjoy walks in the woods and on its top, where a Neolithic tomb was erected. This relief is the fulcrum of the Ring of Gullion, the first ring deck in the world to be geologically mapped and recognised as an "Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty". It is important to acknowledge Drogheda and Carlingford as major tourism hubs for the county, and perhaps even for the entire north-east tourism ecosystem. As demonstrated in the final steps of this dissertation, both these urban settlements have been identified as key tourism drivers and "destination hubs" in Louth by local authorities. They therefore emerge as extremely relevant for this research.

3.2.1. Louth and Mythology

The name of the county is the genitive form of *Lugh*, one of the principal deities of Irish pagan Celts (Bradley 1985), and while most of the county's settlements are connected to the Normans and medieval times (Nolan 2023), the entire territory is connected to some of the most important mythological tales and figures. The northern side of the county is connected to the figure of the Celtic warrior *Cú Chulainn* (reputedly born near Dundalk) and

to one of the most important Irish mythological cycles: *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, in English "the Cattle Raid of Cooley" (Kinsella 2002; Oram 2007). This is the tale of the war between the northern kingdom of Ulster, from which *Cú Chulainn* originates, and the army of *Queen Maeve* from Connacht, the western realm of Ireland.

Leprechauns are also part of local mythology. Carlingford and its mountains are the place where a Leprechaun was allegedly seen for the last time, in 1989, and where infrastructures and activities dedicated to these fairy creatures have been realised (Wilson et al. 2018, pp.571-572), capitalising on the potential of "fairy tourism" (cf. Lovell and Sharma 2023). The southern side of the county retains myth and legends that are connected to the neighbouring river Boyne, such as the tale of the Salmon of Knowledge from the Fenian Cycle. Giving the rich heritage of Celtic mythologic references, this county is advertised and marketed as "Land of Legends" (Visit Louth 2024a), where local myths are exploited to create branding strategies that emphasize the association between legends and the region. Mythology is also connected with music in Louth, with the mythological bard *Amergin*, known as the originator of Irish music, that is believed to be buried under Millmount in Drogheda (Carolan 2023, p.655).

Beyond the border, Slieve Gullion is the setting to a series of important myths and legends. This mountain is associated with the hero *Cú Chulainn*, as this should be the place where he got his warrior name after battling against a hound (the dog of *Culann*). The relief is also the location for another tale, centred on the giant *Fionn Mac Cumhaill*, who was cursed with white hair by a witch named *Miluchra* after he bathed in the lake on the summit of the mountain to rescue a ring. The superstition survives in the present and it is believed that if people bathe in the lake their hair will turn white.

3.2.2. Louth and Spirituality

In Louth, myths encompass and blend with religion and faith. One of the most important Irish saints, St Brigid, is historically associated with counties Louth and Kildare. While being at the same time a Pagan goddess and a Christian saint (Figure 36), Brigid was reputedly born around the Faughart hill, in north Louth, and here a shrine has been erected to commemorate her figure.



Figure 36: St Brigid's Mural in Dundalk, a local landmark (source: author).

In 2024 the Irish Government established St Brigid's Day as a national bank holiday to be celebrated on the 1st of February to mark the return of spring, aligning it with the Celtic festivity of *Imbolc*. This preserves and maintains connection between Christianity and Paganism, while the Brigid of Faughart Festival is a small event dedicated to the saint held in Dundalk around St Brigid's Day, that forecasts craftsmanship workshops and pilgrimage walks. Even though this initiative remains strongly connected to Christian aspects' of Brigid's figure, the event's imaginaries merge together with Celtic and New Age spirituality, just like the figure of the Goddess herself. As 2024 marked the 1,500th anniversary from the passing of the saint, Brigid 1500 'Louth: Birthplace of Brigid' Festival – a series of events including light shows, expositions and dance performances to celebrate the figure of Brigid and the new bank holiday – was a successfully delivered in Dundalk. This festival achieved impressive results, with more than 55,000 visitors that visited Co. Louth to attend the different activities offered during the celebration (Newman 2024). Such positive outcomes underline potential to turn this festival into a recurring production that can enrich Dundalk events calendar. Nevertheless, the initiative was not replicated in 2025, as Louth County Council did not provide funds to sustain it. Anyway, the audio-visual installation featuring

eight majestic Gothic arches beautifully adorned with Celtic and religious symbols known as Northern Lights (Figure 37) – previously introduced during Brigid 1500 – were reinstalled for the 2024 Christmas celebrations and remained on display in Dundalk Market Square until the end of February 2025.[6]



Figure 37: Northern Light's arches in Dundalk Market Square, December 2024 (source: author).

Brigid is not the only saint connected with this territory. St Mochta, a disciple of St Patrick, is regarded as the abbot of Louth Village (Bradley 1985), while St Columba, one of the most influential Irish saints together with St Patrick himself, built and implemented several monastic sites, such as those of Clonmore, Louth Village and Monasterboice, where the Muiredach's High Cross, a 5.5.metre Celtic cross regarded as the finest of all Ireland, is preserved (Murray and Ó Muireadhaigh 1911).

3.2.3. Built Heritage and Events in Co. Louth

Co. Louth possesses a rich network of attractive and inviting natural and built heritage sites (Figure 38), which 'contributes to the county's character, identity and sense of place' (Louth County Council 2022, p.5), making it the starting point for the Ireland's

[6] These arches, managed by the Dundalk BIDS (Business Improvement District) team, are regularly installed in Dundalk Market Square for a variety of festive events including annual Christmas celebrations.

Ancient East campaign. The entire region is stepped in history, with Neolithic remains of national relevance such as the Proleek Dolmen, while medieval buildings and ruins are scattered all over the county. Notably examples are Castle Roche (Figure 39), a Normann fortress built near Dundalk, St Laurence's Gate in Drogheda – one of the best preserved defensive wall gates in all Europe – and Carlingford itself, which is one of the finest medieval settlements in Ireland (Oram 2007; Jackman 2016).

Religious sites are also part of Louth's tangible heritage. Drogheda and Dundalk host majestic Neogothic churches and cathedrals. In Drogheda, the head of St Oliver Plunkett is displayed in the transept of the St Peter's Church, an impressive architecture in the town centre. Old monasteries and abbeys contribute and enrich local history and culture. Notably, the already mentioned Monasterboice and Mellifont Abbey, the first Cistercian abbey of Ireland (*ibid*.; Wilson et al. 2018), represent a *unicum* within the Irish cultural landscape, and are some of the best preserved religious medieval ruins in the country.

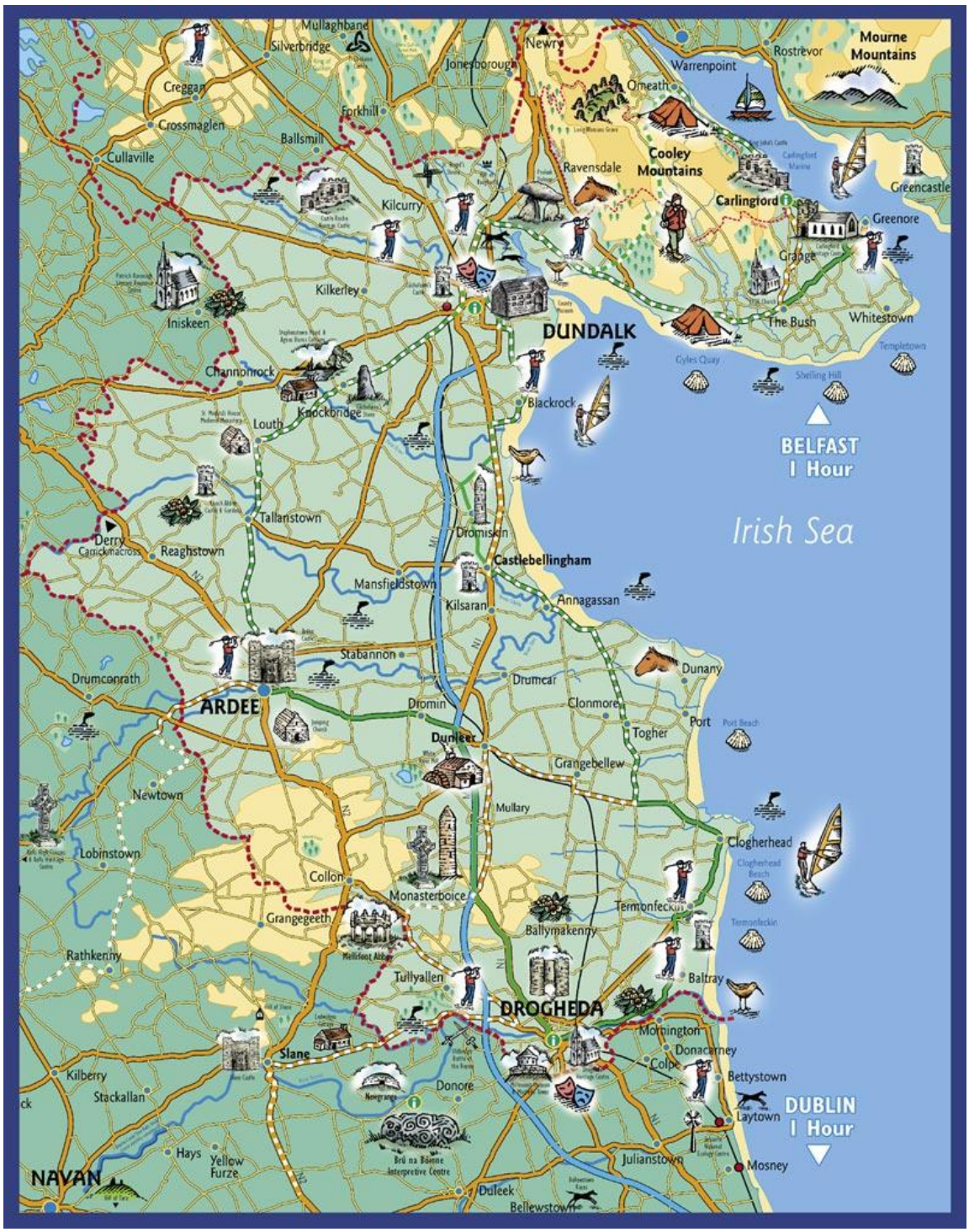


Figure 38: Tourist map of Co. Louth (OnTheWorldMap 2024).



Figure 39: Castle Roche, near Dundalk (source: author).

A number of museums and galleries are located in the country. In Dundalk, the County Museum, located in a former jail, proposes an exposition encompassing geological history, the arrival of first human communities and settlements, the origins of the town and the development of local factories established between 1750 and the 1960s, which characterised Dundalk landscape and reputation as an industrial town. In Drogheda, the Millmount Museum is hosted within the Martello Tower, a defensive bastion built in 1808 to protect the town from Napoleon's army, and whose hill is remembered as one of the last stands against Oliver Cromwell's siege of Drogheda in 1649 (Wilson et al. 2018). Inside, the museum exposes objects connected to local history, urban development and battles. Not far, the Highlanes Gallery, housed in a former 19th century monastery, proposes temporary exhibitions of photography, contemporary and community art (*ibid*.).

In terms of events, the county offers several festivals connected to local heritage and history, even though they differ in terms of scale, targets and impacts over the host towns. In Dundalk, examples include the Brigid of Faughart Festival named previously, and the SEEK Urban Arts Festivals, a contemporary urban art event that celebrates the town and its history through a series of murals realised by local as well as international artists. The SEEK Festival is centred on stimulating contemporary urban art in Dundalk, while it also promotes the town as a street art centre on an international level. In 2025, the festival changed name in EPSO (meaning *El Paso* – a name reflecting the condition of Dundalk as a border town – Irwin 2010), representing a growth of the event in terms of activities, scope and impact (Roddy 2025). This strategy is similar to what other small cities around the world have done, where

murals and graffiti have been identified as part of local heritage and identity, or were used to implement a new image for the area (Richards and Duif 2019; Richards 2021). Despite representing themes and figures connected to local history, not a single mural is dedicated to Dundalk music nor any figures that contributed in developing music discourses in the town. The only mural connected to local music history represents the Corrs, a globally successful Irish folk/pop band from the town, but this was not developed within the SEEK initiative.[7] This representation received critiques from the public, as it was not perceived as a good drawing by many (Roddy 2022).

Another interesting event happening in Dundalk is represented by a one-day festival named Legends of Louth. This small event, sponsored by local businesses and public representatives, wants to connect with local myths, and it includes walking tours of the locality in the morning alongside music and comedy shows in the Market Square during the afternoon. While music is not the main focus of the festival, it can actually become the highlight of the event, as it happened in 2024 with a special appearance of the Irish rock band Bagatelle to celebrate their former frontman Liam Reilly, one of Dundalk's finest pop singers (Roddy 2024b).

In Drogheda, the Drogheda Arts Festival is an annual event held around the May bank holiday that encompasses theatre, arts and cinematic exhibitions, workshops, concerts and activities for children (Wilson et al. 2018, p.566). Initiated in 2005 and funded and supported by Louth County Council and the Arts Council of Ireland, the festival delivers two days of national and international performances along with visual arts exhibition and street parades and shows (Drogheda Arts Festival 2025). Music of different kinds is also a theme of the event, and it is included in the form of concerts and street performances.

Street performances are also a relevant feature of the Boyne Midsummer Festival, another initiative happening in the town during the middle of the summer season. This event, centred on family entertainment, is supported by the local shopping mall (Scotch Hall), together with Louth County Council and other cultural institutions. It also receives support from Fáilte Ireland, Discover Boyne Valley, Visit Louth and Love Drogheda, a community of 1561 local business operators aimed at improving Drogheda's atmosphere and reputation (Love Drogheda 2022). While the highlights of the event include a fairground and a "mythological mural tour" delved into local myths and legends, during the 2024 edition a night trad trail too was part of the general offer, with traditional music performed in different

[7] A new mural dedicated to the Corrs was unveiled in May 2026, with Louth County Council hosting a Civic Reception in their honour.

pubs of the town. The festival also brought back Music at the Gate, an event originally conceived in 2017 by local piper Darragh Ó Héiligh, which was first held during the 2018 edition of the Fleadh in Drogheda. This initiative forecasts a stage placed in front of St Laurence's Gate, where different musicians (mainly traditional music performers) play one after the other. While the connection established between this initiative and its location, set in front one of most prominent emblem of Drogheda's heritage, leads to discussions about place marketing and the potential of combining performances within or around historical sites (Kearney and Burns 2022), Music at the Gate combined both performances of professional musicians as well as children's recitals, appearing as a sort of "bottom-up" and community event, highlighting aspects that are going to be developed in Chapter 4.

Lú: Festival of Lights, held around Halloween, is an immersive audio-visual experience featuring light shows and fifteen-minute length video productions projected on some of the most iconic heritage sites and monuments within the Drogheda's historic quarter. The videos are inspired by local legends and myths, while other side activities, such as lectures and other artistic performances are offered before, during and after the main light shows. My fieldwork has highlighted that music has a marginal position in this. While independent concerts happening during the same days of the event are promoted on the festival website as part of the overall offer (encompassing rock and pop entertainment in pubs, dancing shows in local theatres, and Classical music concerts), music directly connected with the lights performances covers just a side-line role, with small groups of musicians playing randomly in the streets between one show and another. This festival, live for the first time in 2022, received funding from the County Council and Fáilte Ireland, who allocated a total of €672,000 to the Council for the first edition of the project through its Urban Animation Capital Investment Scheme (Fáilte Ireland 2022b). The festival was explicitly considered as an opportunity to reach the Ireland's Ancient East Regional Development Strategy goals, connecting Drogheda's rich heritage with local traditions within an entertaining and experiential opportunity. Colin Hindle, Festival Officer at Fáilte Ireland reported that:

> Urban Animation plays an increasingly important role in transforming and re-imagining our public spaces as safe, welcoming and vibrant places to visit. This is important in attracting visitors to our towns and cities and increasing dwell time to support local tourism and hospitality businesses and jobs. Co. Louth and the Boyne Valley are home to some of Ireland's most renowned mythological stories and the Urban Animation project in Drogheda brings these tales to life in new,

innovative ways so they can be enjoyed by visitors as well as the local community (Fáilte Ireland 2022b).

3.2.4. Neighbouring Counties

In my experience of research on music and tourism in Co. Louth, I found necessary to give critical consideration to the surrounding counties and acknowledge the porousness of the boundaries between them. Giving its position, dimensions and history, Co. Louth is integrated within a system of interconnections with its neighbouring counties. People from neighbouring counties travel – for study or work – to Dundalk and Drogheda, but these counties are incorporated with Louth into regional strategies that identify – for administrative purposes – the territory north of Dublin as a unique north-eastern regional entity.

Cultural and musical traditions are also shared on a regional level, with some of them that extend – and survive – even beyond the border with Northern Ireland. Giving its coastal condition, Louth has experienced an early influx of new music and new musical influences coming in from Britain and Europe, while its traditional music 'also has intimate links with that of its surrounding counties and of the counties beyond them, and has connections too across the Atlantic Ocean' (Carolan 2023, p.655).

Neighbouring counties that have major cultural and musical, as well as economic, social and infrastructural connections with Co. Louth are Co. Meath, Co. Monaghan and, beyond the border, Co. Armagh (Figure 40). With the only exception of Co. Meath, home to some of the most famous Irish heritage sites, this area is not recognised nor highlighted within international tourism discourses, as they privilege Dublin city and the south-west coast. Nevertheless, this territory (excluding Armagh) – as reported during a Fáilte Ireland's Local Experts Programme I joined in 2023 – contains the majority of tangible heritage sites in Ireland, being at the earth of the Ireland's Ancient East programme.

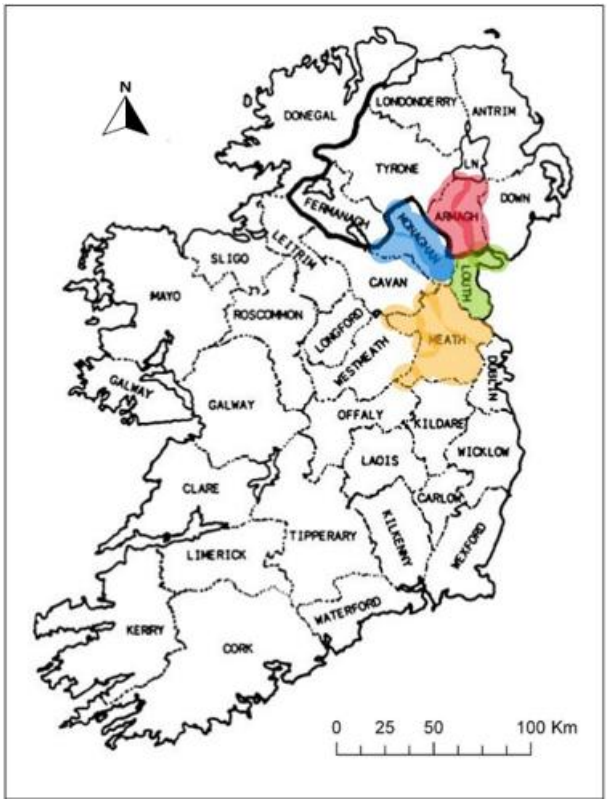


Figure 40: Co. Louth and its neighbours (source: author).

To the south, Co. Meath is considered and marketed as "Ireland's Heritage Capital", given the number of important heritage sites that traces the presence of first human settlements dating back the 8000 B.C. (Wilson et al. 2018, p.550). This county, very close to Dublin, is in fact one of the most important territories included within the Ireland's Ancient East programme. Co. Meath was the former seat of the High Kings of Ireland, and here they were enthroned on the Hill of Tara, a sacred relief whose cultural importance is remembered still today. The most famous attraction of Meath is the Neolithic site of *Brú na Bóinne*. Not too far from Drogheda, the three passage tombs of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth are some of the finest examples of Prehistoric art in the world, being older than the Pyramids or Stonehenge (*ibid*., pp.550-552). Close to this ancient location, the Battle of Boyne Site is a heritage centre and a museum dedicated to the fight held on the 12th of July, 1690, between the armies of King William III of Orange and King James II. This battle ended with the victory of Protestant forces, an outcome still celebrated through the parades by some Ulster Protestant communities and organisations in Northern Ireland (Anson 1999).

Further south, Slane is a town known for its 18th century castle, open to the public for weddings and conferences. The castle is particularly renowned for hosting big concerts during the summer, involving international artists such as Harry Styles, Queen, Eminem and

U2. The Slane Distillery, enclosed within the castle walls, produces a famous whiskey and proposes guided tours with tasting experiences (Wilson et al. 2018, p.554). Following the shores of river Boyne, the town of Trim preserves a series of medieval remains, including the biggest Normann fortress of Ireland; this castle was a key location in Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*, a cult movie about Scotland, but entirely filmed on Irish soil.

Co. Meath, together with the southern part of Co. Louth, is part of the Boyne Valley, an established tourism infrastructure and core segment of the Ireland's Ancient East programme (Fáilte Ireland 2021a). This project originates from Boyne Valley Tourism, a local company aimed at promoting and sustaining tourism development in Co. Meath set up by the local County Council in 1993. Today, 'Boyne Valley Tourism works closely with the tourism trade, Meath County Council, Louth County Council, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to achieve its objectives of increasing visitor numbers and revenue to the Boyne Valley' (Meath County Council 2024). Discover Boyne Valley, a programme intended as a drive route along river Boyne, encompasses heritage sites in Louth and Meath as well as outdoor and gastronomic experiences. Giving the interest that experiential tourism has gained within international tourism choices and marketing strategies (Friel 2021), Discover Boyne Valley Flavours, a network of local food and drink producers and food service providers from across Louth and Meath was established between 2022 and 2023 to enhance and highlight gastronomic experiential components of this region. The commencement of the Boyne Valley Food Series in 2013 signalled a new milestone in the delivery of culinary food experiences to international as well as domestic visitors (Discover Boyne Valley Flavours 2024), following the interest and recognition that gastronomic products have gained within the tourism field (UNWTO 2018; Garibaldi and Pozzi 2020; Fusté-Forné 2022). However, while demonstrating an attention over experiential themes like those concerning local foods and drinks, during my fieldwork I encountered less examples of other components of the visiting experience around the Boyne Valley, such as music. While music is somehow addressed within the website through pages dedicated to culture and festivals where different initiatives are listed, these references are not emphasized, as music seems to not be recognised as a concrete attraction within the region.

To the north-west of Co. Louth, Co. Monaghan is a relatively small territory located along the border, and it is mainly renowned for its natural areas and forest parks (Wilson et al. 2018, p.579). It is sparsely populated and largely rural, with Carrickmacross, Castleblayney and Monaghan town providing urban centres. Together with counties Cavan and Donegal, it is part of Ulster, the northern province of Ireland (almost totally included

within Northern Ireland) and appears just as a land between the east coast and the midlands. Nevertheless, despite representing a peripheral region within the Irish tourism context, local tourism agencies and destination management organisations (DMOs) such as Mad about Monaghan and Visit Monaghan are heavily promoting this territory as a domestic destination for domestic trips. Musically, Co. Monaghan is known amongst a certain audience for a vibrant contemporary country music scene, that enriches the county yearly events' calendar with different country and blues music festival both in towns as well as in its rurality. The county is also connected with the figure of Patrick Kavanagh, one of Ireland's most renowned poets of the 20th century, born in the small parish of Inniskeen, close to the border with Louth. In 1994, a visitor centre was opened in the village to commemorate his figure. Located in a former Protestant Church, visitors here can experience and learn about the poet's life poetry and landscape of Monaghan who was an inspiration for his works.

Co. Armagh is recognised as an important border territory between the Republic and the UK, with Armagh city having good road and rail links, while being a thriving market town for local products in the region (Moley 2015, p.54). The county is also considered as one of the most important clerical centres since the 5th century, as its capital is the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland (Wilson et al. 2018, p.579). Armagh city is the place where St Patrick reputedly built the first Christian site on the top of the hill that stands in the middle of the urban centre. With the Plantation and the arrival of many Protestant families in Ulster, the original Catholic building was then replaced by a Church of Ireland in the 18th century. According to a stone slab located outside of the church, this is also the resting place of *Brian Boru* (*ibid*., p.64), the legendary High King of Ireland and harp player that fought in the mythical battle of Clontarf in 1014 against the Normans, and whose tale inspired many nationalists between the 19th and 20th centuries (Ó hAllmhuráin 2016, p.3). The south of the county, closer to Louth, proposes interesting reliefs and landscapes that constitutes the Ring of Gullion. This border land is also renowned for being an historically Republican territory, and an IRA stronghold during the years of the Troubles (Harnden 2024).

Both Co. Monaghan and the southern side of Co. Armagh share with North Louth important intangible cultural elements connected to music and poetry tradition, explored in a seminal study of the region's musical traditions by local scholar Padraigín Ní Uallacháin (2003). This territory is known as "Oriel", a name given to a region that, despite the administrative and political divisions, has maintained a distinctive identity visible still today, that extends across both sides of the border (Figure 41).



Figure 41: Oriel's location within Ireland (source: author).

The Oriel region is located on the east coast of Ireland and spans the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Oriel, also known as *Airgialla* or *Oirghiall* (Ó Fiaich 1950) was an ancient kingdom across the northern-eastern region, now including counties Monaghan, Louth, and Armagh. This is a space without physical boundaries; the name Oriel refers to an area united by traditions more than to a geographic territory (Moley 2015, pp.30-33). Singer Colleen Savage (2025) has focused on songs from the village of Crossmaglen and has involved engaging with local communities to revive the local song collection. Local tunes – or new instrumental melodies inspired by or dedicated to the region – represent the repertoire of the Oriel Traditional Orchestra (OTO), a cross-border, intergenerational community orchestra whose aims are to promote and encourage participation in and appreciation of the music of the Oriel region, contributing to the musical and artistic life of the territory. *The Oriel March*,[8] a suite composed by Daithí Kearney, was commissioned as part of the Cooperation Northern Ireland scheme and later recorded as a music video with the title *Performing Oriel's Heritage*, supported by the Heritage Office of Louth County Council and funded by the Creative Ireland Programme for the county. It

[8] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYtY45jvbT8.

visually connects music with local heritage and landscape, demonstrating how communities can engage with this regional heritage and its sense of belonging.

3.3. Music in Co. Louth

Music in Co. Louth represents a cultural feature that enriches the lives of people engaging with it, with potential for application in the tourism sector. My experiences of fieldwork and participant observation during music-related initiatives in the area, together with findings and considerations that emerged during interviews, have recognised some key elements within local music environment. They are represented by Irish traditional music in the form of sessions, concerts and music festivals, but also regional traditions (including those associated with Oriel's intangible heritage) together with Classical, contemporary and alternative music. As these music events are small-scale initiatives, their recurrence through the year reflects the potential to create stable sustainable cultural activities that can be part of the tourism sector and contribute to the local community's music ecosystem. Nevertheless, despite many opportunities to integrate music within local culture and heritage, my fieldwork has revealed structural weaknesses, with music that is somehow left behind in local and regional tourism development strategies, while other themes from Louth culturescape, such as gastronomy, are prioritised. There is therefore an opportunity to reflect on the role music can have to enrich local culture and cultural experiences for inhabitants and tourists.

According to Nicholas Carolan, 'Louth is not nationally regarded as a centre of traditional music and the music is certainly of minority interest in the county. Nevertheless, there has been notable activity in the field there since the […] 1950s' (2023, pp.666-667). Irish traditional music practice is prevalent across all Ireland, even if it presents differences in terms of style and repertoire on a regional level (Kearney 2009). Part of my fieldwork exemplified how Irish traditional music activities in Louth could be understood in the context of studies into music and tourism across the island of Ireland and internationally, highlighting the ways in which this genre is performed, appreciated and consumed locally. I have deeply engaged with the infrastructure sustaining traditional music in the county. While this extends beyond Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, the organisation plays a central role in promoting and disseminating Irish traditional music through its three branches (located in Dundalk, Drogheda and in the town of Dunleer). The history of these branches is closely linked to local musicians who have been active in the area since the 1950s, and who have

played a fundamental role in the development of traditional music in Louth (A. Commins 2019). Traditional sessions, concerts and music festivals have been the main Irish music events investigated during the fieldwork experience, highlighting the relevance these events have in the Irish traditional music landscape (Kneafsey 2003; Kaul 2009; Kearney 2013a; V. Commins 2014). Considering the primary importance of sessions and Irish traditional music festivals within this research, I will discuss my fieldwork experiences at a selection of these events in the following chapter.

Other elements that emerged through the fieldwork analysis, as well as through the literature review, that make the region stand out in comparison to the general Irish traditional soundscape are represented by some traditions, namely:

1. Oriel's intangible cultural heritage, represented by the South-Ulster poetry and the early Irish harp;
2. Céilí bands;
3. South Louth & Meath singing tradition;
4. Piping traditions in Drogheda and Armagh;
5. Fiddle tradition(s).

While Irish traditional music is to the fore within this study, considering the relationship between traditional "sounds" and tourism (Foster 2008), as well as the relevance this genre has in national music offer and education (Ní Chonaill 2023), other genres of music are recognised as valuable and important for a "local music tourism strategy". This region offers not only Irish traditional music-related activities, but it is also rich with other interesting music proposals, encompassing broader genre and musicking activities including Classical, contemporary, alternative and pop music, manifested through several music-related initiatives and events, like concerts series, festivals, workshops and masterclasses. In this sense, beyond Irish folk music, Co. Louth can be viewed as a small music-cluster (Krims 2011), with several music-related initiatives and extremely active pubs and venues hosting music and musicians every week. A summary table of all the festivals, events and sessions I attended are provided in the Appendices section.

3.3.1. Cross-Border Music Heritage: Oriel Region's Traditions

Part of Louth's music is encapsulated within Oriel's intangible cultural heritage. Despite a rich local musical tradition, this territory does not feature significantly in the narratives of Irish traditional music and does not form part of a canon for the study of Irish

traditional music (Kearney 2021, p.4). Its location on the east coast, squeezed between the two major Irish urban centres, contrasts with the rural and seemingly untouched west of Ireland (*ibid*.), where research on Irish music has mostly focused (O'Shea 2008; Kaul 2009, Ó hAllmhuráin, 2016).

Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin developed a first comprehensive monograph on Oriel's intangible heritage (2003), placing particular emphasis on the language and song traditions of the region. This monograph has informed further publications and research such as the website project www.orielarts.com, with Dundalk Institute of Technology playing a role in developing a narrative for musical traditions in this part of Ireland (Moley 2015; Crawford 2018; O'Connor 2018; Kearney 2021).

Oriel's music heritage is primarily composed by two main themes, linked to ancient bardic traditions. The region saw the development of a strong Irish song tradition played by bards (Trimble 2011; Trimble 2016; Carolan 2023) as well as the preservation of traditional techniques like the old harp fingernails style (Ní Uallacháin 2003; Crawford 2018; O'Connor 2018). Séamus Dall Mac Cuarta (1647-1733) is ranked as the finest south Ulster lyrics composer (Ní Uallacháin 2003, p.337), and one of the few last poets of his generation who received formal training in bardic poetry composition (Trimble 2011, p.436). Associated with the village of Omeath in Co. Louth, Mac Cuarta was acquainted with the famous blind harper-composer Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738) from Co. Meath. Despite the collapse of Gaelic society and culture in the 17th century throughout the rest of Ulster due to the Plantation, it is evident from Mac Cuarta's poems that patronage was still available in the Oriel region from rich English families for the poetic class at the turn of the 18th century (*ibid*., p.437).

The other main cultural feature of the Oriel region is the wire strung harp, an instrument deeply associated with Irish identity and the sense of Irishness (Kneafsey 2003; Vallely 2011; O'Shea 2012; O'Donnell 2013; O'Donnell 2014). Local harpists have played a significant role in preserving the Irish harp tradition, whose practice has been inscribed in 2019 within the UNESCO World Intangible Heritage List. Many melodies from the area were documented and transcribed by Edward Bunting during the 1792 Belfast Festival, the first of three harp events organised with the scope to 'preserve the moribund harp repertoire and technique' (O'Shea 2008, p.9). An important harper from Co. Armagh that actually joined the summit was Patrick Quin (1745–1812). Identified as one of the last Ulster harpers, his contribution to the festival was fundamental, as his presence was highly symbolic and useful to portray and identify Irish bardic music (Crawford 2018). Moreover, 'the actual

instrument played by Patrick Quin survives and is available to view by special arrangement in Trinity College, Dublin' (*ibid*., p.72), providing evidence of what was played in Ireland back then. Another important harper from the region was Patrick Byrne (1786–1862) from Farney, Co. Monaghan. Recognised as the last noted exponent in Ireland of the historical Gaelic wire strung harp, he was a blind musician who travelled to Great Britain, bringing his music with him. He became such a talented musician that was requested to play in front of Queen Victoria in 1841, receiving a warrant as Irish Harper to Prince Albert. Byrne is also known as the first Irish traditional musician to ever be photographed (Ní Uallacháin 2003). Through these pictures, it is possible to see how harpers were still dressing in bardic robes, recalling an ancient and almost mythological past. The figure of this musician and bard is now celebrated during Féile Patrick Byrne, an Irish traditional music festival set in Carrickmacross.

Part of this cultural capital has been lost between the 19th and 20th centuries. The majority of knowledge associated with this intangible heritage was passed down orally, and it was primarily connected with the Irish language (*ibid*., pp.15-16). Both the language and oral traditions declined significantly with the Famine of 1845, that contributed in drastically reducing the number of Irish speakers across Ireland (Gray 2021). As English became the accepted default language of households and communities by the end of the 19th century, 'the oral tradition would now no longer have the necessary critical mass of Irish language speakers to nourish new talent, sustain the supply of tradition-bearers or simply to have a literate and willing audience for the recitation' (Trimble 2011, p.447). The Partition of 1921 and the Troubles further contributed to cultural decline, establishing a political division and separating communities previously united (Ní Éigeartaigh 2023) with 'implications for the imagination and performance of cultural identity' (Kearney 2021, p.3).

The fragmented heritage of the poetic and harp traditions of Oriel continued up to the turn of the 20th century among the surviving Irish language speaking communities around the Cooley Peninsula (Trimble 2011, p.447). Luckily, the transcribing work of collectors such as John Hannon from Crossmaglen and Luke Donnellan helped in preserving this heritage (Trimble 2016; O'Connor 2018), providing an opportunity to (re)construct and disseminate notions connected to local music identity (Kearney 2021).

3.3.2. Céilí Bands

Even if no particular Irish traditional music festival is held in Dundalk, the town maintains an important connection with the céilí band tradition, which represents a relevant aspect of the town's music history. Céilí bands first developed at the end of the 19th century thanks to "nationalistically minded" Irish emigrants in London (Smyth 1996, p.13) as 'a compromise between modernity and tradition' (O'Connor 2001, p.59), in a period in which new music influences coming from America such as jazz and big bands inspired a new generation of Irish musicians through the radio. Céilí bands combined elements and instrument of Irish traditional music together with influences and approaches belonging to jazz big bands, and their music was functional to be played in dance halls, to accompany Irish set dancing (*ibid*., pp.59-60). The "golden era" of these bands lasted from the 1920s until the 1960s, but different céilí bands still exist and play today.

Co. Louth saw the development of a series céilí bands during the 1950s. In Drogheda, local bands included the Mrs Hoey's, the Boyne and Dominic Maguidhir's (Carolan 2023, p.666). Céilí bands became popular in Dundalk thanks to the work of fiddle and flute player John Joe Gardiner (1873–1979), piano accordionist Rory Kennedy (1924–1993), and pianist Brendan Gaughran (1933–2018), three musicians who gave new life to local music community, both because of their activity with the Siamsa Céilí Band – a very prestigious music ensemble, that inspired many musicians and still inspires contemporary bands – and for their commitment to establish the first local Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann branch in 1958 (Mac Mathúna and Ní Chonaráin 2003; Carolan 2023). Gardiner came from Co. Sligo, and he introduced his vibrant music tradition and style in a new territory, similarly to what Michael Coleman and other Irish emigrants did in the USA. The commitment of Gardiner and Kennedy in institutionalizing Irish music was the first step that led to three different CCÉ branches in Co. Louth, aimed at promoting and sustaining music educational activities in the area (A. Commins 2019). Gaughran also travelled around the province of Leinster and South Armagh setting up classes for children, while promoting cross-border integration through traditional music and songs (Dundalk Democrat 2018). While the Siamsa Céilí Band established a reputation for the ensemble form in Louth, it is notable that the Táin Céílí Band, which included some members that had previously played with the Siamsa, also achieved national honours. Similar to the Siamsa, the band not only drew on the local community in Dundalk but welcomed members from the surrounding region. Following their success, the Táin released an album and regularly regroup for special occasions, such as when Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann was held in the county for the first time, in 2018.

Despite the importance Gardiner and Kennedy had for local music development, their personalities are somehow neglected, as they are not remembered in current cultural initiatives, nor any particular Céilí band is active around Dundalk. Nevertheless, their contribution in developing an Irish traditional music scene in North Louth represents a relevant feature of local music history, that could be encapsulated into regional music tourism strategies following heritagization processes associated with their figures.

One of the few opportunities to engage with this form of music in Louth is provided by the Termonfeckin Set Dancing Festival, a small event featuring traditional dance and music workshops, as well as *céilíthe* – social gatherings where dancers perform to live céilí band music. Nevertheless, céilí bands' music remains largely inaccessible to outsiders, such as tourists and visitors, as it is often embedded within initiatives organised and promoted through a close-knit network of local music practitioners whose primarily aim is to provide musical experiences for their own appreciation and enjoyment.

3.3.3. South Louth & Meath Singing Tradition

While Dundalk emerged as the primary town in Louth for the development of céilí bands, Drogheda, the other main urban centre in the county, became an early hub for the English song tradition, which flourished throughout the Boyne Valley. Although the Irish language was widely spoken around Drogheda until the 19th century (when it rapidly declined as an outcome of the Famine, just like in the rest of the country), this town was always culturally influenced by its proximity with Dublin. Such influence, together with the role of Drogheda as an important harbour for the British Empire, allowed the emergence of English as the vernacular language already between the 17th and 18th centuries, introduced by Protestant settlers and sailors (Carolan 2023, p.662).

New songs and ballads were also introduced, and it is in this context that the figure of the 18th-century balladeer John Sheil became extremely relevant. This songwriter, defined as the 'best English-Irish poet before Yeats' (Moulden 2021) has been one of the first authors from the Boyne Valley to write ballads in Hiberno-English, contributing to the passage from the Irish language to English as everyday language in Ireland, 'transferring the melodies and sound-patterns of Gaelic song into new songs in English' (Murphy 2018).

Sheil was born around 1784 in Co. Armagh, as his family was from the Portadown area. He then moved to Drogheda, where he became associated with Patrick Kelly, an active ballad printer in the town and founder of the *Drogheda Argus* (and who printed much of

Sheil's work). The work of Kelly in publishing English songs and importing British songbooks was so proficient that by 1845 Drogheda was considered as a town where 'printers could live exclusively by the printing of ballad sheets' (Carolan 2023, p.663). In Drogheda, Sheil wrote much of his most famous compositions, both love ballads as well as lines dedicated to the town, such as the song *Sweet Dooley Gate*. He died in Drogheda in 1872, and was buried in an unmarked grave near the town centre. Recently, a plaque was put at the graveyard entrance by the Louth Archaeological Society and the Old Drogheda Society to remember his contribution that inspired many other song writers all over the country (Murphy 2018).

Today, John Sheil is appreciated and remembered by an active group of local singers supporting music initiatives in town such as the Drogheda Traditional Music & Singing Weekend, and whose activities contribute in making Drogheda an important centre for Irish traditional singing. This group also includes Gerry Cullen, founding member of the Voice Squad, an internationally appreciated singing trio that toured internationally during the 1990s.

Another figure that enriches local music heritage between Co. Louth and Co. Meath is Francis Edward Ledwidge, a poet from Slane that contributed to the Irish Arts song development (Curtayne 1972). Born at the end of the 19th century, since his youth Ledwidge started writing first poems and songs dedicated to river Boyne, its valley and the national cause, that were published in local newspapers. He also joined First World War, where he got killed in 1917, and where he wrote his *Songs of the Fields* and *Songs of Peace*. Ledwidge's poetry has inspired different artists and musicians, including Michael Head, who used the poet's poems and words for his famous song cycle *Over the Rim of the Moon*. The cottage where Ledwidge lived, just outside of Slane, served as a museum open to visitors for several years but is now inactive. This small museum hosted the poet's works and artefacts from the War, alongside memorabilia of the period.

Another figure from Louth that deserves recognition is Mary Ann Carolan, who was born in 1902 in the village Tenure, near Drogheda. Her father, Pat Usher, was a renowned traditional musician in the locality and a fine exponent of the "old-style" concertina playing. After his death, Mrs Carolan continued her father's legacy, enriching it with a wide repertoire of local songs (Carolan 2023, p.667), being eventually defined as 'one of the finest female traditional singers in Ireland' (Corcoran 1982, p.2). Her recordings demonstrate how the influences of both Northern and Southern English dialects in Ireland converged in Co. Louth,

highlighting its status as a borderline region between two distinct geographical and administrative realities.

3.3.4. Piping Traditions in Drogheda and Armagh

Together with the harp, uilleann pipes represent an Irish symbolic musical instrument (O'Shea 2012), and the act of playing them – *uilleann piping* – has been inscribed in 2017 into the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage list. During the 19th century until the first years of the 20th century, Drogheda was also an active centre for pipers and reeds makers, with many pipers living and musicking in the area (Breathnach 1978). The connections of the town and its surroundings with this instrument are also linked with the modern-day revival of pipes, beginning with the establishment in 1968 of Na Píobairí Uilleann, the association of uilleann pipers, in Bettystown, a small village in Co. Meath south of Drogheda (Carolan 2023, p.661). This organisation was established also through the contribution of internationally renowned musicians Willie Clancy (Ní Chonaill 2023, p.63). The local piping tradition is particularly connected to two brothers, William and Charles Taylor, two musicians and pipes makers that introduced important innovations in the shape, mechanic and quality of the instrument and who are commemorated in a mural in Drogheda (Figure 42).



Figure 42: The mural in Drogheda town centre dedicated to the Taylor brothers (source: author).

William Taylor was born in Drogheda in 1834. His step-brother Charles (Charley) was then born in 1848. The two brothers followed their father's footsteps, a local piper who

taught them how to play and build the instrument (Matthews 2018). In the aftermath of the Famine, Irish pipes music went into decline, with many musicians and instrument makers moving to the New World, looking for a new life in cities of the American East Coast. The lack of economic stability connected to pipe making in Ireland determined the two brothers to emigrate to Philadelphia at some point between the 1850s and the 1860s (*ibid*.). Here, they made improvements to the instrument to meet the demands of a new audience, developing the modern uilleann pipes chanter (O'Connor 2001, p.67), and becoming 'crucial in supplying the piping needs of the many emigrant Irish pipers in the United States' (Carolan 2023, p.661). Their experience in the United States convinced them that the mild tones of the ordinary Irish pipes were too puny to meet the requirements of the American stage or dance hall, being a note or more below concert pitch (Matthews 2018). William Taylor in particular 'experimented, remodelled and developed a compact, substantial instrument of powerful tone, which blends agreeably with violin and piano' (*ibid*.).

The engineering and mechanical skills which enabled the Taylor brothers to make the various modifications, alongside with their talent as performers which ultimately changed the style of playing the uilleann pipes resulted in these Drogheda pipers becoming renowned across the piping world, with their hometown becoming synonymous with the uilleann pipes (*ibid*.) and a potential music tourism destination. The two Taylor brothers were not the only pipe makers that deserve a mention. Pat Ward (1845–1928) was another renowned uilleann piper and a young teenage pupil of William Taylor. Originally from Co. Meath, he then moved to Drogheda, where he developed his reputation as an excellent reed-maker (*ibid*.). The quality of his reeds became nationally renowned, with many pipers travelling to Drogheda by train to visit Ward to get his products (Carolan 2023, p.661), establishing the town's reputation as a notable reed supply centre.

Despite the recognition figures like the Taylor brothers and Pat Ward have within the piping world, Drogheda is no longer an active centre for uilleann pipes and piping. In the city of Armagh, instead, the connection with this instrument is demonstrated by the presence of an important and extremely active piping club and the annual William Kennedy Piping Festival, an event dedicated to William Kennedy (1768–1834), a blind uilleann piper after which this festival is named. William Kennedy was born in Banbridge, and he experienced the first cultural and music revival in the country, signed by the 1792 Harp Festival in Belfast. While he was working in Armagh, he developed an interest in uilleann pipes, combining his love for music with his carpentry skills (Moley 2015, pp.65-66). Soon, Kennedy began fixing instruments and creating new sets of pipes, introducing new elements such as keys on the

chanter to enable the playing of sharp and flat notes, or the keyed regulators (*ibid*.). Just like Drogheda, Armagh too became an important centre for uilleann piping in Ireland, with the reputation of Kennedy spreading across the country, and leaving a deep footprint in the county's musicscape.

3.3.5. Fiddle Tradition(s)

Following the seminal work of Seán Ó Riada (Shields and Gershen 2000; O'Shea 2008; Kaul 2009), regional traditions and identities within Irish traditional music have been widely examined by Daithí Kearney (2009; 2013a; 2021) and Niall Keegan (2010). Other authors have focused more on how these elements are reflected into instrumental practices, leading to the analysis of how musical instruments such as the fiddle are played according to a given regional style (Mac Aoidh 1994; Sweeney 2017).

The area north of Dundalk, despite being overlooked in recent narratives about Irish traditional music, has been homeplace to fiddle and violin players that contributed in enriching local music scene through educational activities and innovative approaches. In particular, the presence of both traditional fiddlers as well as classically-trained violinists has contributed in creating a context in which several renowned fiddlers and music gatekeepers have developed a way of playing that combines Irish technique and ornaments together with Classical music's style and precision, giving birth to the so-called "Louth style" (Lynch 2022). These musicians still remain primarily traditional musicians; nevertheless, by introducing dynamics and nuances from the world of Western Art music, they help in shaping a regional fiddle style in Co. Louth.

A relevant Classical violin tradition developed in Dundalk due to the figure of Fr Brendan McNally (1933–2017), a priest who served in a number of parishes throughout Louth, but is best known for his work as music teacher and violinist. Originally from Co. Antrim, Fr McNally was ordained in 1958 and began teaching music with string instrument classes while based in Ravensdale where he also established a youth orchestra (Irish Independent 2017). He also established the Redeemer Youth Orchestra which performed in the United States. Many of his students have become professional musicians, joining prestigious orchestras and chamber ensembles internationally. The recital room at Dundalk Institute of Technology is named in his honour.

Another family from Ravensdale, the O'Connor, is extremely relevant on the Irish traditional music side of teaching and fiddling in the area. Rose O'Connor (1920–2008) is

regarded as a fundamental figure within Louth's music ecosystem (Carolan 2023, p.666). She taught music to a multitude of students over the years, ensuring a vital continuance of the tradition. Her approach combined both traditional as well as Classical music, and her family is still active in musicking internationally. Gerry O'Connor (*b*.1958), Rose's son, is a celebrated performer and freelance musician, and a four-time winner of the Fiddler of Oriel competition. Through his recordings he evoked a regional identity through references to local folklore and themes, performing a repertoire from local sources (Kearney 2021, p.10). He is also a luthier and a collector, who recently published a collection of tunes from the Oriel region based on the Donnellan collection (O'Connor 2018). His sons Dónal, Feilimí and Finnian are also acclaimed musicians, who promote intensively music initiatives between Dundalk and Belfast.

Jim McKillop (*b*.1946) is another fiddle player musicking in the area. Originally from Cushendall, Northern Ireland, he developed an interest in the fiddle when he was 26 years old. Four years later, and without any formal tuition, he won different international competitions, becoming an All-Ireland champion at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 1976 (Féile Oriel 2024). In order to explore new techniques in instrument making/performance he travelled to Italy to learn about the standards of excellence in Classical music performance, an aspect he has included in his approach since. Just like Gerry O'Connor, he is also a luthier, supplying high-quality violins in the area. A documentary entitled *From a Forest to a Fiddle* was presented in Dundalk in May 2024; this art-film captures Jim McKillop 'as he breathes life into wood, creating a fiddle in his rural workshop for the last time' (An Táin Arts Centre 2024).

An internationally acclaimed fiddler and Fleadh champion, who plays a Jim McKillop instrument, is Zoë Conway (*b*.1981). Zoë 'is an accomplished traditional fiddle player and singer, performing with many acts such as Riverdance, Damien Rick and Nick Cave. As well as this, Zoë is an established classical violinist and has performed with orchestras in Ireland, the UK and Germany, many times as a soloist' (Moley 2015, p.29). Her figure has been deeply analysed by Kerri Lynch, who recognised the blend between Irish traditional and Classical music within her fine way of playing (2022). As demonstrated later, Conway has contributed significantly to aspects of music activities in Co. Louth, particularly in her role as director of Féile na Tána and of the Carlingford Heritage Centre's Concert Series.

Other relevant figures from the local fiddling tradition include Noreen McManus and Josephine Keegan. Born in New York city to parents originally from Monaghan, McManus

(*b*.1963) moved back to Ireland in the mid-1970s. Here she became a cornerstone for many sessions over several decades. She actively taught Irish music and fiddle in Louth and Monaghan, becoming a CCÉ teacher in Carrickmacross – Co. Monaghan – and Dunleer – Co. Louth; here she actually contributed in establishing a local new CCÉ branch named *Cú Chulainn* (formerly J.J. Gardiner). Noreen is also the leader of a céilí band, and one of the musical directors and co-founders of the Oriel Traditional Orchestra.

Josephine Keegan (*b*.1935) was born in Dundee, Scotland, but then she moved with her family to Co. Armagh in 1939 and later to the village of Mullaghbawn, South Armagh, in 1950 (Fegan 2011). Her experience as fiddler as well as piano player, accompanist and composer well exemplifies the different roles played and challenges faced by female Irish traditional musicians in the 20th century (Kearney 2022a). Keegan was a prolific recording artist in the context of Irish traditional music from the 1960s until the 1980s. Her contribution was initially as accompanist to musicians including Jim McKillop, but between 1977 and 1982 she recorded five solo albums on the fiddle. These solo recordings were valuable in establishing her identity as a fiddle player and solo artist. She was also an innovator, as she faced social and cultural norms including the presence of women in pubs, 'attitudes that Keegan challenged and overcame as a pioneering female performer in a male-dominated society' (*ibid*., p.86). She was not the first Irish female musician to achieve prominence, but her revolutionary attituded opened these spaces to women musicians, becoming a role model for the next generations, with performances in DkIT that focused on her repertoire (Crawford 2018; Kearney 2018).

This dynamism in fiddling in Louth, at the crossroad between traditional elements and Classical nuances, represents a dynamic tradition that reflects continuous development and contaminations. As Gergory Dorchak writes in relation to Cape Breton fiddle traditions, 'to think of cultural practices only via stylistic terms can hamper the ability of a tradition to adapt to the inevitable changes that occur within a community' (2008, p.53). The blending of Irish traditional with Classical music as a regional form of playing the fiddle demonstrates how new spaces and soundscapes are part of the evolution of regional identities in the tradition (Kearney 2021, p.7).

3.3.6. Classical and Contemporary Music in Louth

Co. Louth and surroundings do not offer traditional music only, but they can also count on a good proposal of non-Irish music events. The territory proposes numerous chances to enjoy Chamber, Contemporary or Baroque music, and the relevance Arts music has within Co. Louth's soundscape has been also evidenced by some interviewees. Co. Louth can count on a multitude of Classical music organisations operating in the territory, providing high culture entertainment along the year. In particular, Classical music organisations and events include:

1. Drogheda Classical Music Series;
2. Ardee Baroque Festival;
3. Boyne Music Festival;
4. Louth Contemporary Music Society Festival.

An analysis of these events will be provided in Chapter 4 within a section dedicated to music festivals in the region. These music initiatives contribute to shaping imaginaries of Co. Louth as a music cluster, where different music events flourish within a relatively small territory along the year. In particular, the Drogheda Classical Music Series and the Louth Contemporary Music Society bring every year in the county leading artists, performers and composers from the Western Art music scene, which enhance their reputation as high quality events.

3.3.7. Pop, Country and Alternative Music

Beyond Western Art music, Co. Louth and Dundalk are the hometown of one of the most important 1990s Irish folk pop bands, the Corrs. This band, alongside other ensembles such as U2 and Cranberries, combined folk and traditional sounds together with popular music, becoming an internationally acclaimed project. Nevertheless, while other cities and towns have connected famous musicians or bands to their identities and sense of place – as the Beatles and Liverpool (Jones 2020) or Elvis Presley and Memphis (Gibson and Connell 2007) cases have demonstrated – Dundalk was not able to capitalize on this resource, celebrating the Corrs only through an already mentioned mural. Bagatelle was another important Irish pop-rock ensemble, born at the end of the 1970s. Although the band never attained international acclaim, they influenced many other Irish groups, and their name is still popular on the island. Even if the band was formed in Bray, Co. Wicklow (where a memorial bench was installed in September 2025 – Irish Independent 2025), former

frontman Liam Reilly, one of the finest Irish pop singers, was born in Dundalk, and his figure was remembered during the 2024 edition of Legends of Louth (Roddy 2024b). More recent bands from Dundalk include the Mary Wallopers, an emerging folk rock group featuring Finnian O'Connor – Gerry O'Connor's son – that have begun touring internationally. Arising from the local traditional and folk music scene, these musicians continue to enrich and take part in Dundalk's night sessions when they are not on tour.

Country music is another genre quite popular in the territory. More specifically, the neighbour Co. Monaghan retains important connection with it. Here, regionally acclaimed events such as the Countryfest in the village of Inniskeen, the Harvest Time Blues Festival and the Country Music Festival in Monaghan provide entertainment for a younger audience during the spring and summer seasons. The town of Castleblayney is significant in this regard, as its urban environment is constellated by references to its connection with the Country music scene. In 2018, the bronze statue of "Big Tom" McBride, one of the most important Irish Country music musician (Gilmore 2018), was unveiled in the Castleblayney's Market Square, while murals dedicated to Paddy Cole and other prominent showband musicians have been pictured all over the town. Such situation resembles that of other Irish towns, where the local music tradition has been "fixed" and physically represented and translated through tangible devices like monuments and plaques (V. Commins 2019). Something similar occurred in Dundalk, where a new plaque was unveiled to commemorate the Miami Showband, an acclaimed 1960s Irish pop-rock ensemble involved in a ferocious massacre carried out by the UVF[9] on the 31st July 1975, when three members lost their lives in a shooting (Dundalk Leader 2025a). Through this plaque, Dundalk has created a tangible link to the band's history, absorbing its tragic fate within its own sense of place and collective memories.

Alternative sounds have also their celebration through big events such as the Fuinneamh and the Otherside Music & Arts Festivals (located near Dundalk and Slane), where DJ sets are mixed with Celtic aesthetics in impressive experiences.[10] While these events are not furtherly explored in this dissertation, they provide potential to explore the diversification of tourist activities in response to niche interests, with opportunities presented by different genres of music.

[9] *Ulster Volunteer Force* – a loyalist paramilitary group involved in the Troubles.
[10] A new festival, named Aurfest, saw its first edition in July 2025 at Bellurgan Park, Dundalk. A community festival with limited capacity, this event blends music, performances, art installations and workshops.

3.4. Music Venues and Spaces

The music ecosystem in Co. Louth is sustained by an active environment of pubs and venues hosting music and musicians every week. Both traditional music events and happenings like sessions and pop/rock performances are held in public houses and bars, which represent important institutions to preserve and keep music scenes on a local and communitarian level (S. Cohen 1993). Dundalk and Drogheda in particular can count on many pubs where musicians are invited to perform every week. In Dundalk, the Spirit Store, Mo Chara, Phoenix Bar, Russell's, Corbetts, the Tipsy Cow, Toales, the Bartender, the Viper Room and the Northend Bar emerged as main music venues during my fieldwork. North of Dundalk, Lumpers Bar is another important place, where the music community living around Ravensdale gathers here on Thursday night with members of the Mary Wallopers for traditional sessions. South of Dundalk, the Glyde Inn is instead a gastropub in Anagassan, a small village of Viking origins facing the Irish Sea, where music (traditional and Classical) is employed to cheer up customers' dinner on particular occasions. In Drogheda, important pubs and bars were the Admiral, Boomerang Cafe, Clarkes Bar, Duende Bar, McHugh's, the Grey Goose, Odd Mollies, Peggy Moore's, the Market Bar and the Punt. Carberry's was an important place where musicians in Drogheda used to meet in the past, but this pub is permanently closed now. Nevertheless, its entrance, with the name written in Irish – Ní Cairbre – still enriches the town's streetscape.

The Spirit Store in particular retains a special position among Louth's pubs. This place is an important space for popular and community music in Dundalk, attracting audiences from throughout the region, as it provides a stage for concerts, while it also hosts traditional sessions on Sunday afternoon, together with open mic nights. It also supports the Louth Contemporary Music Society Festival, being a traditional venue for this event. The Phoenix Bar holds a notable place in Dundalk's rock music history. While it currently serves as a regular venue for Irish traditional musicians – hosting weekly sessions every Thursday night – this historic pub, the oldest in Dundalk, was once a favourite drinking spot for international rock stars such as Phil Lynott and Eric Clapton during their visits to the town. However, this interesting aspect of Dundalk's history is preserved only through oral accounts, as no plaques or official markers commemorate these facts.

Beyond pubs and bars, other important venues are represented by churches and chapels in the region. Churches and ecclesiastical buildings often serve as venues for musical gatherings. The territory is disseminated by small places of worship and major cathedrals that host Classical music concerts all along the year, offering performances in spaces

renowned for their exceptional acoustics. Some of these buildings are also landmarks and key components of local heritage, seamlessly combining music with tangible cultural assets. From my experience, Churches of Ireland are generally more welcoming to music initiatives than Catholic ones. Both spaces have music during liturgies but Catholic churches do not often host musical events that are not connected to religious services.

The territory can also count on a series of theatres that propose diverse forms of entertainment, including musical one. In Drogheda, the Barbican Centre is a multi-functional building equipped to host different activities, from performances in its main theatre to workshops in the rooms upstairs. The Tommy Leddy Theatre and the Crescent Concert Hall contribute in delivering music experiences of different shapes and genres in town, while in Co. Monaghan, the Íontas Theatre in Castleblayney and the Garage Theatre in Monaghan town work to bring in the community educational, creative and artistic endeavours. Thanks to the Adelphi Theatre, Dundalk too was once a destination for tours of international Irish and non-Irish acclaimed performers. However, this venue closed during the 1990s, and now its spaces host a series of restaurants and take-away outlets.

Another important typology of venues is represented by Arts Centres in the area, such as the Oriel and An Táin Arts Centres in Dundalk, the Droichead Arts Centre in Drogheda, and the Carlingford Heritage Centre. Noteworthy are also the An Grianán in Termonfeckin and Scoraíocht Lann Léire in Dunleer (both in Co. Louth), and the Patrick Kavanagh Centre in Inniskeen (Co. Monaghan).

The former Dundalk Gaol hosts the Oriel Centre, a regional centre working under the auspices of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, servicing counties Cavan, Monaghan, Louth, Meath and Armagh. The Gaol combines the role of a resource centre, a museum and an education, as well as performance, space. It also includes a small shop where books and recordings linked to the local repertoire are sold. The Centre is hosted in a historic building deeply connected to Dundalk's history, and an interview with its manager highlighted the process that brought from a vacant and abandoned space in 1997 – when Louth County Council took first renovation on it – to 2007, when Comhaltas transformed it into a regional centre to cover the north-east of Ireland:

> […] This place kind of closed in 1991 until 2009 and it was not abandoned but just used by the Council as a place to store things, nothing more than that […]. The jail closed in 1931 […] by the 1950s, this place was like derelict. I think it was 1997 that the Council took on the first renovation of this building. So they

> renovated this building here and they renovated the other cell block, which now houses the Louth County Archive. […] The plan at that point was to use both buildings as part of the Louth County Archive: that building over there was for holding all the material, and this building I think was intended to be the public reading space. I think that was the intention. I have no idea what happened in the Council, why that never came to fruition. They just had that building and used that building. And here was left vacant […] So by the early 2000s, it was sitting empty, and it was still empty by 2006. At that point they [*the Council*] were wondering 'what are we going to do with it? We need it used for something'. The [*former*] Tourism Officer, was involved with them at the time. I think she was the one that suggested to the Council about Comhaltas using it (interview with the author, November 30th, 2023).

A guided tour is available to discover more about it and its activity as prison from 1854 to 1931. This tour is free of charge, and it includes one hour walk within and around the jail's perimeter. Aspects of its functioning are highlighted, together with details concerning its history. However, the walking tour reflects issues in the Centre management, at least from a tourism perspective. While the building has been fully restored after a period of abandonment lasted for approximately twenty years, the external yard within the jail's walls is still used as deposit by the Louth County Council, giving the impression of a never-ending worksite. While the tour provides many information and anecdotes, informative content is presented in a poor layout, as it is mainly made up of prints attached to dividers (Figure 43). This gives the impression that materials within the Gaol are just part of a temporary installation.



Figure 43: Oriel Centre's panels and figures presented during the walking tour (source: author).

As a foreign visitor, but also as a music student enrolled at the centre, I was expecting some information on Oriel music traditions, but such heritage was never mentioned during the visit. Nevertheless, despite this missing aspect – as the guide's focus and expertise are limited to the town's history – the walls of the main hall host panels concerning Oriel's music and poetry traditions (Figure 44). Music is nowadays the most important element within the Gaol, where highly qualified teachers provide Irish traditional music lessons. Apart from educational aspects, the Centre hosts weekly sessions and performances with emerging and renowned traditional musicians. These aspects will be discussed in Chapter 4.



Figure 44: One of the panels within the Oriel's Centre main hall, dedicated to local harpers (source: author).

The An Táin Arts Centre is an independent and multivalent arts venue set in Dundalk town centre opened in 2014. It works as a place for exhibitions and artistic/music performances. Composed by two theatres, a gallery for exhibitions and diverse artist studios, the centre actively supports local artists and cultural enjoyment in the town.

Established in 1989, the Droichead Arts Centre in Drogheda is a hub that manages and organises different events in Drogheda during the year. While it coordinates and supports different initiatives happening around the town, its main building is located near the local library, and it is a space that provides a gallery and a theatre used for a variety of events including, professional, semi-professional, and community performances, concerts, launches and conferences. The theatre also boasts a large film screen and projector to facilitate cinema, live opera screenings, and presentations (Droichead Arts Centre 2025). The centre actively collaborates with some music festivals including the Drogheda Traditional Music & Singing Weekend, as many of its volunteers and coordinators are also part of the centre's committee. Throughout the year, this centre hosts a series of slow session open to players of any instrument and at any level to give them the chance of making practice and learn Irish traditional tunes in a friendly and relaxing environment. Participants usually learn a selection

of tunes including a couple of local ones from Co. Louth and well known tunes from across the country (*ibid*.).

Located in a former Church of Ireland building, the Carlingford Heritage Centre is a small venue used for events and weddings. The acoustics allow for concerts without the necessity of amplification systems. The Centre hosts two main music events: the Spring and the Summer Concert Series, two initiatives directed by Zoë Conway and John McIntyre, Zoë's husband and a guitarist highly influenced by Donegal music, formerly a member of The Revs, an Indie Rock band that toured internationally.

Not too far from Drogheda, the town of Termonfeckin is home to An Grianán, an 18th century mansion set in a quite garden, and venue since the 1920s for the Irish Countrywomen's Association. This building proposes nowadays one-day, midweek and weekend courses in art, crafts, cookery, leisure, personal development and selfcare for individuals or groups of adults at any age and skill level, providing also accommodation (An Grianán 2021). In January, this mansion hosts the Termonfeckin Set Dancing Festival, while in June, An Chúirt Chruitireachta (International Harp Festival), one of most relevant events for harpers and a prestigious masterclass attended by many pupils coming from all Ireland and abroad, is held here.

The town of Dunleer hosts an interesting school of Irish traditional music. Scoraíocht Lann Léire is an institution funded in 1974 by Sean Ó Flanagan with the aim to promote Irish music, history and culture in the Mid-Louth area, proposing sessions and music classes during the week (Carolan 2023, p.667). Run on a voluntary basis, this school offers classes in different Irish traditional music instruments, together with occasional events such as those connected to its recent 50th anniversary. With its inside that recalls an old countryside cottage, Scoraíocht Lann Léire represents another institution in Louth delivering Irish traditional music through education in a fascinating setting, where music edutainment phenomena can be developed.

Finally, the Patrick Kavanagh Centre is also home to a series of performances and concerts. Beyond the tour experiences connected to the life and history of the poet, this centre has an interest in connecting the figure of Kavanagh and the village of Inniskeen with Irish traditional music practices, functioning as an important stage in the region.

These venues provide, in different ways and moments, multiple opportunities to approach and engage with music, advancing the concept of musicking (Small 1998) in Louth and its surroundings. Moreover, such a variety of venues moves beyond a reductive vision

of music in Ireland made of "didlee-eye" songs and pubs, providing a deeper understanding of music production and enjoyment on a regional level, where uncelebrated and amateur musics (such as open mic scenes, buskers, adults learning groups etc.) have their own dignity and value within the local soundscape (S. Cohen 1993; O'Flynn and Mangaoang 2019).

3.5. Mapping Music in Louth

In order to facilitate the understanding of Louth music's tourism potential, part of my research was dedicated to the realisation of a "music map" of the county and of its surroundings, where musical points of interest – such as local traditions, venues, pubs and festivals – are evident. This interdisciplinary initiative examined the music experiences in the north-east of Ireland, providing data that could be used both for music ethnography and tourism development strategies. This activity highlights the contribution of maps to a greater understanding of the relationship between tourism, music and place (Cohen and Roberts 2013), challenging more traditional and standardised cartographic representations focused on physical and tangible characteristics of areas and communities.

The music map of Co. Louth was developed through different forms of data collection, mixing approached and theories, while exploiting the opportunities provided by digital applications. Direct experience in the field, comprehensive of participant observation (Dei 2016) and field-playing activities (Rice 2008) while attending music-related initiatives in the territory, together with semi-structured qualitative interviews collected with events' organisers, tourism providers and musicians from the region, contributed to inform my knowledge of the territory and its resources. I took notes about venues and events I attended or where I performed. Printed and online materials such as brochures and tourism guides were also an interesting source for this study; here, I was able to find additional info on initiatives and places that may appeal visitors in the area. Some academic books and articles were also a valuable source, especially from a historical perspective of music and musicians in the area. This was also augmented by some netnographic research, and it was contextualised with reference to literature review on Irish music, ethnography and tourism studies (Kneafsey 2003; Gibson and Connell 2005; Kaul 2009; Mangaoang 2023).

The majority of data were gained through cartographic activities involving stakeholders during my fieldwork. Participative cartographic practices emerged as an interesting opportunity to apply music studies within a geographic perspective, and reflected their importance within territorial and tourism planning strategies (Casti 2006; Burini 2012).

Participative and bottom-up ways of representing the local space contribute in making local stakeholders the main actors and operators of their own culture and territory (Kavanagh 2020), thus reducing the risk of omitting anything they may feel as relevant, and enabling the opportunity to represent actively their musical sense of place (Dillane and Langlois 2021). The SIGAP Strategy (Geographical Information Systems for Protected Areas[11]), used primarily within environmental and territorial studies (Casti 2006; Burini 2015), emerged as a useful model with potential for replication. This model provides the opportunity of collecting and presenting the landscape through participative cartographic practices, forecasting the direct engagement of inhabitants of a territory. Through the use of digital mapping supports, the SIGAP strategy has been used in Western Africa (Casti 2006) and around Bergamo, Italy (Burini 2015) to decode the social and cultural values of protected areas for local inhabitants. This activity can help in identifying elements that are known and important for the local community, while an external viewer might not notice them. Such an approach provides outcomes for multiple uses concerning territorial development and strategic management. The SIGAP Strategy thus emerges as a useful tool to enable music-related figures, tourism operators and other stakeholders to actively engage in the definition of what is represented within a map with the scope of enhance future promotion materials and tourism development – able to respect locals' wills and desires.

While maps are useful instruments to share, gather and present data that can be easily understood from a wider audience (Cohen and Roberts 2013), new digital tools advance such possibilities even further, with systems like online maps and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) that can gather greater sources of data and store them into virtual databases. These digital devices represent an opportunity to create highly detailed cartographic products in digital formats, which can be easily shared and integrated within other informatic systems, such as presentations, but also websites and apps. Such maps have also potential within the tourism industry, where different products (from tourism brochures to road tour apps) are created. In particular, travel companies have recognised the commercial appeal of music cultures and "musicscapes" (Cohen and Roberts 2013), and thus a greater number of music maps have been progressively realised internationally (Lashua et al. 2010; S. Cohen 2012; O'Flynn and Mangaoang 2019; Jones 2020).

Influenced by the work of Italian geographer Federica Burini (2015) and Irish music-geographer Aoife Kavanagh (2020), parts of interviews carried out with local musicians were dedicated to the collection of geographical data. During these meetings, a question

[11] In Italian, *Sistemi Informativi Geografici per le Aree Protette*.

concerning the identification of "music elements", on a map, was incorporated into the interviews. At first, I used an online OpenStreetMap base; then, I optioned for a printed tourism road map comprehensive of Counties Louth, Meath, Monaghan and Armagh (to overcome issues concerning internet connection and the use of a laptop during my meetings). Interviews thus represented an important opportunity to complete and update a digital support where music-related elements are represented under a visual perspective. A first pilot project involving Umap, a free software that allows users to create maps using OpenStreetMap layers, was created. This first draft forecasted the presence of music-related sites (such as graveyards and venues) and festivals' locations, as well as heritage and natural sites like castles, churches, ruins and hiking trails located in scenic areas. A border to highlight my area of research was also established (Figure 45).

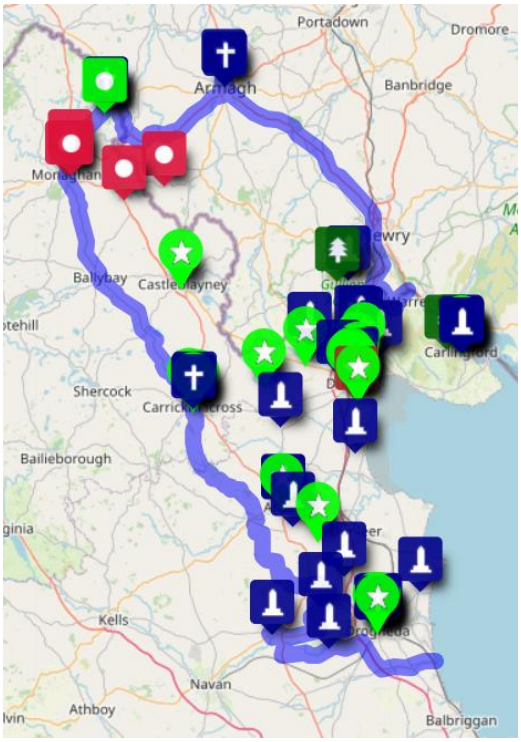


Figure 45: Pilot participative map realised on Umap (source: author).

"Tangible" heritage sites were then removed from the map to provide an easier readability. The border too was not included in following products, since such a strong delimitation was not able to express the connections underpinning the nuanced reality of music and culture in this region. Once the data were collected, these were uploaded on ONA, a software developed by the Columbia University's Earth Institute to sustain participative collection of georeferenced data, where I opened an account and a private project. A

taxonomy of different elements and locations was created and inserted within a form uploaded on a phone application named ODK Collect and connected to my ONA personal project. Once all of the data were imported into ONA, a comprehensive file was downloaded and inserted within a new QGIS project. I eventually realised a QGIS (Quantum Geographic Information System) map (Figure 46), where different layers can be selected according to the focus of analysis and the scale of observation (Figure 47). Points of Interests (POIs) were divided according to their typology. Here I identified, alphabetically:

1. Cathedrals and holy sites where music is hosted;
2. Classic music festivals;
3. Spaces where music education is provided;
4. Graves and plaques associated with local musicians and singers;
5. Hotels and conference centres where concerts and other events are held;
6. Houses where musicians lived or their places of birth;
7. Irish traditional music festivals;
8. Murals where music elements are drawn;
9. Music/poetry museums;
10. Music production places (such as venues) no longer operating or closed;
11. Musicians statues;
12. Official music venues like theatres;
13. Other elements not previously mentioned.
14. Other music festivals or events that include music within their main activities;
15. Pubs that host music nights;

Labels associated with these POIs were also introduced this time (Figure 48). Metadata of this project comprehends names, latitude and longitude, a brief description and possibly pictures.

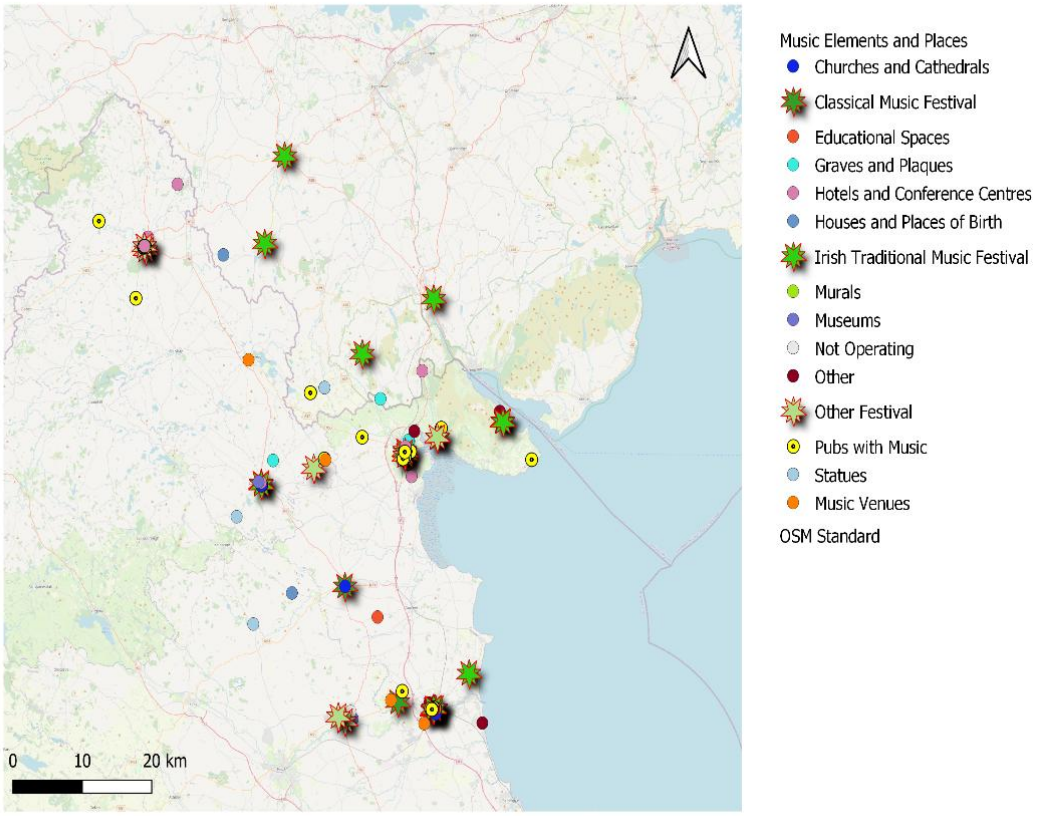


Figure 46: QGIS music map of Co. Louth with all the POIs (source: author).

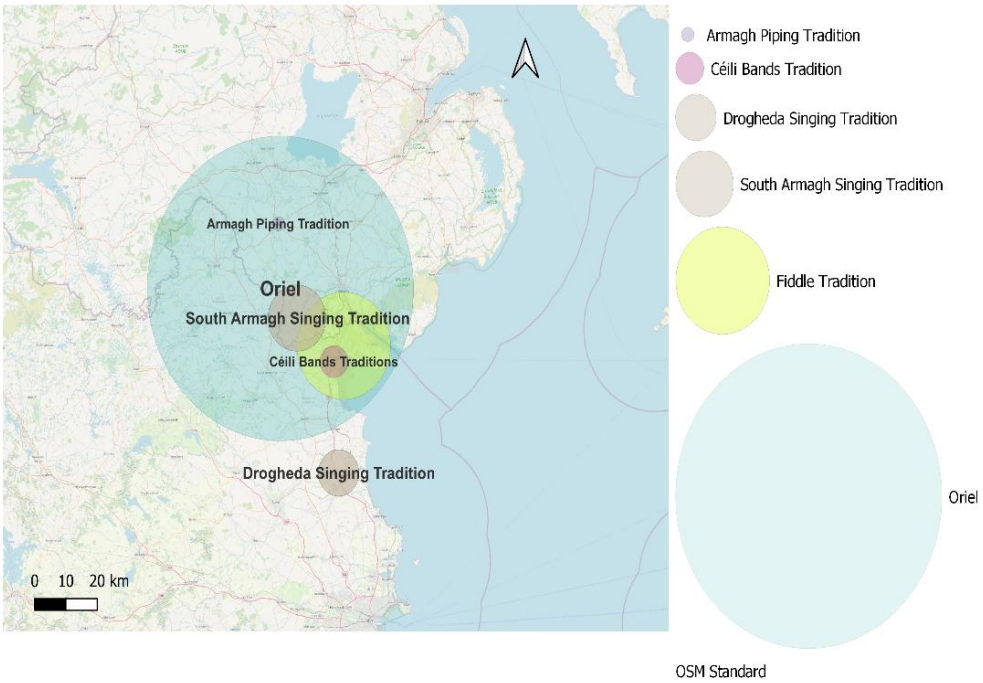


Figure 47: Detail of regional traditions (source: author).

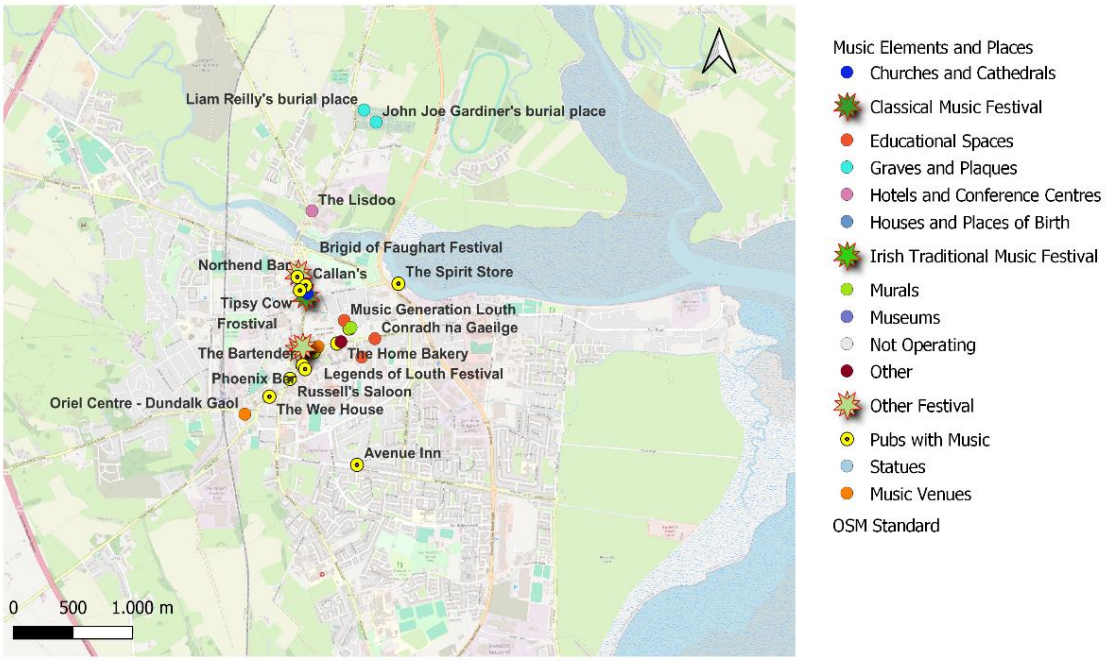


Figure 48: Detail of Dundalk (source: author).

This initiative has provided an effective representation of local music heritage, informed by a mixed approach shaped by two diverse perspectives: my own gaze – representing a "foreign" (or even etic – see Barz and Cooley 2008) viewpoint – and that of those who "make" culture and music on the ground (e.g. local musicians and actors involved in heritage promotion and maintenance). Through this participative cartographic experience, these people had the opportunity to share with me what they consider to be their musical heritage, demonstrating the importance of adopting a participatory strategy when conducting research in the field. The final product (a QGIS file) can serve as a model for future research and studies, but it can also be integrated within future projects to implement and sustain both music and tourism development initiatives in the region. Although the map is not publicly accessible at the moment, a folder containing all related data can be easily shared to allow users navigate within it.

This initiative provides further possibilities for tourism and territorial development and promotion in Louth, while it could also open to new forms of participative citizenship (Dillane and Langlois 2021). This map can inform local governments and tourism agencies, while new geographical tools for tourism related purposes can be realised. New geographical products might be used to expand visitors' perception of the visited environment, increasing their knowledge concerning local music traditions, consumption, practice and development. Recently, apps and online interactive maps have been realised to represent virtually cultural

points of interest. For example, an app to link the Wild Atlantic Way with its musicscape has been developed, in order to connect "on the road" travellers with the territory and the cultural practices that surround them. The Road Trip App has been developed by the Cultural Roadmap team with the aim to illuminate the richness and complexity of local culture and heritage through stories that "move with the tourist" during its trip. Directly connected to users' GPS, this tool allows them to listen to music and tales associated with the land they are travelling in (Cultural Roadmap 2020). A very similar initiative – that shows practical future outcomes for this project – was recently realised in Dublin, where Mapping Popular Music in Dublin (MPMiD), an applied research project based at Dublin City University with funding from Fáilte Ireland, brought to the creation of a music map of the city. This was done through interviews and questionnaires with visitors, citizens and musicians to get insights about their representations of the connection between music and place in the city (O'Flynn and Mangaoang 2019). In Co. Louth, something similar was realised within the Sea Louth initiative, a project developed between 2021 and 2022 dedicated to the promotion of Louth's seafood trail and its coastline (Figure 49). On the programme's website, an interactive map allows users to discover Louth's territory by clicking icons related to viewpoints, food producers and restaurants supporting the initiative (Sea Louth 2022).



Figure 49: A Sea Louth panel in Blackrock, Co. Louth (source: author).

3.6. Conclusions

This chapter has revealed the cultural and musical infrastructure of Co. Louth and of its surroundings, providing an overview of the territory while highlighting all the elements on which a regional music tourism development strategy can be developed. By highlighting local music and heritage sites as well as the musical history of the territory, the chapter has illustrated its cultural richness. Nevertheless, many aspects of local intangible heritage escape tourism promotion and development efforts, while music remains inadequately integrated with other significant themes and events. This highlights the need for a greater appreciation of musical activities in Louth to inform, embrace and convey local identities within tourism development strategies. A tool that was developed to enhance the link between music and tourism in Louth, and to facilitate the understanding of this connection, is the "music map" with all the different music-related themes from the region displayed on a digital map. Such representation conveys the music discourse within a traditional tourism device – something similar to city maps brochures – that can inspire future tourism strategies with a focus on music and sounds in the region. The experiential aspects of attending local music events, with specific regards to Irish traditional music sessions and Irish music festivals, is going to be addressed in the following chapter. Finally, a critique of current local tourism management and how music is (not completely) integrated or enhanced within it is going to be developed within the final section of the dissertation.

Chapter 4: Experiencing Music in Co. Louth

4.1. Introduction

While the previous section presented the infrastructure of music in Co. Louth with a focus on regional music heritage, this chapter examines the experience of current musical practice in the north-east of Ireland. It does so by critically reflecting on fieldwork experiences with a specific focus on sessions, concerts and music festivals, weighted towards but not exclusively dealing with Irish traditional music. Beyond this genre, I am focusing primarily on Western Art music events such as workshops and concert series dedicated to Baroque and Contemporary music, as these were more prominent in my observation. In this chapter, I present music experiences in Louth highlighting the elements noticed during my fieldwork between 2022 and 2024, focusing both on my subjective perception and the structural differences with music initiatives elsewhere, such as destinations reputed as important Irish traditional music centres characterised by higher tourism pressures. In addition, the analysis on sessions and music festivals offers the chance to discuss the dynamics between these events and their communities, noting how they can produce social value (Gradinaru 2021).

The different opportunities for musicking provide chances to discuss the diverse experiences visitors can encounter in Louth, as well as their qualities and characteristics. Rather than focusing on standardised tourism encounters in renowned Irish music destinations, I explore opportunities for intimate engagement with musical communities in the east of Ireland, which may lie outside of tourism expectations. Here I also highlight how such music encounters deal with themes like cultural consumption and commodification, staged authenticity and edutainment. The combination of education together with entertainment is evident in a number of initiatives observed during fieldwork. While this aspect expands and redefines the borders of concepts like experience and experiential tourism, edutainment within Louth's music-related events is no longer primarily targeted at children, as it was previously the norm, but it increasingly involves adult learners, as demonstrated through my field-play experience.

4.2. Irish Traditional Sessions in Louth

As already descripted in Chapter 2, sessions are a cornerstone of Irish traditional music, offering both musicians and music enthusiasts a unique space to engage and connect (O'Shea 2008; Kearney 2013b). My fieldwork enabled me to reflect on the way people – both musicians and listeners – engage with sessions in the area of research. My intention was to experience them from multiple perspectives – as a (foreigner and somehow tourist-like) listener and music enthusiast, but also as a practitioner who is learning the Irish technique on the flute (Morton 2005; Rice 2008). Additionally, I sought to identify similarities and differences in the quality and structure of local sessions compared to those held in more renowned and "touristified" regions of Ireland.

In the process of field research, I joined sessions in Co. Louth (Figure 50), Co. Monaghan and Co. Armagh, experiencing the atmosphere and documenting the sensations felt over my two-years fieldwork activity. As the majority of night sessions are held in pubs, my understanding mainly reflects what people encounter within these environments. As it is dealt with in Chapter 2, night sessions are joined by several musicians from the area, who sit all around a reserved space (traditionally a table with some chairs and stools) that becomes more and more overcrowded as the night goes on. These performers are both learners and amateurs, but also professional musicians, who enrich the quality of the overall performances and sequence of tunes and songs. While in tourism destinations tourists sit near the musicians, watching very closely, often taking pictures or video-taping events and clapping at the end of each tunes (Kneafesy 2003, p.34), people in Louth – who are mostly locals – behave differently, giving limited attention the undergoing performance.



Figure 50: A session in Dundalk Town Centre, October 2024 (source: author).

During my fieldwork, I noticed some recurring elements. In contrast with the experience detailed by O'Shea (2008), people playing and joining a session in Louth demonstrate openness and interest towards new musicians and their repertoires or music styles, providing informal and friendly opportunities to move first steps into live music. Even neophytes to Irish traditional music are welcome to join the session circle; this allows them to play together with musicians with a consolidated background. A sense of "flow" (Sinnamon et al. 2012; Sparling and MacIntyre 2024) is soon established between participants, where musicians communicate among each other without words, as if they shared a common mind, switching from one melody to another, as if they were tuned on the same frequency. Various authors tried to describe the rules that govern sessions' etiquette, but these are not strictly followed (Tolmie et al. 2013). Most of the time, the shape of a session and its "management" depend on where you are, and with whom. As already discussed in the second chapter, a shared behaviour is usually established within a session, with higher status and older musicians somehow "controlling" the gathering, deciding the order of tunes to be played (Kaul 2007; Ó hAllmhuráin 2016) unless the session is specifically among friends or learners, where everyone is encouraged to contribute (O'Shea 2008). Many sessions in Louth are managed through a "circular" approach, in which each musician, in turn, is invited to start a piece or a song, regardless of age, origin, gender, or experience. This wider involvement contrasts with O'Shea's narration about the session

etiquette, where 'the tension between the welcome extended to outsiders and the barriers to being accepted as a fellow musician may result in a struggle over musical territory' (*ibid*., pp.94-97). Sometimes, it is possible to hear negative comments about outsiders and foreigners joining a session, bringing their external sounds and way of playing that could be perceived as disturbing elements for the local musicians (Kaul 2009, pp.121-127). While I faced difficulties in joining sessions during my time in Miltown Malbay, in Co. Louth I have been invited to join the table of musicians several times, where I was even asked to play "my tunes" (Italian folk pieces or my usual repertoire). Often, my participation during these events enabled me to experiment with some improvisation, combining Irish traditional music together with my background as Classical and Progressive rock musician. This happened also with other people coming from foreign countries such as Spain, Portugal, Norway, Venezuela and Ukraine. While our/their presence demonstrate the interest amongst persons from other places in this music (Kearney 2020), it also highlights opportunities of music diversification during sessions in Louth.

Other aspects of sessions in the north-east of Ireland follow traditional etiquette and rules. A characteristic feature of these gatherings is their tendency to start later than the scheduled time, reflecting an informal and relaxed approach to timekeeping (Irwin 2010; Kearney 2016). In addition, as many participants are local musicians, leaders of a session usually have their preferred seats and chairs within the circle of players, and sitting in their place might be perceived negatively. From a demographic perspective, sessions weekday sessions are predominantly attended by adult men, with women and younger participants (including children and teenagers) forming a minority. This preponderance of men playing in a session is traditionally attributed to old habits of women attending public houses, who had to face constrains such as caring and family responsibilities (Cusack 2021). I conducted interviews with different musicians attending sessions in the Dundalk area, and many of them were women. Róisín Ward Morrow, a fiddle teacher and emerging performer in her late twenties from the village of Dromiskin, was particular sensitive on this subject. As she said to me:

> I am the only woman of my age playing trad music around Dundalk. I grew up with a lot of girls playing. Where did they go? They are not going to pubs, they are not going out to play tunes. I would like to see more women involved, because a lot of times I feel like in lads' club. This happens a lot. That's ok, they are lovely lads altogether, but I would like to see more women coming back into it (interview with the author, February 28th, 2023).

According to my experience, Róisín was not the only young woman playing in sessions in the area, yet they certainly remain a minority.[12] Nevertheless, other women performers (both younger and older than Róisín) did not raise this aspect as a relevant issue. Olive Murphy, a local fiddle player and music teacher – and main coordinator of the adult ensemble Scale Force – discussed with me the limited presence of young people during night sessions. In her view, this is often due to age restrictions preventing under-18s from staying in pubs at night, when music events are on. Actually, she was a little bit critical in this regard. As she recalls:

> To me, children and families is where the music starts […] I do think that families with kids and under eighteens are forgotten about. […] For those families that are going to go out at 4/5pm and be home at 9pm because they have a young child or whatever there is nowhere for them to go. If they come here with young kids who play music, and are coming from abroad, maybe somewhere where there are no sessions […] then they arrive in Ireland and suddenly they are told "sorry your child cannot come in because it's after 9 o'clock". […] I do think there is a space there for to do family music at a time when families can actually attend (interview with the author, March 5th, 2023).[13]

However, the demographic balance can shift, and in certain events, older men may themselves become the minority. While "traditional" night sessions in pubs typically remain male-dominated environments (Monaghan 2021), newer contexts like festivals and education-related workshops tend to be more gender-balanced or even female-dominated (Cusack 2021) and are also more accessible to children and young learners. I remember initiatives within formalised contexts like workshops or sessions established within a festival where women not only constituted the majority of performers but were also frequently in facilitating roles. For example, this happened during a session following the Fleadh Workshop held at the Boomerang Cafe in Drogheda in 2022, led by female tutors from the local Comhaltas branch.

[12] The gendered dimension of the session lies beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, while the relationship between women and the Irish traditional music scene has been extensively explored (Cusack 2021; Monaghan 2021; Watson 2022; Cusack 2025), the role and positionality of women within niche music tourism experiences may be considered within the framework of future work.

[13] While this interview was conducted in early 2023, in late 2024 flute and accordion player Dave Sheridan started a family friendly session in partnership with Mo Chara, a pub in Dundalk. This is held once a month on Sunday afternoon, and welcomes everyone regardless of age, gender, instrument or music skills. Nevertheless, the majority of participants consists of young pupils and music tutors, with only a small number of adult learners taking part in the initiative.

4.3. Irish Traditional Music Concerts, Workshops and Festivals

Fieldwork activity has included the observation of and participation in several music festivals and initiatives like concerts and workshops in the area, as they retained a primary role within the research. These encounters offer enjoyable occasions to engage with Irish music, together with opportunities of discovering the territory where they are, thinking also about all the potentialities these events may have in enriching local tourism experience. All of the "festivals" attended in the area (which were often comprised of workshops, music masterclasses and public presentations mixed with music activities) remained small-scale, with the possibilities of meeting musicians and having chats with them in extremely informal and peaceful contexts. Alcohol consumption, a typical feature of larger Irish music festivals such as Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann (Cotter 2022; Ní Fhuartháin 2024), was not pronounced. These events offered opportunities for a full-immersion within the "trad world" in a more "intimate" and relaxed environment, providing qualitative experiences for developing a strong knowledge of local music heritage. In this sense, specificities of the events in Co. Louth and neighbouring regions are related to their niche and experiential aspect.

The most relevant Irish traditional music events within Co. Louth observed during my fieldwork were:

1. Féile na Tána;
2. Carlingford Heritage Centre Spring & Summer Concert Series;
3. An Chúirt Chruitireachta – International Harp Festival;
4. Séan Corcoran Series;
5. Boyne TradFest;
6. Drogheda Traditional Music & Singing Weekend;
7. Seisiún – Oriel Centre Summer Show Series.

Other Irish music festivals within the regional traditional music calendar include:

1. Féile Patrick Byrne;
2. Féile Oriel;
3. William Kennedy Piping Festival;
4. Féile na Bealtaine;[14]
5. Iúr Cinn Fleadh;[15]

[14] Féile na Bealtaine is an event organised in all Ireland to celebrate the arrival of the summer. I attended the closest initiatives, in Northern Ireland.
[15] I did not have the opportunity to attend this event. Hence, it is only mentioned here, without further descriptions.

6. Maid of the Mill.[16]

Despite a strong and wide community of musical practice, including a Comhaltas regional centre, no Irish traditional music festivals are held in Dundalk, with the exception of the Oriel Centre Summer Show Series. This reflects an interesting imbalance between Louth's major towns. In contrast, even if Drogheda has partially lost a vibrant music community that gathers to perform on a weekly basis and actively sustain the local soundscape, many traditional music initiatives and festivals are held in the town all along the year. This aspect is going to be developed further in Chapter 5 as part of the SWOT analysis realised to critically understand the potential for music tourism enhancement in the region.

4.3.1. Féile na Tána

Held in the village of Carlingford around the beginning of February to coincide with St Brigid's bank holiday, Féile na Tána is a small music festival curated by Zoë Conway and John McIntyre, who are the main members of the festival committee. Its first edition dates back to 2015, and it was inspired by Ceol Chairlinn, an older festival that had been running in Carlingford until 2012 (Moley 2015, pp.29-30). The namesake of the festival, connected with local mythology (Féile na Tána means Festival of the Táin in Irish, referring to the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*[17] cycle), highlights the sense of place underlying this event, enhancing an identity for the festival and its territory, inserting its activities and its community within a narration that traces connection with a legendary past (O'Shea 2008). Féile na Tána is currently sustained by approximately twenty volunteers, who assist Zoë and John in activities concerning catering, while the festival secretary, Elaine Harold, is involved in duties concerning the managing of bookings and the maintenance of the website. The festival is subsidised by Create Louth, the Arts service of Co. Louth, who awarded the event with €3,500 to sustain the 2024 edition (Roddy 2023). This made Féile na Tána the largest recipients of County Council Arts funding that year (*ibid*.). Local businesses that support the initiative are Carlingford's accommodation providers and local politicians, as mentioned on the festival's website (Féile na Tána 2024).

With a focus on local repertoire and music traditions (Moley 2015), Féile na Tána's main activities include Irish traditional music workshops in local schools with well-

[16] I did not have the opportunity to attend this event. Hence, it is only mentioned here, without further descriptions.
[17] The Cattle Raid of Cooley – the tale of the Celtic warrior *Cú Chulainn*.

established Irish musicians and concerts – both with masters as well as local music students – at St Michael's Hall, a former parochial hall (Oram 2007; Carolan 2023) and at the Carlingford Heritage Centre, in addition to singing circles and sessions in local pubs and hotels. Recently, initiatives such as heritage walking tours that engage with local built heritage have been included in the programme, diversifying the festival.

Féile na Tána's focus on music education is also enhanced by the involvement of local participants in Music Generation, Ireland's national music education programme (Moley 2015, p.34). Although Craobh Dhún Dealgan, the local Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann branch, is not directly involved in this festival, some of its teachers participated in sessions or attended concerts. Irish folk music is traditionally associated in tourism literature with pubs and alcohol consumption (Kaul 2009; Cotter 2022; Pessina 2024) to such an extent that the drinking industry actively promotes and sustains live Irish music scene (Minidio 2005; Foster 2008). However, this does not apply to Féile na Tána as the focus on education and the strong engagement with children and minors reduces considerably the alcohol consumption during most of the event.

The main concert is a showcase of all the tutors performing one after the other or in small ensembles, followed by a *finale* where they play together (Figure 51). The repertoire includes renowned instrumental tunes as well as local and lesser-known pieces, with Zoë incorporating also her compositions into the set. As stated by Zoë and John: 'we have been able to bring literally the best exponents of Irish traditional music to Carlingford' (interview with the author, May 19th, 2023). Tutors, mostly from outside the region, usually perform a couple of tunes each drawing from the wider Irish music repertoire, thus embracing a broader Irish music tradition comprehensive of different styles. Workshops at Féile na Tána are primarily aimed at young music pupils from the area, while the night-time music sessions are attended mainly by adults. In 2023, I joined the flute workshop with Louise Mulcahy, an award-winning flutist and piper. Workshops were based in a school ten minutes' drive from the village, and they lasted half a day. My class included different levels, from beginners to professional musicians (but other classes provided a division according to the level of their attendances). The lesson was dedicated to approaching new tunes that everyone was able to learn without difficulty.



Figure 51: Final tutors' concert at the St Michael's Hall during Féile na Tána 2023 (source: author).

Sessions are organised to bring music outside of the formalised contexts. Held in the bars of two Carlingford hotels, they were informal gatherings of musicians (festival's attendees plus additional performers) intended to play a common repertoire (Kearney 2013a) made of songs and tunes. I joined some sessions, noticing the inclusiveness that characterises these meetings, but also the lack of a democratic decision-making process when it came to deciding which set was the next one (a decision left to leading musicians). Notably, the majority of sessions were not held in pubs, which are perceived by many as the standard setting for this kind of events.

There is a strong connection between the Irish language and Irish traditional music, as the language is, together with music, integral to (Irish) identity, and it is still used in the construction and expression of nationalistic discourses and cultural consciousness (Anderson 2006). Within its activities, Féile na Tána places considerable attention towards the Irish language, as it is used to portray both place and community (Moley 2015, p.43). The festival's name is in Irish, as the organisers wanted to incorporate this language within the activities, highlighting the connections it retains with the local area (*ibid*., p.33). Féile na Tána, and Carlingford, are located in the Cooley Peninsula which, according to Ní Uallacháin (2003) was one of the main centres for Irish poetry within the Oriel tradition. Additionally, the nearby village of Omeath was the heart of the last surviving Gaeltacht in eastern Ireland. The inclusion of the Irish language in the festival programme paid tribute to the linguistic enclave that used to thrive in the area. Although Irish 'is no longer the predominant language in Carlingford or Omeath, there has been a resurgence in interest in

learning the language, with many people attending Irish classes and the establishment of an Irish Language Learning Centre in Omeath' (Moley 2015, p.43). Back in 2015, this learning centre actively proposed initiatives within the festival such as an Irish Language Table Quiz (*ibid*., p.38). However, no particular Irish classes or similar activities were recorded during my fieldwork. Nevertheless, the festival programme and website are both in English and Irish, and the Irish language is still actively used by Zoë and her guests to introduce and greet the audience at the beginning and at the end of every concert nor social activity. Still, this emphasis on the Irish language does not appear to have provided additional funding, as the event does not seem to have received extra grants from Irish language bodies.

According to Zoë and John, 'there is tourism potential with Féile na Tána' (personal communication with the author, May 19th, 2023). The festival attracts music enthusiasts and visitors from throughout Louth and surrounding counties, because of the presence of renowned tutor-performers. Some of these musicians have returned several times, securing a constant flow of attendants wishing to have lessons with them. From a tourism management perspective, it is possible to critique the event, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Even though Co. Louth receives few overseas and domestic tourists, Carlingford is one of the top destinations in the region. The village is very accessible from major Irish cities and the music events themselves welcome anyone with an interest in Irish music. Entry fees are relatively affordable, ranging from €15 to €35 per person. These events are small and intimate initiatives, proposing high-quality music consumption. This aspect allows for a deeper immersion within the music discourse and among its practitioners, similarly to other niche activities (Porfido 2022). From a tourism perspective, Féile na Tána is the only Irish traditional musical event in Carlingford outside of the tourist season, in a period when the competition between destinations and music festivals is less fierce (Moley 2015). This means that Féile na Tána can easily emerge and get recognition within the Irish traditional music calendar by using its small-scale character as a unique selling proposition.

Nevertheless, the event and its presentation suffer from structural weaknesses that force it to remain intended primarily for a local audience. The village can only be reached by bus for those relying on public transport. Even if Carlingford is considered as a top destination within Louth's tourism supply, references to its music initiatives are missing in tourism marketing campaigns, which are primarily focused on its built heritage (Wilson et al. 2018). Posters and brochures promoting the event were detected only at the St Michael's Hall entrance and the Carlingford Tourist Office. This may impact on the potential of the

festival to attract funding from the tourism and hospitality industry, which often places an emphasis on "bed nights". Moreover – as confirmed through personal communication with the Carlingford Tourist Office (May 26th, 2025) – Féile na Tána has no significant impact on the occupation rate of local accommodation (despite the support of a few hotels and B&Bs). In addition, the festival's activities are facilitated in schools, small halls and churches, signifying the absence of bigger infrastructures and venues. Furthermore it was remarkable that sessions were not held in pubs, which are typical spaces for these kinds of events. This probably reflects Carlingford's publicans' perception of this music festival as commercially unviable, leading them to focus on more remunerative events like hen and stag parties or sport events broadcasting (Irish Independent 2012). It is also notable that there are no regular Irish traditional music sessions in Carlingford outside the festival period, thus limiting its conceptualisation as a music tourism destination. In addition, the figures of Zoë and John are fundamental for the realisation of Féile na Tána. The event is not a community-led initiative, but the product of two musicians and cultural entrepreneurs that dominate the local creative landscape and work to sustain Irish music locally, while seeking to generate additional income and increasing their reputation within the music scene. This overdependence is especially noticeable when it comes to digital engagement. While Féile na Tána has its own websites and social media profiles, the largest number of interaction and promotional activities come from Zoë's work through her own social media profiles.

Nevertheless, Féile na Tána has the potential to develop a stronger profile within the national Irish traditional music landscape. It also may contribute to the promotion of Carlingford, the Cooley Peninsula and Co. Louth as tourism destinations. In particular, the name of the festival and its connection with local mythology may enhance branding strategies of Co. Louth that emphasize the association with local legends and myths, proposing a narrative that connects with local history (Holt 2004). Moreover, Féile na Tána offers niche tourism opportunities as a result of the way music is produced, consumed or simply "enjoyed". This event can be seen as an occasion to learn about Irish music in an alternative and hidden context. Music courses and similar initiatives offer visitors the opportunity to learn music while having entertainment and discovering new places. This is an example of edutainment (Urry 2003). Applying this perspective in relation to Carlingford music would allow the village to be framed not only as a place of musical consumption, but more broadly as a space of participatory cultural production.

The potential adverse outcomes of an overly strong tourism promotion of Carlingford musical activities include commodification. Intangible cultural heritage receives increasing

pressures from the tourism industry, and as noted by O'Shea (2008) and Kaul (2009), Irish traditional music is subject to commodification and standardisation to meet tourist expectations. The risk is Carlingford music offer may lose its intimate aspects, becoming a product to be packed and sold to visitors. Such threats may also be caused by poor planning and lack of a good co-ordination among stakeholders. This could result in poor management and loss of networking opportunities between the music scene and the tourism operators, leading to declines in interest and support. On the other hand, a successful marketing campaign could eventually turn Carlingford into an overcrowded tourism destination. A final threat concerns the overdependence of Féile na Tána on its principal organisers. As the festival remain dependent on Zoë and John, their continued commitment is necessary for the sustainability of the events.

4.3.2. Carlingford Heritage Centre's Concert Series

In Carlingford, the local Heritage Centre hosts two main music events: the Spring and the Summer Concert Series. The music activities of the Heritage Centre are directed once again by Zoë Conway and John McIntyre. As they reported while discussing on their role in enriching local cultural life and challenges they face:

> We are involved in creating festivals, concert environments, venues, accommodate people and trying to build audiences locally, applying for funding through Create Louth or the Arts Council or other channels like Foras na Gaeilge,[18] trying to support what we do in the arts (interview with the author, May 19th, 2023).

The Concert Series usually features Irish traditional music, but also other genres including Classical and Choral music. I attended a concert during the 2024 edition of the Spring Series, resulting in the participative observation of a few elements characterising the initiative. According to my experience, confirmed by interviews with Zoë and John, the series usually attract a mature audience from the village and from main urban centres in the region. Ethnographic analysis of the event included the recording of interactions between performers and audience and their sensations associated with the concert. Even though no interviews were conducted with members of the audience, informal chats before and after the initiative gave me the opportunity to record their reactions and opinions. Many of the attendees were

[18] The main body responsible for the promotion of the Irish language in Ireland.

returning listeners coming from the village, but also people arriving from other towns such as Drogheda or villages beyond the border. I personally recognised an old lady I already met while attending various singing workshops in the area. She was attracted to Carlingford because of the reputation of musicians' performing there.

The venue, while being quite small, is often full to capacity. This demonstrates the success of Zoë and John as entrepreneurs in developing an attractive programme. The two musicians began to propose first concerts around 2014, when they decided to pause touring as professional musicians to focus on starting a family. Initial concerts received positive responses, and this motivated Zoë and John to develop the two series. These series are structured as concerts with renowned musicians from the Irish traditional music scene invited by the two Carlingford musicians, and joined by them during the second half of the set (Figure 52).



Figure 52: Zoë Conway and John McIntyre performing with Dónal O'Connor and Muireann Nic Amhlaoibh during the Heritage Centre's Spring Series 2024 (source: author).

Some of them are recurring artists, who have collaborated with John and Zoë in the past:

> Every week we invite guests to come and we play with them. […] We have the fun of meeting new persons, learning something of their music. This also opens other venues where those people invite us to play in their town, in their festivals. It is really an amazing thing to do (interview with the author, May 19th, 2023).

This form of management contributes to establishing partnerships and musicking opportunities for the musicians involved. Through the series, Zoë and John raise the profile of local musicians, generate some income for the region, and secure additional live performances elsewhere. Performances include music from the places where guest musicians come from, but some melodies and tunes from the local tradition are also inserted in the repertoire, with Zoë and John playing them together with their guests, often providing details in the introduction. They also enrich the setlist by performing their own compositions, that combine Irish traditional music together with Classical and Contemporary music elements (Lynch 2022). This improves and diversifies the series' music offer, connecting Louth's music heritage to a wider Irish music repertoire. These events share similarities with Chamber music concerts – characterised by relatively small ensembles performing in small venues for a select audience. In Carlingford, programme notes are replaced by performers engaging in lengthy introductions to the pieces.

Carlingford's tourism promotional materials suggest that the Concert Series is not considered as a main tourism attractor, since it is targeted for a local audience of music enthusiasts, but it contributes to experience of visitors to the village. Moreover, it is promoted by the local tourist office (that attaches flyers on its windows) and digital tourism platforms such as Visit Louth, the regional tourism web portal (2024b). Zoë too actively promotes the series on social media, exploiting her network and engaging with a wider audience. The series also receives support and funds by Create Louth, that in 2024 subsidised the initiative with a budget of €3,000 (Roddy 2023), making the Concert Series one of the major recipients of local fundings together with Féile na Tána.

While critiquing the series, it must be noted that this initiative benefits – just like Féile na Tána – of the role of Carlingford within the regional tourism ecosystem. The events are relatively affordable and accessible, and they are small and intimate initiatives, proposing high-quality music consumption. However, the series suffers from similar structural weaknesses, such as a limited promotion, and a general overdependence on its organisers. This event is attended primarily by a local audience, and thus it does not impact on accommodation capacities. Nevertheless, the Concert Series contributes in developing a

stronger profile for Carlingford as music destination, and the niche aspects of these concerts are a precious resource that contribute in defining the village – and the region – as a cluster for intimate experiences (see Krims 2011).

4.3.3. An Chúirt Chruitireachta - International Harp Festival

Held in the village of Termonfeckin (north of Drogheda) at the end of June, An Chúirt Chruitireachta (literally "The Harping Court") is an important event that attracts young harpists from Ireland and abroad originally launched in 1986. It is organised by Cairde na Cruite (Friends of the Harp), a national organisation established in 1960 with the intention to sustain the revival and development of interest in the Irish harp, providing tuition as well as the publication of music for this instrument, so deeply connected with Irish identity (Vallely 2011; O'Shea 2012; O'Donnell 2014).

Funded by a wide range of supporters and sponsors, including the Arts Council, Louth County Council and Create Louth, but also the Department of Tourism and Fáilte Ireland[19] – through its Ireland's Ancient East brand – An Chúirt Chruitireachta is structured on a weekly residential masterclass, enriched by subsidiary events held between Termonfeckin and Drogheda. These include concerts, exhibitions and sessions. While the teaching experience is reserved to the course participants, other initiatives are open to a wider audience, some of which offer free entry (but booking is always required). The main venues for the festival are An Grianán, where students remain for a week and where main activities – such as lessons, major concerts and the final recital – are held, the Drogheda Library, the Highlanes Gallery and the Tholsel in Drogheda, an historical building set in the heritage quarter, formerly the town hall and now headquarters for the local tourism office.

While it was not possible for me to participate in the workshops and the masterclass – as I am not an harpist – I attended the concerts organised during the 2022 and 2023 festival editions. Daily shows at the Tholsel are a sort of small exhibitions of the overall event, with young pupils and former students playing excerpts from their repertoire. The Tholsel is a small venue with limited seating, creating an intimate atmosphere for these performances. As a result, the audience primarily consists of a small group of listeners, mostly family

[19] According to T. Quinn, 'the Arts Council provides annual funding to An Chúirt Chruitireachta under the festivals and events scheme […] An Chúirt Chruitireachta has also received some funding from Louth County Council' (2014, p. 64). The author reported the festival earned €11,500 from the Arts Council between 2013 and 2014, together €500 from Create Louth (*ibid*.). However, data regarding funding for the period 2022-2025 have not been published.

members of the students participating in the festival. As these shows are held within a small room, they do not need an amplification system. They are similar to school recitals; however, the presence of more experienced musicians guarantees high-quality performances, featuring both traditional repertoire for the Irish harp and popular music rearranged for the instrument. (such as the *Pirates of the Caribbean* theme by Hans Zimmer or *Bad Guy* by Billie Eilish).

Educational activities and night performances are held at An Grianán, which appears as a peaceful mansion with a vast garden, a garden centre and tennis fields around it. When I first arrived here, this relaxing characteristic was also enhanced by some harp music played just outside the entrance, where a few students and tutors were playing. The majority of teachers and students attending harp tuition are women and girls, confirming the perception of femininity associated with this instrument (O'Shea 2008; O'Shea 2012; T. Quinn 2014). While the workshops, group and individual lessons are hosted in many of the building's room (Figure 53), night shows are held in the concert hall.



Figure 53: A room filled with harps during the 2023 edition of An Chúirt Chruitireachta (source: author).

This theatre features a spacious stage that accommodates multiple harps, along with an amplification system consisting of microphones and speakers. The evening concerts showcase a mix of traditional harp repertoire performed by festival tutors and a broader

collection of Irish traditional music presented by various guest musicians, both local and from other regions of Ireland. The festival often features international artists on a variety of harp-like instruments performing music of different traditions. Depending on the performers, Irish traditional music is presented in diverse forms, incorporating various regional styles and repertoires, but it is also blended with external influences, such as Baroque music, creating a rich and dynamic musical experience. During these events, the audience is mainly composed by adults and old people, but children (both pupils enrolled in the festival and kids with their families) are also a notable part of participants.

Just like Féile na Tána, An Chúirt Chruitireachta places an emphasis on the Irish language. The namesake of the event is in Irish, and this language is widely used for introductions and greetings during the evening concerts. Notably, one of the recurring tutors and member of the festival committee is Cormac de Barra, a renowned performer and fluent Irish speaker. Another relevant figure, which is a tutor and member of the festival's committee, is Deirdre Ní Bhuachalla, a harpist originally from Co. Meath, who has contributed to the growth of the event, as well as in the promotion of the harp in the county. A member of the resource team of Music Generation Louth, she facilitated – eventually becoming its project manager – the creation of Nós Nua - Youth Folk Orchestra, a collaborative initiative between Music Generation Louth and the Dundalk branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann that aims to create opportunities for young musicians to learn, perform, and enjoy Irish traditional music. With Music Generation, she also runs the Harp Ensemble, a cluster of harp pupils coming from Louth and Meath that performs in the territory.

From a tourism potential perspective, An Chúirt Chruitireachta is another festival proposing intimate music experiences with a focus on education. I had interviews with Fiona Gryson and Rachel Duffy, two tutors and festival co-directors, and both of them were particularly interested in exploring this connection during our chat:

> Absolutely, we would love it. […] I think that balancing education and entertainment and community as well […] it's an interesting idea. […] I think we're open to kind of two sides of things as well, the kind of entertainment and people coming as listeners. And then we do also take total beginners as practitioners. […] We would welcome both people coming to learn the harp and people coming to listen to the harp (interview with the author, July 18th, 2023).

Moreover, as highlighted by T. Quinn (2014), festivals and events focused on a single instrument (the harp) are excellent opportunities for instrument makers and luthiers to exhibit their work and generate orders. During my fieldwork at An Chúirt Chruitireachta I did not encounter harp makers showcasing their instruments. Nevertheless, leaflets of the event showed, on the last page, a series of hand-made harps attendees and audience were able to purchase with a discount.

The effects of this festival over the territory are positive, but quite limited. An Chúirt Chruitireachta attracts people in Co. Louth, mainly from Ireland but also internationally (UK and mainland Europe). According to D., another tutor and one of my interviewees, families of pupils usually travel before and/or after the event, visiting different localities and points of interest in the region (such as *Brú na Bóinne* or Carlingford). However, the event suffers from a series of weaknesses. While people in the local area (and Irish harp enthusiasts) are generally aware of the festival, the wider public – and tourists – probably remain ignorant about its existence. This statement is confirmed by my interview with Fiona and Rachel:

> R.: I think it [the festival] is very well known in the harp community, nationally and internationally, but maybe there's a bit of work for us to do in expanding beyond that […] we think we could do more to raise the profile of the festival […] in the wider kind of Irish traditional music community. […] I still think there is more we can do to promote it locally and nationally (interview with the author, July 18th, 2023).

> F.: Yeah, it's a very unique festival. And it is a bit of a hidden gem […] as Rachel said, it's well known in the harping community. […] It is an Irish harp festival, or just a harping festival, but there is certainly more that we can do to raise its profile (interview with the author, July 18th, 2023).

It was notable that representatives of Fáilte Ireland attending an Expertise Meeting held in Drogheda in July 2023 were unaware that this festival was running at that very moment in the nearby. Moreover, while being close to Drogheda (which is a town highly connected with Dublin and its airport), Termonfeckin remains quite inaccessible due to ineffective local public transport service. This specific weakness was emphasized by Rachel Duffy. Another discrepancy is related to the target of the event, which is limited to harp students. While workshops and the opportunity to learn and perform alongside renowned tutors can become a strong pull factor, not enough people (who are not harpists or Irish traditional music enthusiasts) are willing to travel for evening concerts unless they live nearby. Another

problem is related to the lack of partnerships with local businesses, who are neither able nor interested in sustaining and promoting the event. This is probably due to the fact that the majority of activities during the day (including lunch and dinner) are held within and independent and isolated mansion, where attendees spend the majority of their time (however, it should be noted that students are free to choose whether they wish to rely on accommodation provided by the event or make their own arrangements in the area). One last weakness is associated with the strategy of Cairde na Cruite, that relies on external funding and volunteers. In the words of one of my informants, unlike other festivals in the territory, the absence of a team working full-time is considered as an obstacle to the growth of this initiative:

> I think the strategy is part of the issue. […] a lot of that work is done voluntarily. If there was a budget there similar say for instance to Drogheda Arts Festival, which is an incredible festival. […] They had a programme manager […] and a team 100% working full-time fully committed to getting it out. […] When you're doing it [*planning a festival*] in the evenings and you're trying to do a little bit after your full-time it's very hard. […] It is challenging to expand a festival that is run in a voluntary capacity. (interview with the author, June 21st, 2023).

Thus, despite having potential to become a relevant initiative within the international landscape for Irish and harp musicians, this event, similarly to Féile na Tána, faces different weaknesses that limit its growth. While the "growth" of the event is not perceived as a necessity for the festival and its committee, tutors and organisers see this as a possibility to raise the reputation of their initiative, generating additional revenues from tickets sold and sign-ups. As a participant, I believe that, given its name, qualities, and distinctive features, the event represents a missed opportunity to establish an Irish traditional music festival of international standing in Co. Louth. Nevertheless, the interaction between a local community of practitioners and a festival organised by a national body provides interesting considerations. As suggested by T. Quinn (*ibid*.), the location of harpers in Ireland is influenced by factors such as population density, but also available tuition or events focusing on this instrument. Co. Louth has the two bigger Irish towns for population density, together with strong tuition provided by Deirdre Ní Bhuachalla – who has done a lot to promote the harp in the county and has taught a number of prominent (and award-winning) students – and this festival, that could become an excellence and one of most important traditional music initiatives on a national level.

4.3.4. Séan Corcoran Series

Held for the first time in Drogheda in 2023, the Séan Corcoran Series is a small Irish traditional music festival developed in memory of the late Séan Corcoran (1946-1921), a musician (bouzouki player), singer and researcher from the area. Corcoran's main contribution to local music life is due to his activity as collector, writer and editor, recording artist and lecturer, maker of radio and television programmes, and club and festival organiser. In 1976 he became director of Féile na Bóinne, an important folk music festival with an emphasis on Louth performers initiated by enthusiasts of the Tradition Club of Drogheda (Carolan 2023, p.667), from which the Drogheda Traditional Music & Singing Weekend was then developed. From 1994 to 2001 he collected traditional music, songs and dances extensively in the field for the Irish Traditional Music Archive (Carolan 2021). The initiative to celebrate the life and work of Corcoran originated from his closest friends and his family, who wanted to pay a tribute to an important person who left them in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rosa Corcoran, Séan's daughter, is the main organiser and coordinator of the series.

The series presents typical encounters an Irish traditional music festival may offer, like workshops with renowned teachers, opportunities to try instruments such as the uilleann pipes and the bódhran, entertainments for children, concerts, sessions and singing sessions. The main locations for the events within the series are pubs in the town of Drogheda, the Droichead Arts Centre, and St Peter's Church of Ireland, the only religious building involved in the series. I joined the 2023 edition, where workshops and sessions were led by renowned musicians and performers coming from all Ireland, with a group of local singers that had a bigger involvement within the initiative, as some of them worked closely with Rosa for the entire series as organisers and volunteers. While some events saw the participation of small numbers of people, the two main concerts were sold out, as they were largely promoted through online and local journals. The former was held at the Droichead Arts Centre, and featured mandolin and bouzouki players Andy Irvine and Donal Lunny, with Andy playing Séan Corcoran's instrument. The latter was hosted at St Peter's Church of Ireland, and it showcased the different performances of various friends and colleagues of Séan. Sessions were scheduled for the weekend and they featured acclaimed musicians such as Harry Bradley and Gerry O'Connor (Figure 54), but also "unofficial" gatherings happened before or after them (Figure 55). In terms of people attending sessions, I felt like an optimum level among the number of musicians, of people hearing them and the actual capacity of the environments where they were hosted. Beyond music-related initiatives – attended mainly

by adults interested in concerts and sessions coming from the area but also from Dublin and Belfast, and children and young students attending workshops and music classes – I also joined a bus tour led by community historian Brendan Matthews with the purpose of visiting areas associated with the figure of Corcoran. This activity was enriched by a trio of musicians who were playing Irish traditional music in the back of the vehicle, and I considered this experience as a real novelty for a niche music festival.

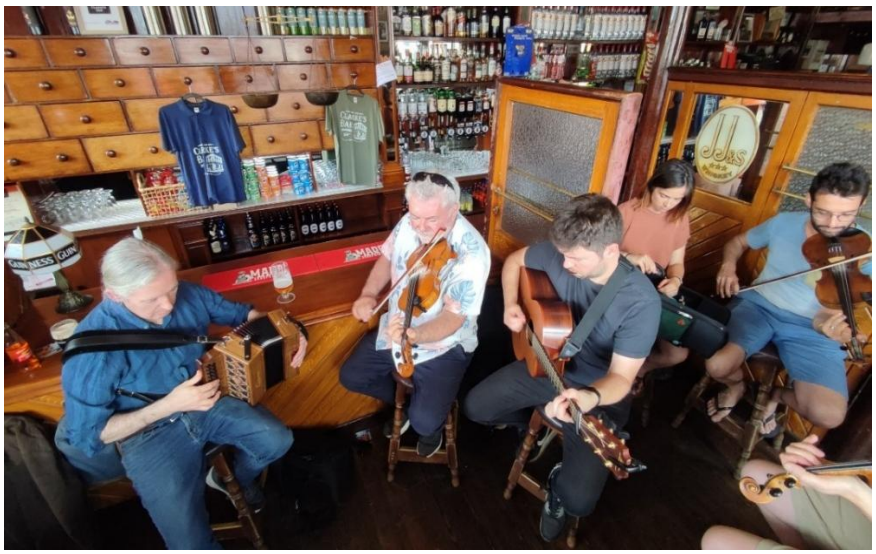


Figure 54: Martin Quinn, Gerry O'Connor and his son Feilimí leading a session during Séan Corcoran Series 2023 (source: author).



Figure 55: "Out-of-the-programme" session during Séan Corcoran Series 2023 (source: author).

The series is funded by a series of administrative, cultural and music organisations such as Louth County Council through its Arts service (which sustained the initiative through a €3,000 grant – Roddy 2023), the Arts Council, the Louth Archaeological Society, ITMA, RTÉ and Drogheda Credit Union. Notably, this initiative is not supported nor funded by any tourism organisations, as the focus was more on gathering a music community, with no additional tourism-related targets. Nevertheless, the series was hosted during a weekend, within the first half of September. From a tourism planning perspective, September is a good month to host cultural initiatives. The weather is still good – and this, especially for outside events in northern countries like Ireland – is fundamental, but at the same time the high tourism season is ending, and this means lower prices. In addition, hosting something outside of high peak season help in managing tourism flows, contributing in controlling the tourists pressure on a destination. Finally, especially for small and hidden locations (as Drogheda may be), events in this moment of the year help in avoiding direct competition with established destinations, allowing thus the opportunity to emerge more easily, inviting visitors to come in a moment where they are not searching for more traditional forms of summer holidays nor entertainment.

This event, entirely dedicated to the commemoration of Corcoran, contributed to a possible process of heritagisation of his figure. Drogheda can already count on different musicians who enrich its historical musicscape, such as the Taylor brothers, uilleann pipers and makers who are commemorated in a large public mural, and Pat Ward (Matthews 2018). The festival placed Corcoran in this pantheon and offered the town an opportunity to exploit his reputation within the Irish music national and international community. Moreover, the series may develop into something similar to Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, where the figure of the piper, and its subsequent festival, intertwined with the village itself (V. Commins 2014), becoming a pull factor to attract many Irish traditional music enthusiasts in Drogheda.

Nevertheless, the series presented a series of structural weaknesses. While September appears as a good moment to host festivals, the timing was difficult as the festival took place before the branch returned to activities after the summer. Music is something that anyone can appreciate (Turino 2008), but it also allows direct engagement for children and families, with their kids currently learning a music instrument. In this way, many music pupils have not been informed by their teachers about the initiative, since they did not meet in time. Moreover, it did not develop strong relationships with some segments of the local music

community.[20] With the exception of the Drogheda singers – of which Séan Corcoran was a member and a friend, and that contributed in the series' management as volunteers – other important organisations, such as Drogheda Comhaltas, the local branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, were not involved in the event (despite an initial invitation to cooperate). Drogheda Comhaltas is an extremely active group with many music students that, during the same days of the series, was proposing promotional activities that would have easily been incorporated into the series' programme. Its contribution would have helped enormously in reaching a bigger impact over the local music community.

4.3.5. Boyne TradFest

Two weeks after the Séan Corcoran Series, Drogheda hosted a new Irish traditional music festival, named Boyne TradFest. This event presents many similarities with the series dedicated to Corcoran, as it is a relatively small music festival held in the town centre, with standard activities included in similar Irish music celebrations, plus a walking tour with local historian Brendan Matthews. I joined the 2023 and 2024 editions of this festival and, according to my experience, workshops and sessions were led by renowned musicians and performers coming from all Ireland (Figure 56). While I only participated in public sessions during the 2024 edition, in 2023 I also attended the flute workshop led by Catherine McEvoy, through which I was able to experience and document the learning processes embedded within the festival. In addition, I attended the participants' recital, although I did not take part in it, as it was reserved for children attending the workshops, who were asked to perform some of the tunes they had spent their morning learning.

[20] My considerations for this initiatives rely only on my participation during its first edition in 2023. Over the last couple of years, it seems that Séan Corcoran Series has developed a small returning community of musicians and tutors – coming both from the locality as well as other parts of Ireland – becoming a relevant gathering for local music life.

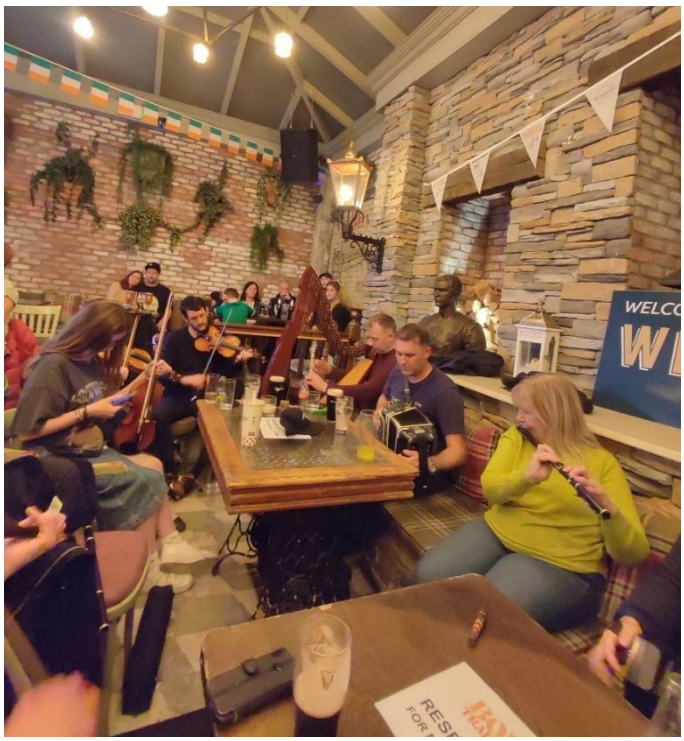


Figure 56: A session during Boyne TradFest 2023 featuring some of the workshops tutors (source: author).

The main locations for the events within the TradFest are the Barbican Centre (where workshops are hosted), the Tholsel and the Highlanes Gallery. As sessions are the main features of this festival, pubs cover a fundamental role as venues, with many of them displaying panels and leaflets of the initiative. Interestingly, this event was able to involve for sessions a wider number of pubs and bars, including those that do not usually facilitate Irish traditional music during the rest of the year. While in 2023 no activities took place in the Droichead Arts Centre, in 2024 the festival supported a new initiative named "Night Moves Trad Trail", which was of part of a broader "Night Moves" series produced by the theatre in partnership with various pubs and Love Drogheda, and supported by the Arts Offices in Louth and Meath County Councils, together with the newly established Night-Time Economy Advisor in Drogheda (Drogheda Life 2024).

This festival presents some differences if compared to the Séan Corcoran Series, as it places a greater emphasis on participatory music sessions, which are the real leading element and main focus of the initiative, and a deeper engagement with the Irish language. These differences and the central role given to sessions is confirmed by Paddy Callaghan, a renowned button accordion player originally from Glasgow and teacher for Drogheda Comhaltas, who has also been a tutor for Boyne TradFest. In his words:

> I feel that the two events are both quite different and offer different outcomes for participants and audience members despite both being trad music events happening at similar times in the same locale. For me the Séan Corcoran Series is occupying the space that encompasses a wide spectrum of the arts […] whereas the Boyne TradFest is very much centred around traditional […] music and song and fills a void that has existed in traditional music for some time of festivals where sessions were the key driver – for musicians (online interview with the author, August 25th, 2025).

The focus on sessions is due to a personal interest of Boyne TradFest's organiser, Gormlaith Maynes, a talented concertina player from Drogheda as well as a young entrepreneur who had recently returned to the town after gaining experience in event management abroad. As she stated:

> I am not looking for Boyne TradFest to go down the road of hooking up multiple pubs, taking on folk/pop singers. That's not what Boyne TradFest is. It is a participatory event, and there will be concerts, but traditional Irish music sessions remain one of the focal points of the event, that is open and free. If I lose this aspect, I have lost the festival. […] I am conscious of different demographic, and different levels of participants. I wanted that everyone, even if for just one day, may have a good day of music, regardless of its age and level. […] I want that sessions remain central. I want to attract the very best musicians to Drogheda (interview with the author, October 13th, 2023).

Drogheda Comhaltas was actively involved in the festival, with some of its tutors arranging slow sessions and other subsidiaries activities. As Gormlaith said:

> Drogheda Comhaltas did host the learner session. It was not a Comhaltas event, not a Comhaltas festivals, but they promoted Boyne TradFest because they were having their learner session, which was great and very helpful. We are looking forward to work together again the future (personal communication with the author, October 13th, 2023).

The festival did not explicitly present Drogheda's music heritage. The majority of tutors have few links with the territory and the only geographical connection with the region is established throughout the namesake of the festival and its location. Another element that contrasted with the Séan Corcoran Series is the audience. Although I do not have statistics of participants and attendees, I noted a greater percentage of teenagers and young people

joining the event. This was due to a digital promotional strategy targeted on young musicians, activities that were more youth focused, and many sessions led by young musicians. Moreover, Boyne TradFest benefitted from being held during a weekend within the second half of September. This means that this festival was held during the second half of the month, when schools (and music schools) are open again after the summer break. Thus, it was easier to connect with the local Irish traditional music ecosystem, with families and children having the chance to be informed about the event from their music teachers. This greater involvement of teenagers and young people is probably connected to one of the goals of the main organiser. The idea behind the event, as highlighted during the interview with Gormlaith, was to reinvigorate, after the experience of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 2018 and 2019 and the COVID-19 breakdown, the local scene with an annual Irish music event, giving to young people especially the occasion to be immersed within traditional music melodies. Thus, Boyne TradFest has been an attempt to offer the town a new, but similar, experience. In Paddy's words: '[…] I can see the benefit in the long run for the area in helping to bring musicians closer together and helping "normalise" trad [*music*] in spaces which may help encourage more events on a regular basis in the area' (online interview with the author, August 25th, 2025).

According to Paddy's opinion, the two events enrich Drogheda's culturescape as they cover different aspects of experiencing and discovering (local) music heritage, engaging with diverse audiences. In addition, he stated that strengths of Boyne TradFest lie in its participative features, which can guarantee long-term sustainability:

> I guess the similarities begin and end with the emphasis on trad music but they very much operate in different spaces and appeal to different audiences. In fact the word audiences doesn't really sit well with me as for the vast majority of the Boyne TradFest events, they are by design tailored to the participants (musicians) as opposed the "audience" and the long term success of the festival will be in somehow "limiting" the number of "audience" members that come to watch as they take up the space which would otherwise be occupied by more musicians. For example Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy in Miltown Malbay used to be all about the sessions. Now there are too many people (who aren't musicians) travelling to enjoy the festival and this has made it very difficult to get the space to have those sessions – it's been a victim of its own success […]. Boyne TradFest now operates in the space that the likes of Miltown used to (online interview with the author, August 25th, 2025).

Results seemed to be really positive for this new event. Local musicians (from Drogheda but also from surrounding areas) have been really responsive, with venues always full of young musicians and publicans listening to them. Moreover, the festival receives the support of several local enterprises, plus Louth County Council, national organisations such as Conradh na Gaeilge and RTÉ. While the Séan Corcoran Series is sustained by Create Louth, Boyne TradFest has received fundings from the Festival Grant Initiative, a stream of resources managed by another County Council's scheme: the Economic Development Office. This initiative is open to local festivals and events which have a role in enhancing economic and tourism impacts in Louth. Thus, even this financial aspect reflects similarities and differences between the two events. While both are funded by the local authority, the reason for funding is different, with the former seen more as a purely artistic happening, and the latter covering the role of a proficient economic opportunity for the town and its region. In addition, the Fest is supported by the Ireland's Ancient East programme, and it was also promoted by tourism platforms such as Discover Ireland[21]. This means that this festival is recognised and interpreted by destination promoters as a tourism attractor, contributing in increasing the chances of recognising Drogheda as a music tourism destination within the north-east of Ireland.

These two events (Séan Corcoran Series and Boyne TradFest) can be critically compared, while contrast aspects and weaknesses should be highlighted. Both saw mainly positive results, with venues full of participants, but the two organisers made different connections to communities of musical practice, locally and regionally, which impacted on the audience and the effective results. Communication and collaboration among music stakeholders in the Drogheda area was sometimes questionable. Both were funded by Louth County Council, but through different departments, which resulted in little joined-up thinking. Moreover, Boyne TradFest also received support from Fáilte Ireland in the 2024 edition, while the Séan Corcoran Series did not. While both the events enlivened Drogheda as a place for music, even if they may not be official tourist attraction, the general lack of communication between the organisers of each festival and other stakeholders led to a divided music scene, which caused some concerns. For instance, Róisín Ward Morrow, who frequently performs in Drogheda and was asked to lead a session, wrote on her public Instagram profile this ironic post:

> [*In relation to Boyne TradFest*] Is anyone in this from Co. Louth? […] Did they approach anyone else local? Not even the Drogheda singers are involved. [*In*

[21] The main web portal for Irish domestic tourism.

> *relation to the Séan Corcoran Series*] Also two weeks before that is this – do Drogheda people not coordinate? And the Drogheda Trad Weekend will be in November (retrieved from public Instagram content, Summer 2023).

This undermined the development of a local community of musical practice that could support a further development of not only these initiatives but a rich public engagement in Irish traditional music in Drogheda. Fieldwork and interviews gave me the impression that things were arranged in isolation, with no cooperation, and no interest in working together. The sensation is that these events missed opportunities for coopetition, a phenomenon which is going to be addressed in the next chapter as part of a general critique of music tourism development in the north-east of Ireland, identified as the condition where destination actors collaborate and compete at the same time (Damayanti et al. 2019).

4.3.6. Drogheda Traditional Music & Singing Weekend

Drogheda is the host town of another traditional music event, even smaller than the previous two. The Drogheda Traditional Music & Singing Weekend is a recurring event held during the last week of November. Established in 1997 from the embers of Féile na Bóinne, it is run by a group of local singers, the same people that provide assistance during the Séan Corcoran Series. This event proposes a series of concerts at the Droichead Arts Centre and the Tholsel, as well as lecturers on local musicians and traditions – often featuring once again local historian Brendan Matthews – and music and singing sessions. The intent of the series is to promote music from the region, and local repertoire plays a central role in the initiatives included in the event. As this event is organised by a group of singers, the singing aspect is definitely a highlight of the weekend. I joined this initiative in 2022 during a special spring edition held to recover from the pause caused by COVID-19, as well as during the traditional late-November weekend and again in 2023. This event is characterised by a high level of informality, as the majority of its activities are attended by a relatively small number of (adult and older) people that comprise the singing group itself (Figure 57).



Figure 57: Music interlude during a lecture at Drogheda Trad Weekend 2023 (source: author).

The Weekend relies on a local community of musical practice (Kenny 2016; Cawley 2021) and reflects the participatory nature of Irish traditional music, with the regular breaking of the fourth wall (Brown 2012) between audiences and performers. Nevertheless, whether as a listener or an active participant, joining their activities offers access to a rich repertoire of traditional songs from the Boyne region that might otherwise remain unknown and hidden. It was here that I had the chance to learn – while attending presentations and conferences – about the musicking activities of figures like John Sheil or Pat Ward. Concerts provided me with additional opportunities to hear music from the region. This confirms what S., a local singer, secretary of the Trad Weekend and former director of the Droichead Arts Centre, said to me during an interview: 'our intention is just to promote music from this region' (interview with the author, December 8th, 2023).

As this event is held at the end of November, the weather is unstable and characterised by shorter and colder days. Still, during this period of the year prices for travelling and accommodation are usually extremely low, with almost no competition between similar destinations. From a tourism perspective, hosting an event during the off-peak season provides visitors with additional incentives to travel, allowing them to benefit from lower costs while also helping the event gain recognition. However, this small festival is funded and supported by a small number of organisations including Louth County Council, and none of them is involved in tourism planning nor promotion. In addition, even if it

provides opportunities to experience a particular Irish traditional music repertoire in an alternative and intimate way, its informal management – relying primarily on volunteers – represents a limit to its growth and recognition as a valuable music event within the national – and international – Irish traditional music calendar. My meeting with S. revealed details about the origin of this event, as well as its target: 'the genesis of that was sometimes at the end of the 1990s. […] We decided to organise a festival at low level' (interview with the author, December 8th, 2023). These words demonstrate a sense of satisfaction with the way the Trad Weekend has taken shape in the gaze of its organisers. Still, while the Drogheda Traditional Music & Singing Weekend is an interesting initiative with potential to engage with music and musicians in a familiar and friendly way – while also getting notions of local music history – in my opinion this small festival represents a missed opportunity to contribute in proposing and recognising the town as an established music destination on the national and international tourism market.

4.3.7. Music at the Oriel Centre and Seisiún – Summer Show Series

Music at the Oriel Centre includes music lessons during the week, weekly sessions – usually on Thursday afternoon – and performances with emerging and renowned traditional musicians, such as Ímar (Figure 58). Despite the small dimensions of the hall, these shows feature amplification systems. Nevertheless, the arrangement of chairs and tables, as well as the short distance between listeners and performers (and favouring dialogue among them), allows for events involving small ensembles performing for a reduced audience, that can thus experience intimate encounters with musicians and their music. Members of the audience are typically local musicians and traditional music enthusiasts. Nevertheless, during my fieldwork I noted some exceptions to this, as I recorded the presence of foreign attendees – mainly foreign workers living in the town who were intrigued by the events and their atmosphere, but also occasional visitors from abroad. This demonstrates the interest of the Centre's manager to propose this venue as a music hub for the town, able to become a valuable source for local tourism strategies, and the tangible opportunity to open it up to an international audience even further.



Figure 58: Ímar performing in the Centre in February 2023 (source: author).

In 2024, the Centre proposed Aistear 2030, a series of free concerts involving local traditional musicians focused on regional repertoires of Ireland. This initiative was held in order to mark the launch of a new Comhaltas Prospectus to guide the organisation development towards 2030. This report highlights the contribution of and interrelations between Irish traditional music and tourism, recognising the role Comhaltas plays as tourism stakeholder in the country (Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann 2024a, p.48). Organisations such as Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland are recognised as strategic partners (to which Comhaltas will actively engage and participate in future marketing campaigns – *ibid*.), while the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media is acknowledged as a key supporter (having allocated €2,400,000 funding to Comhaltas in 2024 – Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann 2024b). In addition, resource centres such as the Dundalk Gaol are recognised as important landmark locations and potential tourism resources. Hence, the document states that Comhaltas will ensure their ongoing support, seeking funding to expand their varied programmes (Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann 2024a, p.29). New investments are forecasted for interactive exhibitions, with the possibility to turn these centres into info points for Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland (*ibid*.). Moreover, the new prospectus declares

a series of goals, including the research for additional funding to develop a banner brand for Comhaltas' festivals and events, in order to increase their visibility internationally (*ibid*., p.37).

An important and recurring annual activity is Seisiún – Summer Show Series (Figure 59), whereby the organisation presents concerts and sessions with music guests, teachers and students every Thursday night between July and August. A type of performance presented by branches around all Ireland, Comhaltas describes Seisiún as 'a colourful show of music, song, dance and storytelling' (Kearney 2009, p.242).

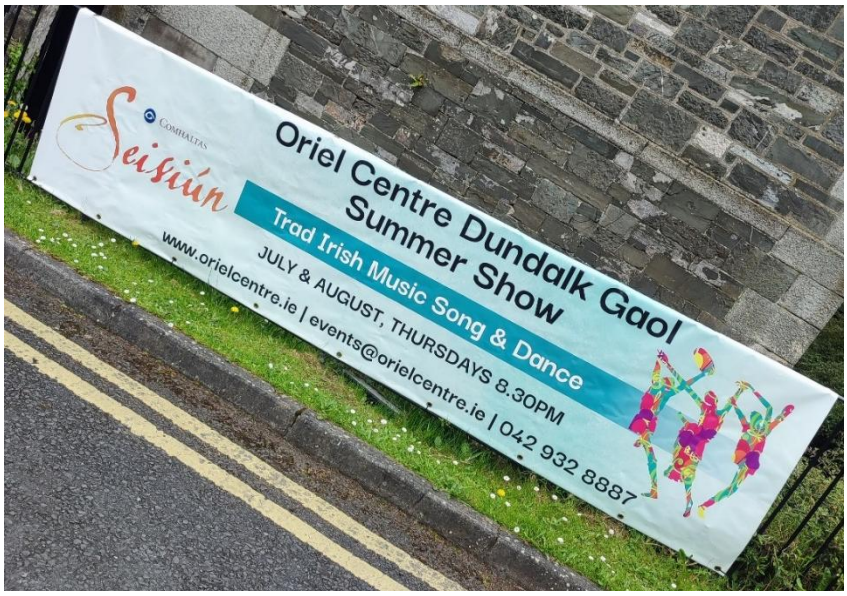


Figure 59: A Summer Show promotional banner at the Oriel Centre's entrance (source: author).

Kay Webster, manager of the Centre, describes Seisiún shows as follows:

> They're all different in their own way. […] Tourism is important […] not from the point of view of getting money off people, but it's important from a point of view of just being able to offer to tourists what authentic, traditional Irish music, song and dance is about. I think too often tourists come into an area and their experience of Irish music is […] a questionable session in the back of a pub somewhere, you know. Or just the ramble down in Temple Bar. They say on that day, of course, "Irish music tonight", and then you just find someone playing pop songs on a guitar […] (interview with the author, November 30th, 2023).

For Kay, these shows in Dundalk are a chance to let visitors enjoy something different than the average session in overtouristed destinations: '[…] it's never the real experience. […] whereas [here] that's not the case. […] amazing musicians […] those people are so accessible to you. And, you know, you get to play with them, like, is what keeps you in the music. […] So, that series is important' (interview with the author, November, 30th, 2023).

This event typically involves a first half of the set in the form of a concert, followed by an open session where musicians in the audience are invited to join the stage, if they wish (Figure 60). I had two major experiences in 2022 and 2024, where I observed this participatory format both as an observer and as an active participant. I remember, during a night in 2022, a mandolin player from Scale Force being called up to the stage for a few tunes after the first half of the show, while in 2024 a series of music students, myself included, were invited one after the other to play with local tutors and performers, before eventually joining together to conclude with the national anthem. These represented moments that blurred the line between audience and performer, with the Gaol thus offering the opportunity to hear local Irish music in an enjoyable and historical environment in a format that incorporates both participative and performative elements (Turino 2008).



Figure 60: A Seisiún in the Summer 2024 (source: author).

Initially developed to respond to a desire for sessions of informal music, in which all members of a branch can participate as musicians, singers, dancers or audience (Kearney

2009, p.241), Seisiún at the Oriel Centre has gradually become an event targeted for visitors. This is linked to the increasing commercialisation of Irish traditional music, emerged after international acclaim of shows such as Riverdance (*ibid*., p.245). As stated by Kearney, 'Seisiún performances are linked to the tourist industry and the marketing of place' (*ibid*.). Nevertheless, these performances also indicate the location of strong Comhaltas branches. In addition, the local nature of Seisiún shows can enable branches to represent regional aspects of Irish traditional music. By reinforcing regional narratives, Seisiún helps to instil a pride in local communities in their own heritage (*ibid*., p.242). In Dundalk, the event enables performers to engage with a local repertoire from the Oriel tradition, creating representations of local soundscape and intertwining with regional narratives. However, the lack of recognition of narratives or traditions, accompanied by a desire to perform the most popular tunes, lead to performances with little reference to local culture, with famous pieces replacing songs and melodies from the regional tradition. At the same time, this choice makes the event more accessible and appealing to a wider audience, that has little knowledge of Irish traditional music. What remains important is maintaining a balance between more commercially oriented pieces and the local repertoire. Thus, Seisiún at the Oriel Centre provides opportunities to reimagine and build new geographies of Irish traditional music in Louth.

Occasionally, the Centre also hosts non-Irish traditional music concerts, such as Christmas events and Contemporary music exhibitions, but its primary focus remains on Irish traditional music. From a music tourism perspective, the Oriel Centre results appealing for visitors travelling between Dublin and Belfast with an interest in music, looking for highly engaging experiences. The Centre and its activities can thus enhance the role of Dundalk as music tourism destination within the north-east of Ireland, attracting those searching for a deeper and intimate involvement within Irish traditional music and the Oriel tradition.

4.3.8. Féile Patrick Byrne

Féile Patrick Byrne is a traditional music festival held annually in and in the nearby of Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, around the Palm Sunday weekend. Organised by the local branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann – and supported by a series of organisations such as the Arts Council, Monaghan County Council and the Carrickmacross Credit Union

– the festival was established to celebrate Patrick Byrne, a relevant exponent in Ireland of the historical Gaelic wire strung harp.

Despite the name of the event, Oriel and its traditions do not appear as an explicit theme during the festival. Finian McCluskey, a festival's volunteer and organiser, discussed the birth of Féile Patrick Byrne, and he told me that the name was chosen almost by chance:

> […] So we were fishing around for a name. We didn't know very much about Patrick Byrne, but we knew he was buried in Carrickmacross and he was the first traditional musician photographed. So I think I suggested "what about Féile Patrick Byrne?" and nobody had a better idea. So Féile Patrick Byrne was born (interview with the author, March 8th 2023).

However, there is a subtle incorporation of Oriel's heritage through the figure of Byrne, which remains a fundamental musician for the region's music history, and whose instrument – the harp – continues to be very popular in Monaghan according to Eilís Lavelle, a Féile Patrick Byrne tutor and All-Ireland harp champion: 'It's an important instrument […]. I think since I was a teenager, the interest in harp has kind of exploded in Monaghan' (interview with the author, April 1st, 2023).

Féile Patrick Byrne developed in the aftermath of a series of workshops facilitated by Carrickmacross Comhaltas in 2005 and 2006, and the festival now offers many activities through an educational aim, providing opportunities for edutainment (Urry 2003). Experienced tutors of Irish traditional music deliver tuition on a variety of traditional instruments. The tutors are not necessarily local and do not necessarily teach local repertoire. Thus the musicking aspects of the festival provide musicians with opportunities to engage with leading performers of national and international reputation. Concerts also offer occasions for hearing Irish traditional music not connected to local traditions, while *céilíthe* provide participants with chances to join the local community to dance and share social experiences. Sessions are also an important aspect of the festival, as they fill the town's musicscape in the evening, with different gatherings of musicians (singing and instrumental sessions, both for learners as well as advanced musicians) in the pubs facing the town's main street. Lectures on local history and performers are also included in the programme. These are an opportunity to hear scholars and journalists from the area and further afield, and add complexity to an understanding of the musical identity of the place, making reference to aspects not typically associated with the narratives of the Oriel region, blurring boundaries of regionality and reflecting on the evolution and contamination of local repertoire and

styles. The festival does not focus on the Irish harp. When I asked Finian if the harp covered a particular role within the initiative, he replied: 'No. We do always try to feature harp activities and harpists, but it's not a harp festival, even though it's in honour of a harper' (interview with the author, March 8th 2023). Nevertheless, it rather embraces the broader Irish traditional music scene and includes walking tours around Carrickmacross leading to Byrne's gravestone as part of its activities (Figure 61).



Figure 61: Patrick Byrne's gravestone (source: author).

Venues involved during Féile Patrick Byrne include local pubs, where sessions take place; hotels in the town centre, which host lectures; and local schools, where workshops are conducted. Some workshops and sessions are also held at the Carrickmacross Workhouse, a historic building and one of 130 workhouses built in the 1840s to house the poor and indigents, now functioning as a visitor and community centre. Additionally, concerts are organised in local religious buildings and in cultural centres and theatres outside the town, such as the Patrick Kavanagh Centre in Inniskeen and the Íontas Theatre in the nearby town of Castleblayney.

Féile Patrick Byrne remains a small event, as it caters primarily for a local audience. As pictured online (retrieved from images uploaded on the festival's website and its Facebook webpage) and confirmed by interviews with organisers and tutors, local pupils remain the main audience for the workshops, even though sessions and walking tours attract locals but also visitors and musicians coming from surrounding towns. Sessions in particular

offer the opportunity to listen and perform in a quiet environment, where beginners – both children and adults – and advanced performers play together. This element partially addresses one of the issues Eilís highlighted during our meeting, as she was concerned about opportunities for adults to learn Irish traditional music in the county: 'for adults, there's not much. […] if I was an adult trying to learn in a group setting, which is more of a social thing, in Monaghan, there's very little opportunity. […] I suppose as an adult, I think it's more scary learning a new thing' (interview with the author, April 1st, 2023).

Even if the profile of tutors may attract learners from further afield, contributing to tourism, the festival does not impact significantly on the regular rhythms of the town, and only a few shops around the main street promote it with posters and brochures. Its activities are run mainly in small environments, signifying the absence of bigger infrastructures and venues, and only a limited support from the local administration. Even if main lecturers are held at the Shirley Arms Hotel, one of the most important room providers in town, the event does not seem to have a significant impact on the local accommodation services, and it is not included into Monaghan's tourism marketing campaigns. Finian provided interesting insights in these regards, as he seemed quite sceptic about a "tourism growth" associated with Féile Patrick Byrne. As he said to me:

> So, it's a kind of a very niche tourism. Probably it [*Féile Patrick Byrne*] is the main event from the north-east with a direct reference to the Oriel tradition beyond Féile Oriel […]. It's evolving very, very slowly. If something works, then we just add on something else. If it works, we keep it, and if it doesn't, it doesn't. […] I'm a bit worried that we're already made it too big. […] I think we're at a size we can manage. We're a small voluntary committee […] if it gets too big […] it would be a different thing […] and eventually the team [*would*] get burnt out. […] You need funding in place from the state or from the local authority to provide effectively full-time a core festival team in terms of production. The artistic direction possibly could be part-time, but in terms of pulling it all together, it's the only way of doing it if you're going to go beyond very small local festivals. But to do that, Monaghan County Council would basically, in a way, have to take on that. […] I think one possible growth area for Féile Patrick Byrne would be to take that Easter holiday period and just put on workshops for the full week. So that people will come to the festival from other parts of Ireland or from abroad and just immerse themselves in it,

> as well as doing the festival as well, and that might be conceivable (interview with the author, March 8th 2023).

Nevertheless, the festival's website includes a section dedicated to accommodation options, providing details on a range of hotels and B&Bs. While it officially receives support from the Department of Tourism, tourism-related agencies such as Fáilte Ireland are not included among the festival's supporters. According to Finian:

> Tourism funding is a bit funny in that as Fáilte Ireland is only interested in bigger events. So, we get arts funding, but we don't get tourism funding. Our event would be considered too small. That's a literacy statement for me. [*People from*] Fáilte Ireland, I would say, are musically illiterate (interview with the author, March 8th 2023).

The festival developed a partnership with a community of musicians from the village of Carhaix in Brittany, France. As Carrickmacross is twinned with this town, the local Comhaltas branch is also twinned with the music school there, *L'Ecole de Musique du Poher*. The two groups hold an exchange visit biennially. Year after year, a group of musicians from Carrickmacross and another one from Carhaix are thus invited to "switch" urban centres, bringing their own music traditions as "guests" in a foreign context. In the words of Finian:

> We actually have a twinning arrangement with a music school in the town of Carhaix, which is in Brittany, in France. As arising out of that, in 2013, two of the teachers from Carhaix came over and we formally agreed a twinning. They came to us in 2014, we went to them in 2016, they came to us in 2018, we were due to go to them in 2020. That works really well […] for us because the Breton tradition is very much a dance tradition, whereas the Irish tradition is very much a music tradition, even though we play dance music. […] It was a real light bulb moment for myself and for a couple of others to see how strong the dancing was in Brittany […] and that informed our music, both partly the style, but also just the vitality of it, the strength of it. […] A lot of Bretons come over to Ireland purely just to learn the music, Irish traditional music (interview with the author, March 8th 2023).

This demonstrates the potential for this event to be accessible for an audience that is not only local or regional.

4.3.9. Féile Oriel

Féile Oriel is another Irish traditional music festival in Co. Monaghan. With a focus on the fiddle, it is held in and around Monaghan town just before the May bank holiday. Here, together with session trails and concerts, the main event is a fiddle competition divided into two parts. The first one is dedicated to young participants, while the second – and main – challenge is for senior competitors, and they are both enriched by the Elders of Fiddling Awards, an event to honour the gate keepers of the fiddling tradition with winners from past editions representing the four Irish provinces (Leinster, Munster, Connaught and Ulster), alongside USA and UK. Beyond competitions, the session trail has an important role within the area, with a shuttle bus that runs between the town centre, neighbouring villages and remote pubs where sessions included in the programme are hosted. The presence of a bus allows musicians without private vehicles to reach remote places and join the music activity. In addition, this enables small villages to benefit from the event in Monaghan town, receiving flows – of musicians, listeners and their money – and thus sustaining local operators and pub owners.

This festival is not organised by Comhaltas, even if the local branch supports and features in it. As outlined through an online interview with Elizabeth McGuinness, the festival's director, Féile Oriel has a long independent history – it was established in 1969 – but it is now managed by Mad About Monaghan, a local destination management organisation (DMO) and promotional agency for the county born in 2021. This is probably the reason why Féile Oriel, contrary to Féile Patrick Byrne or other initiatives in the region, seems to be aiming for a strong growth towards its affirmation as prestigious music event, with strong tourism outcomes. In 2023, Féile Oriel returned after a break of eleven years, with significant promotion including the distribution of leaflets during conferences and festivals in all Ireland and internationally (UK and USA), confirmed during the online interview I had with the festival's main responsible. As she reported: 'last year, after another hiatus (eleven years) a new committee formed and we started all over again! […] the new Elders of Fiddling was a concept (in my head for years) and brought to fruition [*in 2023*], honouring the gatekeepers of the fiddling tradition' (online interview with the author, June 23rd, 2024).

Moreover, international partnerships have been established, like the affiliation with the Fiddler of London, an Irish traditional music competition based in the English capital city. The return of this event was enormously celebrated with panels and posters displayed all around the historic centre and main routes around the town (Figure 62).



Figure 62: A poster of Féile Oriel and Guinness banners at the entrance of a local hotel in 2023 (source: author).

The festival tries to appeal to an audience that is intergenerational, mainly "domestic" (from Ireland) but also international (British and American). As Elizabeth told me: '[*in 2024*] people travelled from twenty-seven of the thirty-two counties to Monaghan. Even a lady from Chicago came to every single event we held' (online interview with the author, June 23rd, 2024).

The target audience is composed by traditional music enthusiasts and musicians, coming from both sides of the Irish border and beyond, regardless of their age. Hotels, churches and pubs are the main venues for the events within the series, while performers and concerts' guests are internationally renowned musicians, both from Ireland and abroad. The competition also plays a fundamental role, and it may become – just like Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann – the main reason for several competitors to attend the festival, visiting Monaghan for the chance to win a prestigious price and perform with renowned exponents of Irish music tradition. By targeting an established Irish traditional music audience, Féile Oriel sought to establish itself as a niche attraction within the calendar of Irish traditional music events. Despite incorporating the name 'Oriel' into the title of the festival, it does not exhibit or explicitly present features of the culture and heritage associated with Oriel region. Still, its organisation and the support it receives demonstrate the recognition given to this festival as music tourism opportunity for the region.

Unlike Féile Patrick Byrne, Féile Oriel is supported and funded by prestigious sponsors (such as Guinness and Fáilte Ireland themselves) and it is also included within local

tourism campaigns (Monaghan Tourism 2024). Contributions of the festival to local tourism are fundamental for the organisation, while the event also contributes to developing a reputation for Monaghan town as a music destination:

> That's a core part of planning a quality event, and core part of our focus. I have enough experience in tourism and travel in my previous life here and abroad, so I understand that one must provide a really great incentive for people to travel to a destination, spend money on accommodation, food etc. You need to have a unique offering. Also a range of events which appeals to a broader audience. Visiting Irish music events, locations, musicians etc. in USA and UK is all about building new relationships, forging alliances, bringing established music promoters and performers to Monaghan. It is already proving its worth. We had USA musicians playing in the sessions this year and we know for definite that more USA musicians are planning to travel here [*for future editions*] (online interview with the author, June 23rd, 2024).

This impacts local accommodation services, prompting the festival's online communication channels to share advice and information about lodging options in and around the town. As accommodation quickly reached full capacity during the first edition, organisers even issued public calls for local owners and landlords to offer available spaces.

Despite the geographical proximity and musical closeness with Féile Patrick Byrne, Féile Oriel appears as much more dynamic and more orientated towards the enjoyment of playing together, resembling similar experiences felt during the Fleadh or Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy. However, this occasionally led to slightly awkward situations, as the overwhelming presence of extremely young musicians from neighbouring towns and counties – one of the festival's main target groups – filled all the spaces reserved for performers, leaving older musicians without seats and feeling uncomfortable in a setting dominated by teenagers. In 2023, I recall my friend and colleague Darren Culliney leaving a session where he was playing in as, in his view, he was feeling "out of context" due to age-related reasons. In 2024, something similar occurred again. I arrived early to secure a good spot in the pub where a session was scheduled, but as soon as the other musicians filled the space, I realised I was surrounded by a group of teenage girls, making me feel extremely embarrassed and worried about the perception of other people (musicians and customers) in seeing an adult male in the middle of a group of young ladies – I eventually decided to leave that seat to get something more peripherical. The interest of the organisation in attracting large numbers of young performers made me think about potential issues regarding an

idealised expectations of the local community of practitioners against an organisers' profit-oriented strategy, interested in capitalising on a young and dynamic audience to develop a strong brand image.

4.3.10. William Kennedy Piping Festival

Held the first time in conjunction with Kennedy's 160th anniversary, the William Kennedy Piping Festival is an internationally renowned event that attracts an audience from across Europe and beyond. The festival, proposed by Eithne Vallely, was founded on the idea of piping acting as a common element across the divided communities of Armagh, carrying the potential of cultural exchange between Unionist and Nationalist communities, with the proposal to bring the Irish uilleann pipes together with the Scottish highland pipes (Moley 2015, p.67).

The annual festival is realised by members of the Armagh Pipers Club, a well-established music education organisation located in Armagh City, in the area of *Aonach Mhacha*. Established in 1966, the Armagh Pipers Club has been the epicentre for education of traditional Irish music in Armagh City, headed by Brian and Eithne Vallely (Vallely and Vallely 2012). The Club has no affiliation with other national music organisations such as Na Píobairí Uilleann or Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and is an independent entity. Its main goal is providing 'music lessons to over two hundred and fifty children every week on a variety of instruments including fiddle, flute, tin-whistle, accordion, concertina and advanced guitar accompaniment' (Moley 2015, p.63). As the Armagh Piper Club is an educational organisation, the festival has always put an emphasis on learning. Members and non-members of the Club can attend a series of events for a small fee (*ibid*., p.67). These activities are held in local concert halls, hotels, churches and pubs dedicated to the world of pipes and traditional music (Figure 63).



Figure 63: A session in Armagh during the 2022 edition of the Piping Festival (source: author).

The impact on the city was almost instantaneous, with the festival strengthening and creating new bonds within the Armagh City community (Vallely and Vallely 2012). Despite the fact that the uilleann pipes retain a primary role within the programme, the festival has been successful in establishing links and partnerships with foreign piping practices. Every year, part of the programme is dedicated to other music traditions that involve some sorts of bagpipes, such as the Italian *müsa* or the Galician *gaita*. The festival often includes lectures on different aspects of piping and types of pipes, specific musicians and other aspects of traditional music. Lectures are included in the festival programme, and they are given by local academics. Alongside workshops, concerts and other events such as sessions, there are also opportunities for uilleann pipers to attend specific workshops on reed making and pipe maintenance (*ibid*., p.68). The success of this festival highlights and enhances the connections between the Armagh Pipers Club and the uilleann pipes with their locality, which raises the profile of Armagh City reputation as one of the most important centre for uilleann piping in Ireland, similar to villages such as Miltown Mallbay (V. Commins 2014).

My experience attending these events highlighted the regional, as well as the international interest it raises, with musicians coming from the region (I recognised people from Co. Meath and Drogheda) but also performers and guest musicians from Portugal and the United States (bookings for the 2024 festival came from eighteen countries – Armagh Pipers Club 2025). Daily activities represent interesting opportunities to approach the uillean pipes, while sessions and night concerts guarantee high quality entertainment.

Difficulties with securing funding led to the cancellation of the festival in 2025. In particular, the Piping Club complained about the lack of support from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, while limited hotel accommodation in the city proved to be a major obstacle to attracting crowds needed to ensure a healthy income. While the Club will continue to deliver education programmes and concerts, the Festival itself has been suspended until further notice (*ibid*.). Nevertheless, the Club also received an overwhelming response from the Piping Festival's community, with many asking for a rethink, given the international significance the event had acquired through its efforts to showcase every national and regional piping style. Thus, in April 2025 a new, smaller, initiative was announced through the Festival's social media channels. The board of the Club is now going to present in November a scaled-down successor named William Kennedy Weekend; the focus will remain on pipe-based music, while other aspects of the former festival including school concerts, instrument workshops, and pub sessions will be maintained too.

4.3.11. Féile na Bealtaine

Féile na Bealtaine is a community music and arts festival that takes place during the May bank holiday every year. *Bealtaine* is the Irish word for Beltane, the Celtic festivity that celebrates the beginning of the Summer, and this recurrence is celebrated across Ireland with initiatives and events that showcase local heritage and traditions. In 2023, I joined a singing session facilitated by Colleen Savage, traditional singer from Crossmaglen, researcher at Dundalk Institute of Technology, and Chair of the Ring of Gullion Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Partnership. This singing workshop was held in Forkhill, in an isolated glamping site in the middle of the Oriel region named Bluebell Lane, as part of a series of events supported by the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. While the pleasant location, isolated in the woods and without Internet connection, provided opportunities for spiritual retreat, the workshop I attended consisted in activities of group singing lead by Colleen around a stove inside a wooden hut (Figure 64).



Figure 64: Singing circle with Colleen Savage during Féile na Bealtaine 2023 (source: author).

Tea, coffee and biscuits were provided, while the session was centred on the local repertoire from the South Armagh singing tradition (even if the focus remained on songs in English, such as *Dealin' Men of Crossmaglen*). Prior to singing, Colleen introduced each of the songs, sharing their histories and explaining what they were about, along with information on authors, collections, and recordings where it could be heard. As shown in the previous image, a singing circle was established, and – differently from other similar experiences – participants were provided with a booklet with lyrics and music scores of each song we were going to sing on that day. This proved invaluable for me, as it allowed me – a person from abroad, with musical knowledge but not an English nor Irish native speaker – to follow the lyrics and sing alongside everyone else. The event attracted a small number of listeners and participants, mainly women who are already interested in traditional singing (I actually recognised some persons I already met in Drogheda during the Traditional Music & Singing Weekend). While I joined an afternoon initiative, Colleen is also responsible for a series of events named "Sing for your Supper", that forecast singing activities during dinner time. According to Colleen herself, this initiative is also held at Bluebell Lane, where participants are invited to gather around a stove (similarly to the event I attended) and enjoy dinner, while Colleen teaches how to sing Irish songs, with the additional presence of a storyteller assisting her.

The hidden location where these events take place, as well as the number of people involved together with the kind of activities undergone, enable observers and participants to recognise them as interesting intimate experiences, where the activity of singing is associated

with learning processes, combining exciting and alternative initiatives with education and knowledge associated with local intangible heritage.

4.4. Other Concerts and Music Festivals

Beside Irish traditional music, Co. Louth retains a series of important music events that contribute to enriching the regional musicscape. In particular, a number of Classical music initiatives and festivals were recorded and observed during the fieldwork experience (see Appendices for additional details). While all of these events represent interesting opportunities to develop Louth's image as a destination for music enjoyment, some of these festivals are relatively small and targeted to a local audience. Nevertheless, others are internationally better-known and perhaps more relevant to tourism, even if they belong to a niche music market. This perspective was considered by Gavan Ring, artistic director of Drogheda Classical Music, who said:

> I think there's definitely a lot of potential there for sure. While the proximity to Dublin could be seen as both a disadvantage and an advantage, I think that nowadays, given how expensive Dublin has become, there's definitely an advantage there, because we are so congruous to Dublin, particularly North Dublin, and I think that there's an opportunity there for us […]. There's the opportunity there to experience the same calibre of international performance, you know, up the M1, as it were possibly half the price that you're going to pay in terms of tickets and accommodation and dinner and everything that you might associate with that event in Dublin (interview with the author, June 6th, 2024).

When I asked if music, even Classical music, could be seen as something that can be inserted within tourism strategies for Co. Louth and the north-east, Gavan replied positively, but he also highlighted difficulties to include this sort of music in comparison to Irish traditional music:

> Absolutely, yeah, 100%. And I think to a certain extent that's already been done. I think the go-to for an awful lot of tourist boards is Irish traditional music, because obviously it's easier to associate that with a place. Classical music sometimes is […] not necessarily the easiest thing for a tourist board in Ireland to sort of go towards. [...] Traditional music […] it's more mobile, it's more flexible. […] I think that particularly, let's say, for local tourism boards,

> traditional music just has that sort of, or certainly they perceive it to have that degree of flexibility which they may not necessarily perceive Classical music to have. Second of all, Irish traditional music […] is the most congruent cultural musical expression that we have in Ireland. So you're going to naturally gravitate towards that, particularly if you want to promote something Irish. […] I suppose Western Art music, for an awful lot of Irish history, was kind of seen more often as a sort of colonial import, rather than being something which is inherently Irish. [*Anyway*], over the last sort of hundred, let's say 50 to 100 years, that narrative has begun to change because I suppose Classical music nowadays is more seen as an expression of our European identity (interview with the author, June 6th, 2024).

These experiences demonstrate the wide music reality of Co. Louth, that spreads beyond traditional sounds, extending and enhancing the local intangible heritage proposal. This analysis challenges the notion that music tourism in (the north-east of) Ireland should be exclusively associated with Irish traditional music, advocating instead for greater recognition of the diversity of musical genres in the region. The number of Western Art music events within such a small territory, together with their similarities and diversities, highlights how this region can be identified as a cultural dynamic cluster (Krims 2011) for high quality performances. In these regards, Gavan's opinion highlighted creativity in the region as a leading reason:

> I think Classical music is very strong here, for sure […] and there seems to be more of an emphasis in the north-east region […]. There's definitely a kind of a feeling that it's something that is prioritised in this part of the country. […] I think there definitely seems to be […] a real enthusiasm for the creation of festivals and the creation of events and the creation of organisations in order to platform different types of music around here (interview with the author, June 6th, 2024).

Such recognition can advance the understanding of Louth as a destination for a certain target of visitors, interested in enriching their holiday experiences with niche music events in prestigious locations.

4.4.1. Drogheda Classical Music Series

In Drogheda, Drogheda Classical Music is an organisation that proposes the Drogheda Classical Music Series every year from September to April since 2012. The project was initiated by Pauline Ashwood, who started the Series in order to re-establish a Classical music scene in town. The current artistic director is Gavan Ring, a renowned tenor. In his words:

> [*Drogheda Classical Music*] was set up, I suppose, to provide that calibre of classical performance experiences for the people of Dublin and the surrounding area […] in a more decentralise way. I mean that you're sort of taking Classical music performances of that standard, which is normally associated with, let's say, platforms in more, urban or metropolitan centres, and bringing it into a regional, provincial centre like Drogheda, much along the lines of other similar festivals and series around the country like West Wicklow, Music for Galway, the West Cork Chamber Music Festival, and so on (interview with the author, June 6th, 2024).

With a focus on Chamber music and string quartets, the Series offers both stand-alone concerts, but it also proposes its initiatives within important events happening in Drogheda between late autumn and early spring. The Series is funded by the Arts Council of Ireland and the local County Council (Drogheda Classical Music 2025). Moreover, the organisation is partnered with the Droichead Arts Centre, and occasionally collaborates with other festivals in the city. As Gavan said:

> We have a long-standing arrangement with Droichead Arts Centre. They are our artistic partners within the town of Drogheda. So, we have an underlying agreement with them that we are essentially their outlet for Classical music performances. So, they do not programme Classical music in their venue *per se*. They allow us to cater for that aspect of their programming, and that sort of feeds into both our *raison d'etre* and theirs. […] And then, aside from that, whenever it's feasible and funding allows, we […] collaborate with festivals like the Drogheda Arts Festival. We engage with them, not necessarily on an annual basis, but maybe on a bi-annual or tri-annual basis, to organise or to have performances in conjunction with their festival as well (interview with the author, June 6th, 2024).

Drogheda Classical Music's concerts are usually hosted in the St Peter's Church of Ireland, which is the main religious building open to music events happening in the town. This church has an important music history, as this is the place where Anthony Bunting (Edward Bunting's brother – the man who collected harp music at the 1792 Belfast Harp Festival as previously mentioned) used to work as organist, and where Edward himself was sent to learn music (Carolan 2023, p.659). Concerts within the Series are usually intimate experiences attended by groups of adults and elderly people but feature artists with a significant profile and reputation within Western Art Music.

4.4.2. Ardee Baroque Festival

The Baroque Festival in Ardee was a small event lasting for a weekend at the end of November. Established in 2004, the festival was an initiative of Create Louth. The board of the event was drawn from the local community and worked in partnership with the County Council in programming, managing and marketing the festival (Ardee Baroque 2023). The festival consisted of a series of concerts focused on Baroque repertoire including international choirs, chamber music ensembles and small orchestras held at the end of November. It was usually hosted in St Mary's Abbey, the local Anglican church. Just like with the Drogheda Classical Music Series, the Ardee's concerts were intimate experiences attended mainly by elderly groups. Still, the music offer included significant performers from Ireland as well as the UK.

2024 was supposed to mark the festival's 20th anniversary, but the event did not take place. No public statement was released to explain the cancelation, while the festival's website is still providing information concerning the 2023 edition. Later communication with Co. Louth's Arts Officer confirmed that Ardee Baroque did not succeed in developing a strong community engagement. A review conducted by an independent consultant between 2022 and 2023[22] recorded insufficient attendance levels; it also demonstrated the festival was not providing economic benefits locally as it should, or would have done in its earlier years. Nevertheless, the Council has not ruled out returning to an early music event at some point in the future where an alternative location in the county that can provide the necessary infrastructural support that would be required to ensure its success would be considered.

[22] No additional information were given to me in this regard.

4.4.3. Boyne Music Festival

Western Art music in South Louth is also featured in the Boyne Music Festival, a summer event proposed along river Boyne. Established in 2013 and held between historical buildings of Drogheda town centre and Townley Hall, an impressive 18th century estate in the countryside, this festival proposes a series of concerts featuring string quartets and chamber music events together with lectures on composition and stylistically choices of most important European composers, spacing between Baroque to Contemporary performances. This event receives funding from many cultural organisations, but also from Fáilte Ireland and two county councils (Louth and Meath). The audience comprises mainly small numbers of older people, but also young people interested in Arts music events and families with children, as the festival is interested in supporting the development of young musicians in the country, with programmes and workshops designed specifically for both young children and aspiring young artists (Boyne Music Festival 2025).

This event represents an interesting opportunity to enjoy music within an isolated context, with the Townley Hall being the headquarters for all the main activities. This mansion is an exclusive place of culture that apparently opens to the public only for specific events. However, this place – and the events of the festival held here – suffer from poor accessibility. According to my experience, it is extremely difficult to get there without private vehicles, with no chance to attend evening and night concerts without a car. This aspect reflects a general weakness shared among all the Irish music initiatives outside major urban areas. The difficulty in accessing the festival made it complicate to evaluate the festival's impacts on the territory, as well as local community involvement.

4.4.4. Louth Contemporary Music Society Festival

Even North Louth retains important connections with a niche music scene. The Louth Contemporary Music Society (LCMS), a non-profit organisation founded in 2006, funded by the Arts Council and Create Louth, and based in Dundalk (LCMS 2025), is responsible for the LCMS Festival, an event happening in mid-June with 'a strong track record for excellence and innovation in Contemporary music programming in Ireland' (*ibid*.). The theme of the festival changes every year, but it always comprehends a series of concerts happening between Friday and Saturday around the town, resulting in a scattered event distributed over the weekend. These concerts are held within the St Nicholas' Church of Ireland, Dundalk's main Protestant building (and this is the venue for the final concert of the

festival), local chapels and high schools, small concerts and events halls and at the Spirit Store, one of the most renowned Dundalk's pubs. While the audience includes mainly adults and elderly people, some young and families are attracted to these concerts, which involve choirs and internationally acclaimed contemporary musicians and composers, performing in duos or small ensembles.

Some of the music performed during the festival is commissioned by the event's committee, and the festival thus becomes the place of first execution of new compositions. More renowned contemporary arrangements and melodies are also part of the featured repertoire. For example, in 2008 the Societies commissioned Arvo Pärt to compose a new choral composition based on St Patrick's Breastplate; in 2023, the final concert saw the performance of *In C*, by the famous American composer Terry Reily, who already worked with the Society in 2007. What was interesting is that this piece was performed by a group of Irish traditional musicians, playing local instruments such as uilleann pipes and the Irish bouzouki (Figure 65).



Figure 65: Greetings after the execution of In C, performed during the 2023 LCMS Festival (source: author).

This performance saw the involvement of renowned Irish traditional musicians, including local performer Zoë Conway. Her participation is notable, as charismatic individuals have been shown to play a key role in sustaining the development of successful

initiatives and imaginaries (Gradinaru 2021), stressing and increasing the size of cultural networks and local social capital, leading community development (Bourdieu 1986).

This event resulted in a curious mixture of contemporary Arts music together with Irish traditional sounds, in a context that, according to some of my interviewees, is a unicum within the Irish music landscape, as this is the only contemporary music festival happening in the country. This festival has garnered positive audience response. Feedback have demonstrated its ability in presenting contemporary music in an accessible, interesting and inspiring way, both to existing and new audiences (*ibid*.). Annalisa Monticelli, an Italian lecturer and performer, emphasized the potential role this event may have in enriching Louth's music reputation nationally and internationally:

> LCMS stands out on an international level. Its organisers do truly excellent, top-quality work. Some of the very best musicians in this niche have been brought to Dundalk. I don't think they can expand much further because of funding issues, but they do organise significant events. This series is definitely one of the highlights of the area (interview with the author, June 1st, 2023).

Arguably, this is one of the events that can contribute most significantly to Louth's reputation for music beyond its traditional scene, as the unique music experience provided by this society is an opportunity for Dundalk to appear as a holiday destination for contemporary music enthusiasts.

4.5. Music Edutainment in Louth

As demonstrated in earlier sections, many music events in Louth and in its surroundings are connected to educational aspects. In different ways, all the music initiatives I joined provided participants with opportunities to practice and enhance their music skills, or discover something new. Children and pupils are often a primary component of the audience, and they are a major target for classes and workshops. Nevertheless, as my fieldwork demonstrated, many of these events are a chance for adult learners to approach musicking experiences too. In particular, lessons and music courses are not solely aimed at children – as was traditionally the norm – but they are increasingly involving adult learners. This is something I witnessed firsthand, as – through my field-play (Rice 2008) – I was able to advance my musical knowledge while attending classes at the Oriel Centre, or events such as Féile na Tána and the Séan Corcoran Series, and joining weekly sessions in Dundalk – as well as, on occasion, in other towns like Drogheda, Carrickmacross, or Monaghan during

specific initiatives. The opportunity of participating both as a member of the audience as well as a musician enabled me to fully experience these activities through a multi-faced perspective, allowing me to overcome the insider-outsider dichotomy, allowing for a deeper understanding of the realities observed (*ibid*.). These experiences provided me with opportunities to develop and increase the knowledge associated with Irish tunes and the proper way to play them. In particular, my time at the Oriel Centre allowed me to advance my knowledge of Irish flute playing, while also approaching the uilleann pipes for the first time. My flute teacher explained to me elements of Irish traditional ornamentation such as cuts, taps and rolls, and made me apply them on new tunes every week. My pipes mentor did the same, although – unlike with the flute – I was merely a beginner. As I am a classically trained musician, I was often provided with music scores, but I was always challenged to learn new things by ear. This approach simultaneously confirms and broadens the "traditional" methods of learning Irish traditional music, transmitted orally (O'Connor 2001; Cawley 2021). Beyond formal teaching experiences, edutainment also emerged in informal contexts such as sessions, workshops and concerts with Scale Force or the Oriel Traditional Orchestra, where I gradually learnt how to perform their repertoires in the manner of the local community of practice (while also adding a "personal taste", such as the use of a piccolo).

Almost every traditional music festival in the area represents interesting opportunities to learn a musical instrument in an immersive and engaging environment, with famous teachers whose ability with their instruments is recognised in Ireland and abroad. The appealing qualities of these tutors create intergenerational possibilities for edutainment. Sessions too are opportunities to discover and understand new musical dialogues and community interactions. This is also due to the welcoming aspect of musicians in Co. Louth, that provided opportunities for learning and for experiencing edutainment. The informality and friendliness which dominate these moments offer a chance to beginners to approach Irish traditional melodies and tunes, allowing them to play together with musicians with a consolidated background. This willingness to let beginners and people coming from abroad playing and learning within a community-based approach is thus a key feature for local music initiatives. When discussing about sessions as open learning opportunities Noreen McManus gave me her vision of what being so musically welcoming means to her: '[…] Welcoming people from other countries, and then we are making contacts and we can […] learn and play some of their music' (interview with the author, February 17th, 2023).

The role of sessions as educational and learning opportunities brought me to think about the possibility of differentiating between two forms of (music) learning processes while experiencing entertainment. Similarly to Harte's case study, which engages with the analysis of different pedagogical perspectives in teaching Irish traditional music in the North American university system (2015), I identify two forms of learning processes. The former is more "explicit" (represented by frontal engagement between student and teacher/tutor during workshops or music classes), while the latter is somehow "implicit" and based on empiricism (expressed through learning opportunities that emerge during a session). A similar distinction is already confirmed by historical pedagogical studies, such as Jerome Bruner's *The Process of Education* (1960), in which the author distinguishes between expository learning (where the teacher actively transmits content) and discovery learning (which is closer to implicit learning). I observed and documented both of the learning forms during fieldwork in Louth, noticing how they connect to Small's concept of musicking, whereas music production is a social act that includes learning processes (1998).

Music learning activities can be considered as a tourism commodity through the lens of experiential tourism, transforming what is already happening in the community into a resource. Different tourism forms are now more closely inter-woven with learning and education, emphasizing it as a primal aspect of the journey experience, recalling in this way the *Grand Tour* (Urry 2003). All of these initiatives thus offer visitors and outsiders the opportunity to learn about and engage with music while are having moments of entertainment and joy, experiencing edutainment.

4.6. Experiencing Authenticity in Louth's Music

Having examined the experience of current musical practice in the north-east of Ireland, I will now consider potentialities to identify aspects of authenticity in local initiatives, considering them through an ethnographic, as well as tourism-oriented, perspective. My fieldwork attending music initiatives showed a divergence from the practice and discourses that characterise the music scene of major Irish destinations. Historically, the interface between tourism and Irish traditional music raises a whole series of questions regarding the social, cultural and territorial impacts of this practice, its sustainability, its hybridization and its commodification (Kaul 2007), leading to discussions concerning the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and staged authenticity (MacCannell 1973; Kaul 2007). While what is perceived to be "traditional" in

Irish music passes through a continuous process of development and adaptation, expressing the "living culture" aspect of music (Kaul 2009, p.159), tourists, visitors and the tourism industry extend the meanings of its authenticity, interpreting it through imaginaries based on media and stereotypes, influencing music production and consumption according to their expectations (Kaul 2004; Kaul 2009).

Music sessions are particularly subject to this imbalance, with Adam Kaul acknowledging innovations in the performance, quality and meaning of the session experience (2009). The majority of tourists consume the session largely through the medium of "the gaze" (Urry 1990), without participating in other sensorial aspects such as talking, but instead enjoying the session in the same way of a gig (Kneafsey 2003, p.34). Tourists' expectation contributes in modifying the shape of the "typical" session, especially in established tourism destinations like the village of Doolin, in Co. Clare – considered as the "Mecca" of Irish traditional music (Kaul 2009) – or in Dublin city itself (Hegarty 2004), denoting effects of commodification and adaptation (Kaul 2007). Nevertheless, while addressing issues concerning the standardisation of sessions in renowned tourism destinations, Kaul proposes to discuss the "musical construction of place" and the outcomes of commodification as a form of adaptation of tradition (2009, pp.152-156). In addition, tourists and musicians developed a sort of symbiotic relationship, with the former providing support, encouragement and income for the latter, while performers provide a seemingly authentic cultural experience for tourists (Kneafsey 2003). If this reflects negative aspects of commodification and staged authenticity (MacCannell 1973; Kaul 2007), on the other side this represents an opportunity for musicians and publicans to get additional income because of their music production and promotion. As Frederick Lau suggests, 'tourism and its impact can no longer be categorically interpreted as a form of exploitation; rather, they assume the role of a transnational network of exchanges in which the locals and the tourists are directly and indirectly fulfilling each other's needs' (1998, pp.131–132).

Contrary to the experiences of scholars and journalists engaging with Irish traditional music scenes that experience deep tourism pressures (Hegarty 2004; Kaul 2009), sessions in Co. Louth and surroundings still preserve aspects of "authenticity" and informality (according to standardized imaginaries associated with them). This theme can be understood and analysed from multiple perspectives. There seem to be at least three different axes to understand authenticity in the context of music tourism production and enjoyment. They include:

1. Musical performance style (how music is performed, in terms of style and instrumentation);

2. Production and staging (amplification and technology, the relationship between performers and audience);

3. Social interactions (community feelings and familiarity among participants).

As tourism does not heavily impact on Louth's music heritage (since tourism is not a major driving force in the regional economy), tourism expectations (see Goertzen and Azzi 1999) and marketing do not significantly impact on the local music scene, that remains composed by a community of musicians focused on enjoying their own music production and consumption without external pressures. While Co. Louth's traditional music scene remains influenced by imaginaries inspired by the Riverdance phenomenon – with the Sligo style being part of local soundscape thanks to the work of John Joe Gardiner – the attitude towards music and musicking is different. In this sense, authenticity may emerge as an aspect of informality, within the multitude of interactions between musicians and among performers and audience that are not staged, but spontaneous. In my experience, these gatherings of musicians were in fact encounters of local people playing just for their own pleasure, even if the "leading musicians" were offered money to perform. This is in contrast with what happens in renowned destinations such as Doolin, Ennis or where the Fleadh is held, where many people come from afar to engage in sessions as a professional act. Often, sessions are scheduled on a weekly basis, but remain something by the community for the community, and not something marketed to an outsider world beyond those engaged in playing and listening to Irish traditional music locally or connected to individuals on social media. In this sense, they still preserve a strong sense of informality and casualness. This aspect was also emphasized with different musicians from the area. Moreover, all the sessions I attended did not have any amplification system. Music filled the spaces in a more natural way; people were not forced to listen to it if they did not want to; they can simply change seat if they prefer to ignore the musicians. This aspect emphasizes the differences from what Kaul used to describe in relation to Doolin's session environment, where amplification systems are often cited as the most important indicator of how commercial and tourist-oriented the session has become, turning in fact into a performance (2009, pp.110–112).

Tunes and repertoire are also something that must be considered. While in overtouristified environments like Dublin's Temple Bar quarter, whose relation with traditional music has been defined 'clearly problematic' (O'Flynn and Mangaoang 2019,

p.35), the standard repertoire includes mainly renowned Irish drinking songs, some clichéd instrumental tunes together alongside versions of internationally famous pop songs – performed in order to meet tourists' expectations together with the necessity of involving them in the singing process (Hegarty 2004) – the usual repertoire in the north-east of Ireland include both popular jigs and reels together with more local tunes. All of these aspects suggest (music) tourism in Ireland is not a homogenous experience, but rather a regionalised one with different outcomes arising depending on the destination and its features, being it a "disneyficated" tourist cultural area like Temple Bar quarter (Dillane and Raine 2023) nor a peripheral tourism destination such as the north-east.

This music environment can actually lead to the development of deeper social interactions. During my fieldwork, I realised that merely consuming music and drinks was not enough to feel the craic. During the first stages of my research, I was always missing the social aspect. Gradually, I gained knowledge of music played during sessions and other events, and so, joining them week after week, people started to know me, chatting with me, developing acquaintances and, eventually, friendships. Like in a hermeneutic arc, despite my foreign origins I gradually transformed into something new (Rice 2017), overcoming the emic-etic dichotomy (Barz and Cooley 2008; Culliney and Pessina 2022). This new awareness of myself within my fieldwork environment, surrounded by laughs and people having a good time, ultimately contributed to my understanding of what the craic is and greatly informs my research.

The great sense of community involvement, informality and friendliness surrounding many music initiatives in Louth are an additional value for this territory and its music. Through these social interactions, one can recognise different aspects of authenticity. Despite being a slippery term, authenticity – in the sense of something not staged nor commodified – is identified as festivals and activities in the area preserve communitarian features, being mainly for local people's pleasure. Many of these events provide opportunities to observe the emergence of communal bonds among community members, while also offering visitors a chance to feel welcomed within a foreign context. This friendliness and solidarity express a sense of group that imply shared identities, norms and social commitment, leading to "authentic" human connections that strengthen social capital, ultimately contributing to community development (Gradinaru 2021). My experience approaching Louth's music demonstrate that authenticity in this context is achieved primarily in relation to the third criterion (social interactions) – and partially the second relating to techniques of production and staging. Following from this, here I argue that an understanding of authenticity based on

modes of social interaction is what matters for the experience of local music-making – including the tourist experience – rather than aesthetic or stylistic criteria that run the danger of introducing purist considerations that impede expression and creativity for musicians.

4.7. Conclusions

Through the description of first-hand experiences, together with direct ethnographic accounts, this chapter has highlighted the different opportunities for musicking in the north-east of Ireland, with a particular focus on Irish traditional sessions, music festivals and workshops. Local music and the ways in which it is manifested in the region provides deeply engaging and affective cultural experiences, while the intimate and small-scale character of its music events provide an alternative to some of the more renowned destinations which tend to be bigger, more anonymous, and less immersive.

Experiencing music in the area offers opportunities for approaching various genres in different ways and settings. This territory proposes a wide range of music experiences. Irish traditional music in Co. Louth in particular is composed primarily by sessions and festivals, that often provide chances for informal learning and intimate enjoyment, far from the standardised encounters visitors may find in high-tourism destinations, where traditional music is a main attraction. Beyond traditional music, Western Art music events were particularly prominent during my fieldwork, considering the small dimensions of this territory. This aspect confirms Co. Louth and its neighbouring territories as a music cluster with a rich cultural offer. Many of these initiatives are sustained by and live through participation of the local community. Through sessions and festivals, people here become part of a wider social capital that contribute in valuing local music as a fundamental theme to express regional identities and a sense of place.

The focus on current musical practice in Louth has critically analysed local events by providing an overview of their strengths and opportunities – like edutainment, intimacy and social authentic experiences – as well as considerations concerning their weaknesses and limits, such as accessibility or funding. In the next chapter, I am going to deliver a fully detailed critique on the role of tourism within the county, with an insight on the potential for music tourism development in Louth. This will include tables and models, together with a comprehensive SWOT analysis and future recommendations.

Chapter 5: Critiquing Music Tourism in Louth

5.1. Introduction

This final chapter critically examines the potential of music tourism enhancement for Co. Louth and the north-east of Ireland, considering how the local music scene could benefit – or be affected – from a tourism development strategy centred on its recognition as a key destination commodity. It also includes reflections on how the connection established between tourism and communities of musical practice can ultimately lead to the celebration of local, hidden or even neglected aspects of music heritage in Louth.

In the first sections I critique the role and significance of tourism in Co. Louth, acknowledging development plans which recognise this theme as a key driver for regional economic growth. Then, drawing on Munsters' study of cultural tourism resources (2021), I examine Louth's music and tourism supply through a series of models which point to a SWOT analysis, comprehensive of strengths, opportunities and threats emerged during fieldwork experience, interviews and questionnaires. This study involves considerations related to local music, but it also reflects interests, desires and concerns coming from other stakeholders (like accommodation providers and other local actors that deal with tourism and music flows in the region). Visitors' perspectives are also acknowledged where possible by means of online questionnaires. Finally, the role, and potential, of some urban places such as the town of Drogheda or the village of Carlingford are also evidenced, together with the ways in which music, tourism and their combination can provide opportunities to achieve UN's SDGs concerning peace and well-being on the Irish border, while enhancing and advancing appreciation for local traditions.

The end of the chapter recommends pillars and sets objectives for the future, implemented through the proposal of a coordinated project for music tourism development built around a participative network of public and private stakeholders, as well as major regional decision makers and gatekeepers. This initiative would challenge an administrative system that is largely based on county structures, but it would also question current regional tourism plans, which often overlook the integration of music as a core component of local tourism offerings. Three case studies from international contexts are then proposed to guide the proposal of a music tourism strategy for the north-east of Ireland.

5.2. Reputation of Louth on the Tourism Market

As already demonstrated in Chapter 2, tourism phenomena and outcomes contribute positively to the Irish economy. Nevertheless, tourism flows are distributed unequally, with the majority of holiday makers remaining in and around the Dublin city area, or travelling to the western regions of the island. While the Ireland's Ancient East campaign welcomes a considerable number of domestic and overseas visitors (Fáilte Ireland 2023b), Co. Louth (together with Co. Meath) only receives approximately 2% of the total amount of tourists in Ireland.[23]

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the region is culturally rich, but its tourism potential remains overlooked. The local authority recognises that Co. Louth 'has much to offer as a tourist destination, in particular its unspoilt natural environment, a rich and varied heritage and numerous cultural and manmade attractions […] and is ideally located equidistant between Dublin and Belfast international airports' (Louth County Council 2021). It is an accessible destination and, although 'tourism has played a significant role in the economic recovery in recent years and is fundamental in terms of the opportunities it generates', Fáilte Ireland indicates that this is an area that does not receive the attention it deserves (*ibid*.). The launch of the marketing campaign Ireland's Ancient East in 2015 suggested a rebalancing of the Irish tourism marketing strategy – previously focused on Dublin city and the Wild Atlantic Way – but Louth remained at the periphery, further problematised by its location in the border region (Jackman 2016). This happened because Co. Louth and the north-east have not been consistently promoted and recognised as tourism destinations. Even leading regional destinations like Carlingford were originally omitted, together with Dundalk and North Louth, from the first Ireland's Ancient East promotional materials and maps (Figure 66 – Roddy 2015).

[23] This data was shared during a Fáilte Ireland Tourism Expertise meeting held in 2023 near Dundalk. Nevertheless, no published report appears to confirm this information. Moreover, there seems to be no publicly available data specifically outlining the percentage of tourism arrivals to Co. Louth only.



Figure 66: First Ireland's Ancient East promotional brochure (Boyne Valley Day Tours 2015).

Something similar occurred again in 2024, with Brigid 1500. Despite a considerable list of activities (Newman 2024), concerns were raised as the event was omitted from the Tourism Ireland's St Brigid's Day national campaign (Roddy 2024a), with David Conway, Louth County Council's Chief Executive, questioning this imbalance (Dundalk Leader 2025b). These examples reflect an historical emphasis on Dublin city and the south/west coast in the mind of principal Irish tourism organisations and actors, with less-renowned territories facing a series of difficulties in becoming recognised attractive destinations. The closure of the D Hotel in Drogheda in 2024 to host approximately five hundred asylum seekers, created a shortage of accommodation in an area that needs to improve its tourism attractiveness. Drogheda's deputy mayor Kevin Callan criticised a lack of consultation and shared decision making in this regard. He also suggested it would have a "devastating impact" on Drogheda as the hotel was the biggest in town, with a net loss of €5.4 million per year from the absence of visitors (McGreevy 2024). The mayor described this structure as an "anchor" of regional tourism strategies for the town and the Boyne Valley, suggesting

also that – in these conditions – the town would not be able to host Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann that year (*ibid*.). This situation also raised concerns among the local population, with hundreds of protestors gathering in front of the building (Hogan 2024) – even though criticisms were recorded as these protests were joined by non-local far-right and anti-refuges activists (Gleeson 2024).

Despite the challenges outlined, Fáilte Ireland itself has acknowledged the importance of spreading and distributing overseas and domestic tourists from a geographical as well as seasonal perspective, in order to guarantee long-term sustainable development and to extend the associated economic and social benefits beyond the most renowned cities and regions (Fáilte Ireland 2025). It is along these lines that new documents and plans – like those previously described in Chapter 2 – have emerged, recognising tourism as an economic catalyst for the north-east. The following sections examine challenges and limits, proposing local music opportunities as cultural leading themes for Co. Louth and the north-east. An analysis of Louth's tourism system and resources culminates in a comprehensive SWOT analysis where the potential for music tourism enhancement in the region is critically addressed.

5.3. Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027

The Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 is a strategical document adopted by the members of Louth County Council. This strategy provides a framework for Louth's growth and development with underlying and cross cutting themes including tourism (discussed within its Chapter 6). This plan provides a guideline for tourism enhancement in the county, referring to current promotional initiatives, regional heritage and other strengths, but also possibilities to advance cross-border tourism and improve aspects like accommodation offer. Previous plans published between 2016 and 2021 established the way to improve tourism's economic contribution in the county, forecasting a partnership between the Louth Tourism Office and other players like Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, and Tourism Northern Ireland (Louth County Council 2021). In particular, goals included:

1. An increase of the number of bed nights and "dwelling time";
2. A maximisation of revenue funding to achieve commercial advantage;
3. Marketing and promotion of Louth's unique heritage, arts and cultural strengths;
4. An emphasis on Louth's "green" county reputation, its quality environment credentials and its sporting activities.

While these objectives still lead the effort for tourism enhancement in the region, the new Development Plan 2021-2027 establishes the necessity of capitalising on Co. Louth's unique location, enclosed between the Boyne Valley and the Mourne/Cooley/Gullion Region (*ibid*.). The Boyne Valley infrastructure – which draws together the tourism industry of Co. Louth and Co. Meath, whose fulcrum is centred on the *Brú na Bóinne* UNESCO World Heritage Site, plus other relevant archaeological sites and monuments like the Battle of the Boyne location, Mellifont Abbey and Monasterboice – is recognised as a central destination marketing and advocacy body, where a collective approach with the tourism trade and other key stakeholders can turn this region into a leading tourism destination in Ireland.

Beyond the Boyne Valley, the Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Geotourism project is identified as another strategic investment to strengthen the area's attractiveness. This is a cross-border initiative that aims to develop a competitive, internationally recognised tourism destination taking advantage of the precious landscape and related cultural heritage of the Mourne and Cooley Mountains and of the Ring of Gullion area, improving visitor infrastructures and services while raising awareness of this natural resource (*ibid*.). Such focus on the potential of the Cooley Mountains and of the Slieve Gullion system is mainly positive, as highlighted during an interview with a South Armagh singer and chairperson of the Ring of Gullion Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership, who noted that these geological areas often remain overshadowed by the more widely known Mourne Mountains.

The Louth County Development Plan outlines all other attractions that constitute Co. Louth' offer, such as medieval sites and ruins, historic houses, all the diverse activities including outdoor sports, horse racing and fishing, walks and cycle routes, coastlines, arts and culture. Particular consideration is given to the Great Eastern Greenway – a new infrastructure which is going to connect Carlingford with Newry, in Northern Ireland – and the Boyne Greenway, that runs alongside the shores of the river, together with the wide array of heritage assets. It is within these lines that heritage tourism is recognised as one of the most important and fastest growing aspects for the regional tourist industry and one of the pillars for the Ireland's Ancient East initiative (*ibid*.). The plan also recognises events and festivals as important pull factors for the county, thereby increasing expenditure, attracting visitors during the off-peak season and encouraging repeat visitation.

While this strategy acknowledges the two editions of the Fleadh in Drogheda, alongside the International Harp Festival, these are the only two occasions in the whole document where music-related themes are mentioned. There are entire paragraphs dedicated

to culture and heritage, but again direct references to music and the potential of music festivals in and for Co. Louth are missing. In 2023, a two-year progress report was published.[24] While it states that Louth County Council 'continues to work closely with the relevant stakeholders, including Fáilte Ireland and Meath County Council, in maximising the tourism potential of the Boyne Valley and the progression of various projects included in the "Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy 2016-2020'' (Louth County Council 2023, p.41), music is still absent from major discourses about local cultural resources. The only exception is represented by the Séan Corcoran Series, mentioned here as the inaugural edition took place that year (*ibid*., p.32).

Music from the territory is neglected when compared with other themes in the "experiential basket" such as sport or gastronomy. Still, a focus on music in the region may contribute to reaching several policy objectives outlined in this strategy. The Louth Development provides a series of goals for each of its chapters. I summarise here those objectives which could benefit from the recognition of the value of local music for tourism enhancement:

1. 6.16: To support and promote existing festivals to increase the cultural, heritage and lifestyle profile of the county, and where appropriate to promote and facilitate the development of new events and venues to host these events;
2. 6.17: To facilitate the sustainable development of the tourism sector and provide for the delivery combination of a unique of tourism opportunities drawing on the network of attractions in County Louth and potential future attractions;
3. 6.20: To promote the sustainable development of Co. Louth as a quality tourist destination in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and associated agencies themed on heritage, culture and an unspoilt natural environment and support innovative tourism projects that would boost employment and promote County Louth as a tourism destination (Louth County Council 2021).

There is also another objective within the two-years monitoring report (Policy Objective SC 21), which forecasts support, development and sustainability of arts and cultural infrastructure at appropriate locations throughout the County, guaranteeing their accessibility to all members of the community (Louth County Council 2023). The way in

[24] In May 2025 Visit Louth announced that Louth County Council was undertaking the development of a new five-year Tourism Strategy (2025-2030). According to Louth County Council's Tourism Officer, this new document should highlight music experiences within the regional cultural offer. In the same year, Louth County Council launched a community survey to inform a new tourism strategy covering the period 2026-2031.

which music can contribute to achieving these targets is showcased in the next sections, which present an analysis of Louth's tourism system and resources, culminating in a comprehensive SWOT analysis where the potential for music tourism enhancement in the region is critically addressed.

5.4. Louth Tourism System

As already discussed previously, Co. Louth can rely on a number of attractions, including dramatic sceneries and a rich cultural heritage. Drawing on Munsters' analysis of cultural tourism resources (2021), Louth's cultural, music and tourism assets are examined through a series of models which points to an overview of strengths and weaknesses of the destination, leading to a SWOT analysis dedicated to demonstrating the potential of the county and of its region as a valuable music tourism destination. The application of the model provides an overall systematic inventory of the tourism supply of this territory (*ibid*.), facilitating readability and comprehension of the context. Figure 67 displays a summary of Louth's cultural resources.

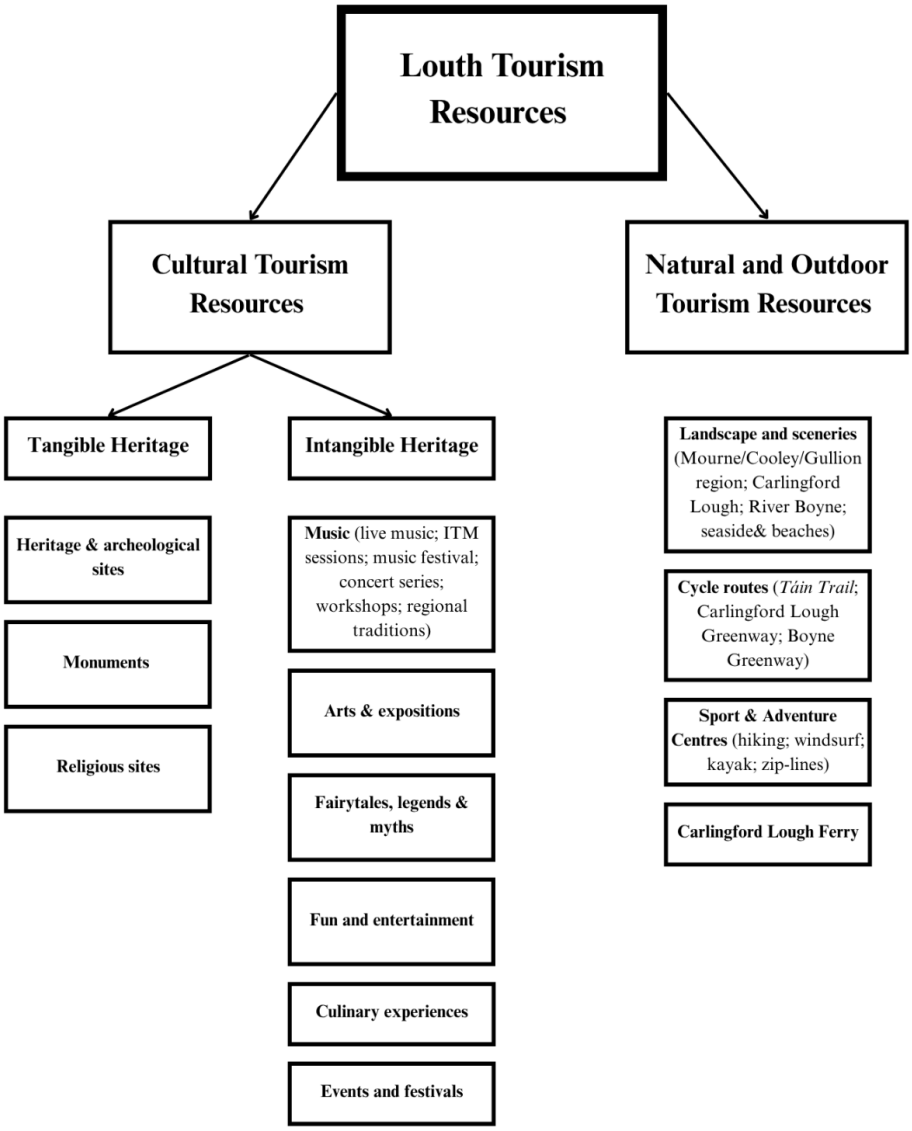


Figure 67: Louth tourism resources (source: author).[25]

These resources are then contextualised within the local tourism system, alongside infrastructures and facilities (Figure 68).

[25] By "fun and entertainment", I refer to a wide range of leisure activities, mostly those associated with nightlife economy.

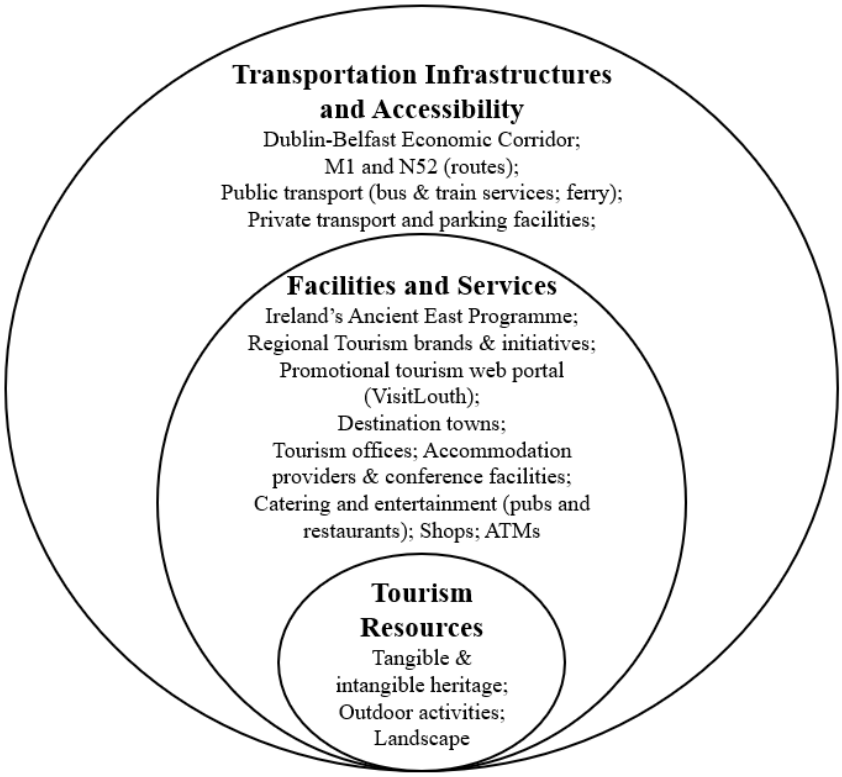


Figure 68: Co. Louth tourism product (source: author).

Such models serve as tools to inform the internal analysis of Co. Louth's tourism strengths, leading to an overview of the themes included in the following SWOT analysis.

5.5. SWOT Analysis

With a view to highlight the potential of Co. Louth's music for tourism development, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are discussed in Table 3 to understand the region's potential to become a recognizable Irish music destination. This SWOT analysis helps to identify gaps in my fieldwork and questions that need to be addressed in my research.

Table 3: SWOT analysis (source: author).

STRENGHTS Accessibility (geographical location + cheap entrance fees); Tangible & intangible heritage; Attractive landscapes; Absence of overtourism; Festivals & events outside high tourism season; High-quality and intimate performances; Informality and community-based approach of local music activities; "Authentic" experiences; Destination towns.	**WEAKNESSES** Accessibility (poor public transport infrastructures in the countryside); Anonymous reputation of Co. Louth and Dundalk; Poor accommodation offer; Weak promotion and communication; Small audience; Recognition of music as a tourism resource; Limited interest for ITM among pub owners and local youths; Absence of regular ITM series; Neglected local music heritage; Administrative & tourism policy divisions; Lack of co-ordination between initiatives; Clash between stakeholders; Absence of professionalism and volunteering.
OPPORTUNITIES Promotion of Co. Louth as a (music) tourism destination; Enhancement of tourism development plans; Recognition within the ITM landscape; Development of niche tourism practices; Funding; Opportunities for edutainment; Opportunities to face seasonality; Potential to attract a wider audience; Increase of tourism expenditure; Urban development and restoration Connection between music with architectural heritage; Co-ordination and marketing activity; Enhancement of branding strategies; Increase of local cultural awareness; Safeguarding of Oriel intangible cultural heritage; Heritagization processes.	**THREATS** Commodification of a genuine local music environment; Festivalization; Poor planning and lack of a good co-ordination among stakeholders; Insufficient interest and lack of support; Internal competition between attractions and actors; Overtourism (increase of prices, negative perception of visitors…); Overdependence on organisers.

5.5.1. Strengths

Results from field research, interviews and the analysis of online contents and reports show that a project for music tourism enhancement in the area can benefit from several strengths the territory offers. This region is positioned on the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor, and so it is well connected and easily accessible from main Irish cities (and their

airports), with multiple options available of public transport. Accessibility also comes in economic terms, as entry fees of many music initiatives (where applicable) remain relatively affordable (ranging from €5 to €40 per person). The north-east of Ireland (Louth, Meath and Monaghan) presents the highest concentration of heritage sites in the entire Republic, and they are located in geographical contexts characterised by outstanding landscapes encompassing seaside shores, hills, mountains and rural areas. In addition, this territory is renowned for a rich intangible heritage composed by legends, fairytales and mythology, but also poetry, literature and music traditions.

This region of Ireland receives few overseas and domestic tourists, as it is not considered as a "must" for visitors, which generally remain in Dublin city or travel directly to the south and west of the island. This imbalance is mirrored into the replies I collected through a questionnaire addressed to pubs and music venues in the region, where sixty respondents provided me with insights about the weight of tourism in their business (see Appendices for the survey questions used). As Co. Louth and the north-east do not receive huge numbers of visitors, only a minority of pubs and venues reported that tourism had a relevant impact over their businesses (Figure 69). Notably, forty-eight participants (80% of the total) indicated that the percentage of business derived from visitors is less than 20%.



Figure 69: Pubs and venues' percentage of business derived from visitors and tourists (source: author).

Nevertheless, this situation allows a proposal of a territory that does not suffer from overtourism phenomena, where the presence of visitors affects negatively physical and social spaces of the destination (Fontanari and Traskevich 2021). Moreover, the number of music and cultural events outside of the tourism peak season can contribute to a music tourism proposal that benefits from the constant presence of music-related initiatives throughout the year, with some initiatives happening in periods when the competition between destinations and music festivals is less fierce (Moley 2015).

The majority of music in the region is expressed through small initiatives, proposing high-quality music consumption within an intimate and informal environment. The intimacy characterising many events from the north-east of Ireland allows for a deeper immersion within the music discourse and among its practitioners, similarly to other niche activities (Porfido 2022). In addition, many of them (especially Irish sessions) are characterised by aspects of "authenticity", at least from the point of view of visitors and of the meaning they attribute to this concept (Hughes 1995). Authenticity is also expressed through the informality and friendliness that occur during these music encounters, which lead to opportunities to approach and discover Irish traditional music.

Despite being at the periphery of Ireland's main tourism routes – with the only exception of *Brú na Bóinne* – Co. Louth and the Boyne Valley benefit from the 2021 designation of Drogheda as a "Destination Town" by Fáilte Ireland, following the successful editions of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 2018 and 2019 (Kearney and Burns 2022; Fáilte Ireland 2023b). This means that the Irish tourism board is now allocating funding to boost attractiveness and tourism potential of the town and for the entire region. The village of Carlingford also has the potential to be recognised as a relevant regional tourism centre. The potential role these urban settlements may have in leading a regional music tourism strategy in the region is detailed in section 5.6.

5.5.2. Weaknesses

The presentation of music in the promotion of Co. Louth and the north-east of Ireland suffers from infastructural weaknesses, which appear quite common outside of the main urban areas (see McKerrell and Hornabrook 2022), threatening the attainment of positive returns from a music tourism strategy.

If accessibility is considered a strength from the point of view of connections between main cities, the area suffers at the same time from a lack of public transport infrastructures in its countryside, with many villages – and events – that are difficult to reach without the use of private vehicles. As Co. Louth and the surrounding region are not among primary tourist destinations in Ireland, they tend to hold a relatively anonymous profile in the perception of visitors, especially those coming from abroad. This aspect also emerged from the responses to the questionnaire dedicated to tourists. As shown in Figure 70, the majority of international travellers reported having little to no knowledge of the county and its cultural heritage, with eighteen participants (on a total of twenty-four respondents) choosing the

"None of the above" option, in contrast to themes such as local history and cultural elements (see Appendices for the survey questions used).

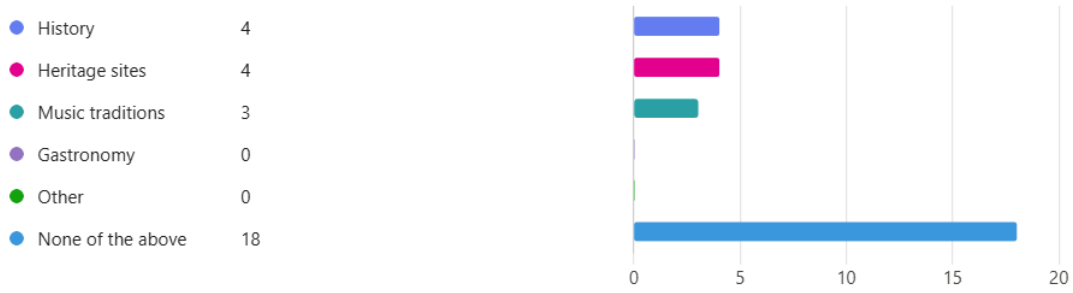


Figure 70: Level of awareness of Co. Louth of my respondents (source: author).

Even if Drogheda is now getting considerable attention from local and national tourism authorities after its recognition as "Destination Town" – with Carlingford and its medieval remains remaining a top regional resource – Dundalk suffers from a lack of appealing imaginaries on the national tourism market. Despite being the administrative capital of Co. Louth, and the only centre providing higher education in the north-east of Ireland (beyond Dublin, Belfast and Maynooth University), Dundalk is still perceived as a border town, partially linked to the history of the Troubles – as demonstrated by the Miami Showband 50th Anniversary Commemorations (Dundalk Leader 2025a). For this reason, the town was once known as *El Paso* (Irwin 2010) – even though journalist Pól Ó Conghaile argued about the transformation of Dundalk from a charmless place to a destination worth shouting about (2025). Moreover, Dundalk experiences a lack of identity associated with the Oriel region to the north or the Boyne Valley to the south, with the Irish border weakening the capacity to recognise cross-border traditions.

This situation has consequences for the development of local tourism infrastructures and services, and the notoriety of regional music practices. The area suffers from a poor accommodation offering characterised mainly by B&Bs and luxury hotels, with only a couple of hostels identified and a limited availability of guesthouses and Airbnb properties. Even Louth County Council itself has identified a 'shortfall in tourist accommodation' (2021, p.6: 14). The absence of a hostels' network reflects the low tourism demand for this part of Ireland, at least from backpackers and other "cheap" travellers that rely on such accommodation services.

The role and contribution of music in enriching the regional culturescape is overlooked. With a specific focus on Co. Louth, references to its music initiatives are missing in tourism marketing campaigns, which are primarily focused on built heritage (Wilson et al. 2018). With weak promotion, many music events remain "small initiatives" that cater for a local audience only. If this allows intimate experiences on one side, on the other side such imbalance limits the development of bigger music happenings. Clear references to the role of music in sustaining the regional tourism system are absent from reports and strategical documents dedicated to the implementation of long-term and effective plans, such as the Ireland's Ancient East Regional Development Strategy 2023-2027, the Ancient Destination Experience Development Plan or the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027. As several initiatives have no significant impact on the occupation rate of local accommodation services (as suggested by the Carlingford Tourist Office through personal communication), this may limit the potential of festivals and other events to attract funding from the tourism and hospitality industry, which often places an emphasis on "bed nights". In addition, the festivals' activities are facilitated in schools, small halls and churches, signifying the absence of bigger infrastructures and venues.

A low interest for Irish traditional music nights among bar owners and local youth is also evident. Venues usually arrange sessions and folk music events during the week and not during the weekend – when DJ sets are preferred in order to attract a larger number of young people. This reflects preferences of local publicans, who prefer to focus on more remunerative events like parties or sport events broadcasting (Irish Independent 2012). While discussing this issue, Róisín Ward Morrow reported the difficulties she faced in arranging a space for sessions in Drogheda:

> I am trying to not get angry. I was trying to organise a session, because obviously COVID did a lot of damage with sessions as well. In the last few months I was trying to set up a once a month session on Saturday night in Drogheda. I went to a pub that was quite involved with sessions, coming up from the Fleadh. The only gave me one chance, and then they said "no, it doesn't make enough money". I am really annoyed with them, and I know them as well, so I was like "what the hell" (interview with the author, February 28th, 2023).

While Dundalk offers an interesting Irish music scene at night-time (with at least seven weekly sessions), Drogheda and other towns in the region do not have a regular Irish traditional music scene beyond festivals or particular initiatives focused on it, thus limiting

the conceptualisation of this territory as a music tourism destination. The lack of recognition of music as a tourism commodity reflects a wider neglect of many aspects of local cultural and musical heritage. My field experience, attending live music events in the same spaces week after week gave me the perception that music is celebrated and consumed only within a circle of music performers and amateurs, while the majority of people in the area are not interested in that, or do not have the opportunity and contacts to approach and access this world, remaining excluded from music-related activities around them. This was partially confirmed while discussing the topic with Áine Scott, a banjo player from Dundalk, who said: 'I feel like Dundalk people don't really seem to be into music […] unless you are like "in the trad"' (interview with the author, February 12th, 2023).

In addition, another issue is represented by the lack of an effective communication within the region Irish traditional music community. This lack of communication follows an original geographical division from North and South Louth. While people from Dundalk are usually more connected with and informed about what is happening in neighbouring Co. Monaghan and across the border, people from Drogheda tend to be more involved in and aware of what takes place along the Boyne Valley than in the north of their own county. This is summarised by Kerrianne McArdle, my flute teacher, who said: 'We are like little clusters of lots of musicians where "these play together", and "those play together". I feel like we are grounded to different places' (interview with the author, February 12th, 2023).

The recognition of Oriel as a cultural region with a rich music heritage is challenged by the administrative division between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, further emphasized by Brexit, which limits possibilities of cross-border initiatives. From a tourism policy perspective, a similar imbalance occurs even within the territories of the Republic of Ireland, with Fáilte Ireland not considering counties Louth, Meath and Monaghan as a unique north-eastern regional entity. While Louth and Meath have developed strong synergies following the Boyne Vallery strategy, as outlined in the Ancient DEDP, Co. Monaghan (within the Ireland's Ancient East programme) is associated with Co. Cavan, a region included in the Irish Midlands (outside the Ancient East sphere of interest). This distinction is also emphasized from a music point of view, with Music Generation having a shared training board for Louth and Meath, and another for Monaghan and Cavan.

The activity of attending multiple cultural events in the region has evidenced a lack of co-ordination between venues and initiatives, with events occurring during the same days. While competition is necessary to generate tourism offer's improvement on all levels (Nguyen et al. 2022), the concentration in Louth – and in Drogheda more specifically – of

separated music events with no interest to dialogue, resulted in a loss of resources and energy. The clash between the Séan Corcoran Series and Boyne TradFest is emblematic in this regard. Organisers should work together or be encouraged to propose new, bigger and better arranged activities, but it seems there is poor connection and communication among them, resulting in these organisations working independently from, and indeed competing with, each other. Moreover, some of these festivals and events are currently not managed in a professional way, with public online social media pages used sometimes as personal profiles from their secretaries, directors and managers. Volunteering also emerged as a critical theme. Many festivals are managed on a volunteer basis, or rely heavily on volunteers to ensure their organisation. While this approach engages passionate and dedicated individuals, this form of management is often seen as an obstacle, as the absence of full-time working teams restricts both the level of strategic commitment and the potential outcomes such events could achieve.

If the competition between similar music events results in awkward situations, the direct clash between stakeholders damages and reduces opportunities for playing music in the area. One of my interviewees presented an example whereby a particular musician's attitude compromised the whole local perception of Irish traditional sessions in the region, harming their feasibility:

> […] He did a lot of damage. Just one person did a lot of damage. […]. He burnt a lot of bridges. People are very angry with him. […]. This is disappointing, because he did actually a lot of work [*to promote music in town*]. He did quite a few sessions but his problem was that he had to be the one doing everything. […] I think that's one of the reasons why there are not pubs with music, and it is horrible to say (interview with the author, February 28th, 2023).

This example shows that the music scene should be more well-established and supported so that it is not threatened so easily by questions of personality and feuds.

5.5.3. Opportunities

Music in Co. Louth can help the region to position itself within the Irish cultural tourism market thanks to its distinctive characteristics. A successful project of music tourism enhancement would result in the recognition of Co. Louth and the north-east as a music destination, and in the consolidation of such achievements. Irish traditional music initiatives in particular have the potential to develop a stronger profile within the national Irish

traditional music landscape, getting recognition and enlarging their reputation within the international community of traditional music enthusiasts. The relationship between traditional music and tourism in Ireland is acknowledged by a number of scholars (Kneafsey 2003; O'Shea 2008; Kaul 2009; Kearney 2013b), but it is also demonstrated in the responses I collected with my first questionnaire, dedicated to tourists in the north-east of Ireland. As shown in Figure 71, the responses indicate that the majority of (potential and current) visitors from abroad expected Irish traditional music to be the "typical" sound they would have engaged with during their stay. Nine participants also selected "Rock/Pop," while only one participant chose the "All of the above" option (see Appendices for the survey questions used).

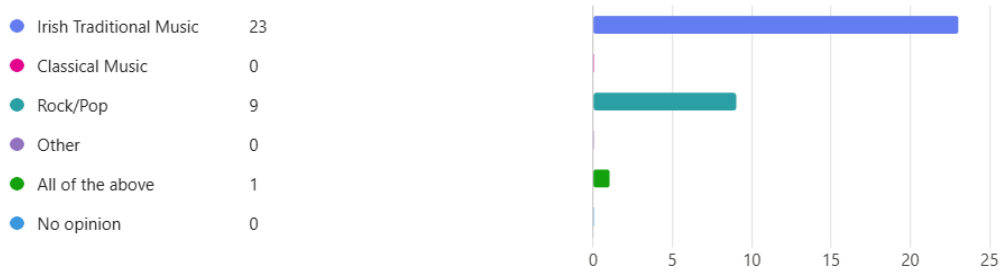


Figure 71: Responses about the expectation of music to be experienced in Ireland (source: author).

The implementation of branding strategies centred on music can address current regional development plans, that are already placing an emphasis on experiential aspects within the Irish visiting experience, like the Ireland's Ancient East Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023-2027. As this plan seeks to enhance the experiential component of visiting the eastern side of Ireland, music – an attractive and engaging expression of human creativity, that can inspire people, influencing and enriching other elements of local culture – may provide additional reasons for visiting Co. Louth and the north-east. The importance and contribution of music in enhancing the overall travel experience for visitors in Ireland was already recognised by Fáilte Ireland (2009). It is then possible to propose the integration of local musical activities into the regional tourism promotion strategy.

Music events can lay the foundation for shaping Co. Louth's image as a small-scale music tourism destination, appealing to a specific target of visitors, interested in experiencing a deeper and intimate engagement with destinations, people and traditions. The way in which music is produced, performed and enjoyed in this territory can be seen as an

occasion to learn about Irish music in an alternative and "unspoiled" context. Uncertainties about the potential music can have as a stand-alone product within the region emerged during my meeting with Mark Mohan, local Ireland's Ancient East manager, as the north-east is not considered yet a strong tourism destination *per se*:

> The […] challenge that we have, and the reality of things is such that we have destinations and counties […] at different levels of maturity. I'll be honest: we can't compare Louth and Meath with Co. Kerry and Dingle. We are trying to put our best foot forward and establish a foundation of a destination that differentiate itself, so we can find a rationale, a reason, for coming here. In that instance, we plan to use the heritage of the Boyne Valley […]. Co. Kerry doesn't have it, because it's here. […] If you are talking about musical styles in Ireland let's be honest: Co. Louth is not jumping up there. There is a place relevant for music in Co. Louth at the moment, but the other bigger areas that profile as destinations you would go to for music are Co. Clare or Co. Donegal, which are frontrunners in the development and promotion of their music. […] While our concern is here, I suppose that – but it's a baby-step process – if I am a music enthusiast and I want to hear something different in terms of how traditional music in particular is performed, if I can hear the regional thing […] this is the area I would come to (interview with the author, July 4th, 2023).

According to Mohan, the leading theme for the tourism development of this region relies on the heritage of the Boyne Valley, which remains a unique and sufficiently strong concept to capture visitors' attention. Nevertheless, intimate and alternative forms of music experiences in the north-east represent in his view an opportunity to differentiate this area within the long-term implementation of regional tourism development. Edutainment phenomena appear as a development area for the recognition of music in Co. Louth and surroundings as a strong cultural tourism offer. This theme is linked to diverse niche tourism proposals that involve creativity and entertainment (Balloffet et al. 2014). While edutainment is traditionally associated with dancing, cooking or craftmanship (Fusté-Forné 2022; Matteucci and Smith 2024), music courses and similar initiatives offer visitors the opportunity to learn music while having entertainment and discovering new places.

As education and culture are not connected to the cycle of seasons, niche forms of music tourism in Co. Louth can easily overcome seasonality issues, allowing a wider audience to visit the county all along the year. Proposing important music events in the "off-season" – managing in this way tourists' flows and offering visitors the possibility to visit

the chosen destination in another period of the year beyond summertime – is a good way to face seasonality. This can also avoid an overload of the carrying capacity for the region (Cortelazzi 2019). Relying mainly on local support, local events involve only a few thousands of people every year. Despite this, many initiatives are developing a returning community that comes back to the region to join festivals and sessions again. While the majority of attendees is local, a small number of returning visitors and musicians coming from abroad was detected during fieldwork, proving that music in Louth can appeal to an international audience too. Their constant presence would eventually lead to an increase of tourism expenditure in the territory, benefiting not only culture and tourism operators, but also the regional food and retail sectors.

While the majority of international travellers engaged through questionnaires had limited if any knowledge of the county and its cultural heritage, Figure 72 shows that many of them reported that were interested in including the region within a future trip, after having received information about local music traditions and experiences (see Appendices for the survey questions used).



Figure 72: Interest in visiting Co. Louth in the future (source: author).

Similar results emerged among domestic tourists, although for most of them music was not a significant reason for visiting Co. Louth (Figure 73 – see Appendices for the survey questions used).



Figure 73: Music as a primary reason for visiting Co. Louth – domestic tourists (source: author).

In addition, despite acknowledging the challenge in attracting an audience for live music in the area, three-quarters of my respondents to the second questionnaire (addressed to music venues and pubs) saw potential to develop more experiences incorporating music to attract visitors in the region (Figure 74 – see Appendices for the survey questions used). Music festivals in particular were recognised as a leading theme by twenty-nine participants, as shown in Figure 75 (see Appendices for the survey questions used).



Figure 74: Agreement on the idea of music as a tool to attract more visitors to the region (source: author).

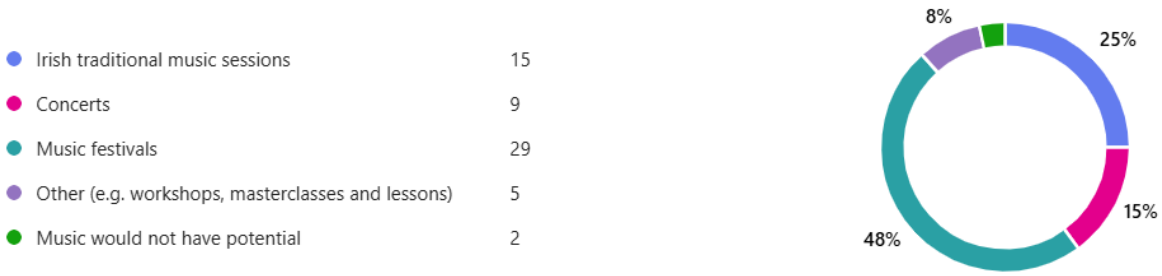


Figure 75: Perceptions of the potential of various music experiences to attract visitors (source: author).

Funding can be an issue, but public financial support for culture and heritage represents an important opportunity for the Arts and music. In 2025, Louth County Council published a request for tenders for the provision of a Peace Plus Collaborative Arts Programme, with the aim to foster connections between divided communities, providing a sense of collective achievement through the completion of arts projects (eTenders 2025). This project, whose duration is two years with a maximum budget of €247,898 (Exclusive of VAT), forecasts the participation of approximately five hundred participants (*ibid*.), representing an opportunity for tourism and arts stakeholders in the region.

The interest of music tourism for many territories is also related to its important use as an instrument able to regain their spatial capital (Burini 2015). Music has been incorporated into spatial planning to promote urban regeneration and to rejuvenate and recover rural, abandoned and dismissed places (EMRA 2019; McKerrell 2022). Abandoned buildings and areas can be used and turned into concert halls or festival locations, thought to give new value to them through the spirit of music (McGee 2012). Music and music-related products have been used to "give new life" to depressed areas. Music-related events can contribute to territorial regeneration, reconversion and reuse of non-places or of localities afflicted by any kind of crisis (Cerutti and Dioli 2016). Another opportunity is represented by the possibilities of proposing activities within or near fascinating venues, which can be associated with music-related initiatives. The regional landscape includes historically important ruins, monasteries and castles that could provide a background for many music events (see Pace 2017), although some are in inaccessible locations or would be vulnerable to crowd damage.

This research proposes chances to discuss and improve co-ordination among events and stakeholders, as well as the enhancement of new marketing activities and brand management strategies centred on local soundscape, considering the concepts of place in product and product in place (Richards and Duif 2019; Lynch and Quinn 2022). Governance involves collaboration, cooperation and trust between governments (at different levels) and business stakeholders. This is the most effective way to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and a future orientation. At the same time stakeholders tend to develop strategies to gain competitive advantages. Coopetition is identified as 'a process based upon simultaneous and mutual cooperative and competitive interactions between two or more actors at any level of analysis' (Nguyen et al. 2022), providing the benefits of both cooperation and competition. Coopetition emerges as an alternative to competition strategies by emphasising the cooperative interdependencies among firms (like suppliers,

complementary businesses, government agencies, local people, and customers) oriented to gain competitive advantages (Damayanti et al. 2019) or common goals (Nguyen et al. 2022). The phenomenon occurs when competitors simultaneously cooperate on and compete over different activities (Damayanti et al. 2019). In this way, actors are stimulated to offer high-quality services, cooperating to make their destination compete on the global market, especially during the low season, as they need to secure a continuous flow of visitors (*ibid*.).

With regards to Co. Louth and the north-east, a year-long programme that both advertises events and ensures good distribution across the national music calendar should be put together for promotional, as well as for coordination reasons. This would reduce the number of conflicting events while presenting the wealth of music-related initiatives in the region as a holistic cultural life rather than a constellation of isolated festivals. In addition, as some events happen within the same territory at the same time, a regional brand able to provide an 'umbrella' comprehensive of more initiatives may be proposed under to improve local connectivity and cultural efficiency. Effective branding processes are a tool to increase tourism expenses. The promotion of labels that highlight a sense of territoriality and localness can be realised associating music products with "traditional" and "authentic" experiences, while also emphasizing mythological and religious heritage from this part of Ireland, proposing a narrative that connects with local history (Holt 2004) and Celtic aesthetics (Markwick 2001). Such a strategy should encompass a process of targetization and promotion based on consumer sentiment in key tourism markets and communities. This strategy would look at the international community of (Irish) music lovers, but also historical overseas markets of Ireland – mainly USA, UK and mainland Europe (B. Quinn 1994; ITIC 2023a).

Music activities not only provide advanced tourism experiences for visitors, but also enhance cultural awareness among residents, simultaneously shaping the sense of place (Connell and Gibson 2003), where music and spatial perception mutually feed each other (Rocca and Fagiuoli 2016). Tourism flows are economic flows, but they can also activate a sense of local cultural awareness and pride within the society living in the destination. The enhancement of such awareness can increase the local sense of community, activated by the understanding of living within a region with a rich musical and linguistic heritage. The celebration of this heritage can also help activities and research aimed at the preservation of some aspects that, without proper recognition, could be lost. This is the case of much knowledge associated with Oriel's heritage and identity. Cultural awareness would also eventually lead to the recognition of the role few actors have played within regional music

history. Beyond figures such as Patrick Byrne, Turlough O'Carolan or William Kennedy, music tourism in the region can induce heritagization processes involving other relevant musicians that contributed to local music development, such as Rose O'Connor, Séan Corcoran, John Joe Gardiner and Rory Kennedy and all the Oriel poets. Local rock and pop musicians like Liam Relly would be part of this, since what they have realised "from" here deserves to be recognised as part of the regional music pantheon – similarly to what happened with Elvis Presley in Memphis (Gibson and Connell 2007), the Beatles in Liverpool (Jones 2020), Nirvana in Seattle (Marini 2016) or, more recently, Ozzy Osbourne and Black Sabbath in Birmingham (Headley 2025). Belfast too has developed a series of music tours administered by the City Council and the Oh Yeah Centre primarily focused on rock and punk music (Visit Belfast 2023). All of these names can become valuable resources for the town in which they musicked or came from. The appreciation of these performers and music teachers may contribute to establishing events similar to Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy in Miltown Malbay, where the figure of the piper, and its subsequent festival, intertwined with the village itself, becoming a pull factor to attract many Irish traditional music enthusiast in the village. From a sustainability perspective, there is a need to empower, acknowledge and put at the centre of any music tourism development strategy all the actors who are part of the local music scene, which invest time and energy to keep it alive. These people should be included for planning and resourcing, co-directing any strategy through empowerment and participative practices.

5.5.4. Threats

The potential adverse outcomes of an overly strong tourism promotion of Louth's musical activities include commodification. Intangible cultural heritage receives increasing pressures from the tourism industry, and Irish traditional music is subject to commodification and standardisation to meet tourist expectations (O'Shea 2008). Economic flows and the increase of monetary returns among the local community of musicians and events could modify a genuine music environment, leading to commercialisation phenomena, where local music becomes a product to be packed and sold to visitors. The dilemma related to what musicians should perform in order to accomplish visitors' expectation may arise, as well as the struggle between what they are required to play in order to make money against what they actually enjoy and find worthy (Tsioulakis 2013). While the increase of economic returns within a cultural context does not automatically represent a commodification issue, problems arise when these aspects become primary, turning to be the only reason for

proposing music initiatives (Kaul 2009). A similar issue is represented by processes of festivalization, in which the (music) events tend towards a modification of their essence, where collective meanings associated to them change, bringing entire communities to live for their festivals and their following economic returns – thus appearing somehow addicted to them (Bennett et al. 2014). While festivals have been validated by 48% of survey respondents as valuable experiences to attract visitors (Figure 75), an over-reliance on such initiatives may frame local music within a neoliberal, profit-oriented logic, potentially eroding the authenticity and social conviviality that underpin local music practices. In the context of Co. Louth, the intimacy of music events is what could be the stronger aspect of a local music tourism proposal – since bigger commercialised events related to Irish music happen elsewhere anyway. Maintaining the existing "unspoiled" elements of informality and intimacy would equal to finding a niche but substantial market.

Another risk is represented by poor planning and lack of a good co-ordination among stakeholders, that could limit and undermine any further development. This could result in a loss of networking opportunities between the music scene and the tourism operators, leading to a decline in interest, especially if the project is not recognised as sufficiently remunerative. This lack of support can possibly be avoided by recording impressions and opinions of musicians and tourism operators in the area through interviews and consultation before the beginning of any practical activity, or through the direct involvement of those dedicated individuals who have both the knowledge and the passion in decision-making processes via round tables and public meetings. These activities can prevent disappointment and frustration.

If one risk is represented by the lack of support from local stakeholders, another threat may arise in the moment when they could become interested in the project, but they also could develop an internal competition between attractions and actors, with individual agendas and frictions arising. Within the tourism industry, a co-operation inside of small systems is fundamental to propose something effective on the market. Co-operation, eventually resulting as co-opetition (Damayanti et al. 2019), becomes an important tool to compete with other competitors outside of the region.

On the other hand, a successful marketing campaign could eventually turn Co. Louth and the north-east into an overcrowded tourism destination. This would have negative consequences, affecting the perception local people may have about tourists and international visitors, and how they may behave – or misbehave – while interacting with

local heritage, together with the possibility of an increase of prices for drinks and food in the area, especially during high-season.

A final threat lies in the overreliance of certain events on their organisers, whose ongoing personal commitment is essential to ensure sustainability and longevity of music initiatives in the region. Many music festivals and concert series in the territory will need to reconsider their managing strategies in the future since they are not community-led initiatives, but the products of musicians and cultural entrepreneurs that dominate the local creative landscape and work to sustain music locally, while seeking to generate additional income and increasing their reputation within the national music scene. This overdependence is especially noticeable when it comes to digital engagement. While many events have their own websites and social media profiles, the largest number of interaction and promotional activities come from the work of their organisers, engaging with a wider online community through their own social media profiles.

5.6. The Role of Drogheda and Carlingford

Two towns from the north-east of Ireland, namely Drogheda and Carlingford, can play the role of urban leaders for the development and enhancement of Co. Louth as a regional music tourism destination thanks to a series of initial advantages. Both of them are already seen as major tourism hubs, not only for Co. Louth, but for the entire north-eastern region. The potential of Drogheda and Carlingford in particular emerged during a round table with Co. Louth's Arts (A.O.) and Tourism Officers (T.O.), which I was able to bring together to share a conversation about possibilities to cooperate for a music tourism strategy in the north-east of Ireland. As they said to me:

> A.O.: […] you know we have two regional hubs as major tourism destination: Carlingford and Drogheda (interview with the author, June 27th, 2024).

> T.O.: What really worked is within Drogheda. We have a tourism cluster and that's led by the local businesses and business owners who have, let's say, a tourism offering (interview with the author, June 27th, 2024).

Additional insights were told to me during my interview with the Ireland's Ancient East manager, whereas he highlighted the combination of a destination with a strong history and built heritage together with emerging music initiatives:

> Drogheda is a focus for us at the moment [*within the Boyne Valley strategy*]. […] The Fleadh came here because it's a good destination. […] Knowing what exists now down there, it [*Drogheda*] can play an important part in supporting a tourism experience. […] There is a good art scene down there, and good opportunities to perform and bring the arts to the fore. We see an opportunity in that space to use music and culture to play a role toward the development of the destination (interview with the author, July 4th, 2023).

Designated as "Destination Town" in 2019 by Fáilte Ireland, and already recognised as a music tourism destination because of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann hosted here in 2018 and 2019 (Kearney and Burns 2022), Drogheda – the gateway to the both the Boyne Valley and the north of Ireland, approximately 45 minutes from Dublin and thus extremely accessible – has the chance to gain a reputation as tourism destination, also thanks to its various music-related opportunities. This designation means that funds will be allocated to boost the attractiveness and tourism potential of the town. Drogheda public spaces will be enhanced, together with streetscapes and markets, in order to enhance and enrich the tourists' experience visiting the town (Louth County Council 2021). This may include spaces for food and craft markets, areas to host events, public art displays as well as additional tourism services (*ibid*.).

The Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) highlights the importance of tourism to the regional economy and seeks to support Fáilte Ireland to deliver greater tourism benefits to the region. A RSES is a strategic plan which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides appropriate policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives (EMRA 2019). The document to cover the period 2019-2031 highlights the significant heritage and tourism potential of Drogheda, both within the town itself and also in its surroundings, leading to important heritage sites along the slopes of river Boyne (*ibid*). This document recognises Drogheda as a neuralgic hub along the economic corridor between Dublin and Belfast, able to attract investments, facilitating collaboration within the cross-border network between the Irish capital and South Armagh. According to this strategy, Drogheda can grow to city scale, becoming a self-sustaining Regional Growth Centre on the Dublin-Belfast corridor, driving synergies along the cross-border network (*ibid*.).

On the other side, the small village of Carlingford is a prestigious heritage town with a unique build heritage asset, able to enhance tourism development in this part of the "Gateway Region" (e.g. the midlands and border zones which act as interregional gateways

to the rest of the island – *ibid*.) through the integration of activities, the natural and heritage resources and the local history and myths associated with the area. Both the Development Plan 2021-2027 and the Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy recognise the village as a critical node alongside the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor, with strong potential for experiential tourism development in the region. Thanks to its amenities, the village can promote northern Louth as a key destination for tourism, leisure and recreation activities, supporting 'the development of an integrated network of greenways, blueways and pathways while ensuring that high value assets and amenities are protected and enhanced' (*ibid*., p.37). Moreover, its location can support the compact growth of Dundalk as county administrative capital, making it an important hub and national entry point to the Republic of Ireland after the outcomes of Brexit (*ibid*.).

5.7. Opportunities for the Oriel Region

All the documents, strategies and plans – from a local as well as a sub-regional perspective – emphasize the central role given to the implementation of cross-border tourism strategies. The border territories have a varied and rich tourism offering, including a wide cultural asset of cities and towns, and cliff walks along the east coast that extend north to the Cooley Peninsula and connect with the Mournes and Slieve Gullion in Northern Ireland (*ibid*.). Nevertheless, this territory remains sensitive from a political as well as historical perspective. Thus, tourism is seen as a tool to guarantee peace and economic stability in the area. The shared traditions of Oriel may have significant potential for local tourism strategy, fostering tourism in a region, located on the border, that does not receive particular attention from overseas visitors and marketing campaigns.[26] It is in this context that music may even become a tourism leading factor, as tourists' appetites for specialised niche and experiential products are on the rise even in cross-border territories (Tosun et al. 2005). Nevertheless, while Oriel's position provides opportunities for local tourism development, there are also a series of challenges concerning the development of a recognisable brand.

Oriel's intangible heritage emerges as an "unspoiled" and valuable feature of the (border) region which has been ignored and overlooked for decades – also because of the presence of political instability between the Republic and Northern Ireland, which contributed to dividing communities and identities. Despite years of neglect, there has been

[26] The 2022 elections in Northern Ireland saw the triumph of Sinn Féin as the leading party of the Northern Irish. This result may have a positive impact over future cross-border cooperation in the tourism sector.

an upsurge in interest concerning Oriel's cultural potential during the past two decades, as demonstrated by the pivotal work of Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin (2003) and Sylvia Crawford (2018). The interest in Oriel's traditions to draw and enrich a common sense of place is also demonstrated by the activities of the Oriel Traditional Orchestra (Kearney 2021) and various music festivals already mentioned in Chapter 4. Despite the presence of the border, a sort of "Oriel Identity" – extending beyond music and oral traditions – still persists and is expressed in everyday life, whether through popular culture (Figure 76) or working activities (Figure 77). Music from this region can increase the level of cultural awareness of being part of this land.



Figure 76: A road sign leading to Dundalk's local soccer stadium (source: author).



Figure 77: Promotional image for Oriel Oil, a distributor of fuel across Louth, Monaghan and Armagh (Oriel Oil 2025).

The regional distinctiveness of the Oriel region has significant potential in the context of tourism. This territory can benefit from projects and funds coming from Fáilte Ireland as well as Tourism Northern Ireland. Moreover, while Tourism Ireland seeks to take an all-island approach to marketing and tourism promotion of Ireland overseas, the organisation was established under the framework of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement of 1998 (see Chapter 2), and thus shared tourism opportunities may be something appetible for this organisation. The already mentioned Shared Island and Peace Plus initiatives allow further occasions for shared economic and social integration between Northern Ireland and the Republic, providing a chance to highlight the benefits coming through a north/south cooperation on tourism. Looking at the Shared Island Initiative, the 7th key theme proposes to move towards a more "experience-oriented industry" (GOI 2022), with potential to explore music as an element of intangible cultural heritage that can contribute to tourism experiences. Furthermore, the recognition of potential in regions and areas outside of traditional tourism "hot spots"' suggests a need to gain a greater understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of these territories. As the Peace Plus Programme provides occasions for cross-border collaboration to secure peace along the border, there are a number of opportunities for engagement by the tourism sector.

Peacekeeping in particular is connected to the sustainability of tourism, and more broadly to the ways in which (music) tourism on the border may implement some of the seventeen SDGs locally. Tourism in this region could help in enhance peace processes and mutual understanding in a territory which has been, for years, a "hot spot" for Europe, now threatened by Brexit's outcomes (Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner 2014; Farmaki 2017). Of particular interest in this regard are objectives included in the 11th and 16th goals, dedicated to sustainable cities and communities, and peace and justice. As tourism favours mutual understanding and produces intercultural exchange – while also providing important economic outcomes – this industry helps to prevent violence and conflict. Music then emerges as an additional theme able to maintain dialogue and express cultural identities, strengthening the discourses associated with the prevention of violence. As music in Northern Ireland is now used to facilitate peacebuilding (Pruitt 2011; Lehner 2023), a focus on the tourism potential of the border region, perhaps realised through the creation of a territorial brand that emphasizes Oriel's music, may serve as a bridge between two cultural and political entities, overcoming divisions in the celebration of a common heritage. In this way, cooperation would be spearheaded through the value of a shared local culture and music

tradition, while a cooperative marketing strategies could foster innovation and help build a strong destination reputation (Tosun et al. 2005).

Nevertheless, according to Irish tourism's experts targeting Oriel as a new destination brand seems to be challenging. This is due to a number or reasons related to the geographic location of Oriel itself, between two different jurisdictions, the fragmentation of Ireland into small destinations on the international market and the nicheness of music as primary travelling reason. Issues about the strength of a proposal focused on Oriel's music emerged through the interviews recorded with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland's managers, but also with Louth County Council's Arts and Tourism Officers. While they all emphasized the contribution music has within the Irish tourism system and the important role it may play in the north-east, they also expressed doubts about Oriel music as a leading factor for tourism development plans. Critiques about the idea of developing a new brand focused on the Oriel region emerged during the meeting with the Ireland's Ancient East manager, as this would be too challenging, time consuming and it could potentially appeal only those with a strong interest in music traditions:

> From a national perspective, in my opinion you run the risk of not developing properly around what the place stands for. […] Your concept of Oriel and how we promote experiences, a place and the culture within that place can be developed as an experience potentially. The Oriel thing is very interesting because it was the fifth province of Ireland going back in time, and it does stretch into Armagh, where there is a very distinctive thing about songs and storytelling […]. The opportunity to connect all of that [*music traditions and events*] is there to be exploited, no doubt. […] But it is a fragmented reality at the moment, with a series of themes that almost stop at the border […]. Is music enough to be an attractor for general consumers other than music enthusiasts? […] You have a [*cultural and morphological*] landscape that is one, but divided by two different jurisdictions, and a border that is invisible to the visitor and the consumer, but it's still there. There is cross-border cooperation, it does exist, but look at the reality: it's not as easy as extending or creating a brand. What we can do – and are doing – is looking at how we can collaborate on softer things (interview with the author, July 4th, 2023).

This element also emerged during my discussion with Louth County Council's Tourism Officer, as she expressed doubts about the idea of having too many brand identities related

to this county, while the name of the county itself is not recognised as a strong tourism attractor.

> The only thing I will say is there is a hesitancy in […] having too many brand identities. So currently Louth, as small as it is, has Sea Louth, Visit Louth, it has Drogheda.ie and it also has Boyne Valley. So that's quite a lot of brands and visitor tends to get a little bit confused. With having too many brands […] I suppose you need to be able to find the balance of having another logo and another piece to the puzzle that we feel is quite a good product offering and a good experience for the visitor. But […] a lot from other tourism officers and stuff when they're talking about brands they're like "Oh my God, another logo to put on the bottom of the poster" (interview with the author, June 27th, 2024).

The importance of not having fragmented destination brands was also emphasized during an online interview with Jenny Jensma, Tourism Ireland's content and brand manager:

> Our role in Tourism Ireland is to inspire overseas visitors to travel to Ireland, and many of those potential visitors have limited knowledge of territories or regions within Ireland, therefore it is important for us that we don't focus too much on fragmented destination brands in those markets that have limited knowledge of our island (online interview with the author, January 29th, 2024).

While a few years ago the Republic and the United Kingdom were both part of the European Union, Brexit made the proposition of projects that include both countries more difficult to realise (Doyle and Connolly 2017; Wilson 2019; Keating 2022). Moreover, councils of the southern part of Northern Ireland do not adhere to county divisions (where South Armagh is part of the Newry, Mourne and Down District, while Armagh city is within another district together with Banbridge and Craigavon), and so it is difficult to work on something that could cross the border without including the entire administrative division.

5.8. Suggestions for a Music Tourism Strategy

Considering the results emerged through the SWOT analysis, it is therefore possible to draft a model for music tourism enhancement for Co. Louth and the north-east of Ireland based on its niche qualities. This section then sets recommendations for the destination strategy assessment through a series of processes able to guarantee consistency to the development project (De Carlo 2013), outlining policy objectives while critically reflecting

on interviews with stakeholders and gatekeepers. A music tourism enhancement strategy for Co. Louth – and possibly surrounding regions – should include a series of milestones and key objectives, whose ultimate goals are the affirmation of music in the region as a valuable tool to attract quality tourism flows, capitals and investments while also contributing in supporting traditions, practices and cultural awareness among the local community. This strategy should also include the themes highlighted in the RSES – like culture, heritage and experiential tourism as part of strategic investment priorities, the role of Drogheda and Dundalk as regional drivers, and the opportunities provided by the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor (EMRA 2019) – considering them as top drivers.

Since 'tourism belongs to all, not just those who wish to control a specific narrative' (Longo 2025), the conceptualisation of a strategy for music tourism enhancement must include a series of passages and milestones, and these should be realised with the contribution of stakeholders, as already outlined in Chapter 1 with the music tourism system management. From a management perspective, stakeholders of various nature (organisers, investors but also performers and audience) have an important role in contributing to successful events (Todd et al. 2017), as they retain a deeper knowledge of the "social capital" of and in the destination (Burini 2015). The need for including coproducers and engaged stakeholders in both strategic planning and day-by-day operations takes on considerable significance in events and festivals, as well as destination management studies (Wallace and Michopoulou 2019).

During my fieldwork, there was consensus across all of my interviewees, as all of them expressed a strong interest in marketing local music for tourism development, with Róisín Ward Morrow emphasising that such initiative should provide benefits to the local music scene 'as long as the organisation contributes to the musicians' (interview with the author, February 28th, 2023). I identified a series of individuals and gatekeepers which could potentially be actors with a primary interest in joining the project, or which could enjoy its following outcomes and benefits. These are:

1. Musicians;
2. Music organisations;
3. Festivals' committees;
4. County councils and local administrations;
5. Tourism operators and organisations;
6. Accommodation providers;
7. Workers in the local tourism industry;

8. Food and entertainment retailers;
9. Museums, venues and other cultural realities;
10. Music shops;
11. Academic institutions.

This is a first list of stakeholders in the region, that can be and should be expanded. The more individuals believe in the initiative, the more successful it could be. Various models can be employed to identify additional stakeholders and engage with them. A useful one may be the "sandwich model", useful to identify and mapping a wide range of stakeholders with flexibility and fluidity (*ibid*.). Developed within the events and festivals sector, this prototype generates a matrix dividing stakeholders into "affecters" and "affectees" according to their active or passive role in the activity proposed (a festival or a development strategy), linking them to their primary interests, squeezing at the centre the initiative, its location and time (*ibid*.). Participation will involve tables and meetings with them, following a bottom-up approach model. This cooperation could be at the government level, in the form of joint investments in projects between or among territorial administrations, but also between privates offering interested in contributing in the realisation of the initiative (Tosun et al. 2005). Responsibility must be shared, with every stakeholder defining not only their own objectives and role within the project to secure profit and results, but also monitoring and evaluating activities and strategies (Seddio 2013).

In order to facilitate coordination and promote a common vision, setting strategies and targets, a destination management organisation (DMO) should be established (De Carlo 2013). A further possibility is represented by the support of already established DMOs and tourism-related institutions, which would be included within the project organisation. Working together with organisations such as Fáilte Ireland or Visit Louth may help this process, since their practical knowledge in the sector, and their recognised presence on the web through several digital channels. Round tables to meet and agree key milestones and fundamental policy objectives must be planned. GANTT strategies are necessary, while a further and deeper SWOT analysis must be conducted to understand and update strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the project. A first DMO for music tourism development may be established through a joint partnership between the Arts and Tourism Offices for Co. Louth with the aim of securing and coordinating festival planning in a complementary manner. According to the Louth's Arts Officer, the two teams have never worked close enough. Additionally, Louth's Tourism Officer acknowledged the lack of an

overarching strategy for the county as a major challenge, noting that significant areas – such as Mid-Louth – are still absent from promotional materials:

> A.O.: We have not worked together enough in my opinion. In the past we haven't. It's something that I've certainly been trying to address since I came into the role (interview with the author, June 27th, 2024).

> T.O.: […] We currently don't have an overarching strategy for the whole county. We have lots of little strands and pockets where nobody is sort of all joined up. So that would be our major challenge, something we're working at the moment. […] there's a whole chunk of the county [*Mid-Louth*] that's also not being represented […]. So I think for us it's trying to get all those places on the map as well, which would be a big challenge (interview with the author, June 27th, 2024).

Another important actor that should be included within this first DMO is Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, as its latest Prospectus recognises the active role this music organisation plays as a national tourism stakeholder (2024a). Considerable efforts must be spent on marketing and promotion, as the region's musical aspects are not highlighted enough. Cooperation in tourism marketing, together with implementation and control of designed programs can create, build and maintain mutual benefits, not only for the countries involved in cooperation, but also for tourists and all the stakeholders as well (Tosun et al. 2005).

As sustainable cultural tourism is a requirement of national and international policy (Holden 2008), investment is needed to ensure sustainability to this potential strategy (EMRA 2019). This project must forecast and apply sustainability on a niche scale where possible, especially in regard of the environment, local communities and their ways of producing and appreciating music, mindful of possible commodification phenomena. Creating new jobs and improving working conditions of people employed in the tourism and music sectors should also be acknowledged as part of the sustainability approach, with investment in music and wider cultural activities intended to alleviate precarity among performing artists and seasonal workers (Tsioulakis 2020; Tsioulakis and FitzGibbon 2020). Moreover, adequate recognition of the value of investing in heritage conservation can reduce potential conflicts with loss of appreciation of a place. Investing in heritage in terms of placemaking can benefit not just tourism but also inhabitants (EMRA 2019). Tourism planning can have sustainable outcomes in relation to spatial planning and capital too, with potential to integrate music into scenic environments and prestigious heritage sites. This sort

of strategy requires an integrated approach that balances the protection of the built heritage and the sustainable development of music tourism enhancement, taking into account concerns and aspirations of the community and key stakeholders. This requires strong coordination and management of potential conflicting interests. Nevertheless, the development of a common vision for celebrating local heritage (both tangible as well as intangible), supported by a coordinated and integrated series of objectives and a programme of realistic, achievable actions, can balance heritage conservation with the desires of those experiencing sensitive sites through live performances (EMRA 2019).

Examining the Louth Development Plan 2021-2027 and its objectives concerning the need to provide tourists and visitors with accommodation and other facilitates in the region, upgrading the tourism infrastructure to accommodate a more demanding category of visitors interested in experiencing music appears as a bigger challenge, but also as something the tourism sector of the territory involved should profitably do (Tosun et al. 2005). Many areas outside of major towns are currently without an effective network of infrastructures such as restaurants or rooms. This imbalance limits the development of any cultural initiative in the region.

Other themes to be considered are social media usability and engagement, and the ability of web portals to inspire potential visitors with appetible contents, integrating them with new technologies such as satellite navigation systems and digital maps. Ideally, the formulation of a music tourism promotion strategy must encompass the design of digital supports aimed at the promotion of the project, music operators' initiatives and, more broadly, of music in Co. Louth. Web portals influence perceptions and tourism behaviours (De Carlo 2013), and therefore aspects to include effective digital communication and engagement must be included in the project. Deliverable includes the realisation of such products, which are going to remain open to further integration and suggestions by local operators and stakeholders. Again, working together with established actors such as local councils and tourism operators from the area can lead to an integration of music aspects within their virtual portals. Such digital tools can also become the platform where a year-long music calendar for Co. Louth and the north-east is displaced. This would align with David Conway's opinions in relation to tourism development in Co. Louth. In the opinion of the local Council Chief Executive, it is key for the county to give visitors a reason to stop in Louth through an approach based on collective work, where unique regional resources are employed to develop experiences and attract more tourists to this area (Dundalk Leader 2025b). The development of an app to promote and connect local music to its environment

and landscape represents another opportunity in these regards. Just like the Road Trip App or the Sea Louth initiative mentioned in Chapter 3, local authorities and music tourism stakeholders may develop a phone application able to guide visitors in the region, making them hear extracts associated with a particular place. Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin has made considerable efforts creating recordings that are accessible on orielarts.ie, while there are several artists with commercial recordings who could be included in an app such as this. Recordings by Gerry O'Connor, Zoë Conway, Daithí Kearney and Adèle Commins, Róisín Ward Morrow, as well as older recordings by the Siamsa and Táin Céilí Bands, could provide source material, some of which names local places in tune titles or stories.

Continuous monitoring and revisions of the project are essential, and they will require interviews, surveys and further meetings. These activities should be forecasted not only for the main project, but every actor should share information about its personal outcomes and expenses. The final part of this project should be dedicated to the publication of a report/article to summarize the initiative, followed by conception and editing of a recommendation framework, while results are going to be monitored and implemented. This development can become an academic case study, monitored by Dundalk Institute of Technology and its Department of Hospitality. Considering the strong theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, including subjects like geography, tourism studies, ethnomusicology and anthropology, additional pivotal projects can be developed within this academic institution, providing opportunities for its students to engage directly with tourism planning and the local tourism industry.

5.9. International Case Studies

As suggested by David Conway in relation to regional tourism development (*ibid*.), international best practices can help and inspire to set some guidelines for music tourism implementation in the region. These case studies propose strong methodologies which can recognise trends and characteristic of creative, experiential and – ultimately – music tourism phenomena. These methods can be adapted and reused in diversified markets and territories, offering integrated experiences and demonstrating how to increase and improve network systems and communication strategies for regional tourism planning based on culture and music (Caldiera and Friel 2019), including Co. Louth and the north-east of Ireland.

CREATOUR was a three-year project lasting from 2016 to 2019. Its aim was to develop and pilot an integrated approach and research agenda for creative tourism in small

cities and rural areas of Portugal (Duxbury 2017). The objective of this initiative included the development of a 'sustainable creative tourism network linking an array of small cities and rural areas and to contribute meaningfully to local cultural vibrancy and holistic development in pilot communities' (*ibid*., p.48). The project followed a framework based on three key dimensions to enhance value for creative sector development:

1. Build knowledge and capacity;
2. Support content development and link creativity to place;
3. Strengthen network and cluster formation.

These dimensions were informed and guided by multidisciplinary research activities, conferences, and the development of a range of publications and other outputs. The framework was then divided into and applied according to five main areas:

1. Creative tourism;
2. Cultural and creative organisations in small cities and rural areas;
3. Creative process incubation;
4. Cultural mapping methodologies;
5. Impact evaluation.

CREATOUR forecasted a system for monitoring and track macro-changes during the project activities and findings. Main results included the promotion of human scaled, interactive, creative tourism experiences, fostering new or enhanced tourism offers building from local strengths, knowledge, skills, and traditions in smaller cities and rural areas (*ibid*.). On a practical level, the initiative saw the involvement of five research centres, and it supported the realisation of forty pilot projects that were designed, implemented, and managed by participating organisations – mainly no-profit art and cultural associations, small entrepreneurial businesses, municipalities, regional development associations, and a few inter-organisational partnerships (Duxbury et al. 2021). The pilot projects were inspired by landscape features including natural and morphological elements, as well as forms of expression such as music, contemporary art forms and gastronomy, and were developed according to five different business models – stand-alone offers; series of creative activities; localised networks; small-scale festivals that include creative tourism activities; creative accommodations – (*ibid*.). CREATOUR nurtured creative tourism offers in small cities and rural areas in Portugal, informed and learned from their development, and linked participating organisations with each other through the development of a national network (*ibid*.). While additional information in relation to the outcomes of this initiative are not

provided, being combined with other initiatives, CREATOUR has demonstrated the importance of creativity and creative tourism as a source of innovation and revitalisation of cultural resources and territories, even in smaller and rural areas (Duxbury and Silva 2020). A potential strategy for music tourism development in Co. Louth and in the north-east of Ireland would benefit enormously from such project, as it provides concrete examples on how to create and maintain networks of stakeholders in rural areas with a focus on culture, creativity and intangible heritage.

Another interesting case study – which includes Ireland among its territories of application – is the Atlantic Culturescape, an initiative co-financed by the Interreg Atlantic Area Programme through the European Regional Development Fund. Launched in 2019, this international project brought together seven partners and twelve associate partners coming from UK, France, Spain, Portugal and Ireland to collectively develop intangible cultural heritage experiences to boost the tourism offer across these nations (Atlantic Culturescape 2019a). Financed with a €2 million budget, this initiative identified intangible cultural heritage opportunities and resources for every country through research and work with local businesses. The main objective was to enhance the natural and cultural assets of project areas to boost economic development. This project intended to deliver this aim by implementing seven work packages:

1. Transnational cooperation in order to develop guiding principles;
2. Usage of the Atlantic destinations to inspire and attract new visitors to the area;
3. Development of tools to sustainably exploit and valorise the cultural assets to create wealth and increase economic returns;
4. Creation of new local jobs in cultural industries;
5. Development of measures to improve the social well-being of the people who live, work and visit the designated sites;
6. Creation of a communications model for inhabitants to gain or reaffirm a ‘sense of place’;
7. Contribution to intangible cultural heritage activities to receive a UNESCO or EU designation.

The project ended in March 2022, and its final stages saw the development of an ICH Atlantic Area Route, marketed to visitors across the Atlantic Area (*ibid.*). Achievements of the project include the creation of sixty new intangible cultural heritage tourism experiences across the countries involved in the process, creating a new European tourism route and promoting local heritage for visitors and communities (Atlantic Culturescape 2022). In

addition, the project has also achieved a series of technical and cultural outputs, as well as benefits for the communities involved and local tourism operators. Examples are the creation of a strong network of operators alongside the entire Atlantic coast area (between and within destinations) as well as new working opportunities within the local cultural industries, and an increase in the number of qualitative tourism experiences. Collaborations were established between ICH entrepreneurs through a series of training and networking events, who were then integrated into destination management and governance, fostering collaboration and sharing their best practices (*ibid*.). In Ireland, Munster Technological University and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council were involved as project partners. Several experiences within the southern part of Northern Ireland saw music as a central feature, proving its importance within the destination's culturescape. Here, activities involving harp concerts, uillean pipes workshops and céilí dances are proposed, with some of them also linked to food and spirits tasting (Atlantic Culturescape 2019b), demonstrating the possibilities music offers to enrich experiential tourism practices (UNWTO 2018). One of the activities included in the local strategy is "Sing for your Supper", the event series managed by singer and researcher Colleen Savage (Atlantic Culturescape 2022). Beyond the inclusion of Irish experiences within its proposals (of which one emerges directly from my fieldwork), this project provides expertise in the involvement of strategic partners at a European level, fostering the development and enhancement of networks built around intangible experiences through international funds.

A final case study which puts music at its core is represented by the *Note in Viaggio* ("Notes on the Way") experience, a project whose aim was to coordinate – through participative networks – diverse music tourism operators and stakeholders, "co-designing" new musical tourism products in Veneto, the most visited Italian region (CUOA Business School 2019). This initiative was developed between 2018 and 2019 thanks to a tender notice proclaimed by the regional administration to foster the development of tourism offer focused on culture and creativity (Caldiera and Friel 2019). The project saw the involvement of a wide partnership of associations, with the scope of offering to local operators the possibility to participate, totally free of charge, in training courses with the aim of activating transversal synergies and jointly designing new music tourism products able to show local excellences (Touring Club Italiano 2019).

After the recognition of structural weaknesses of the regional music tourism proposal such as scarce coordination among events, a lack of targetization in marketing campaigns and, above all, the absence of intra and intercommunication strategies between tourism

operators and the local music world (Caldiera and Friel 2019), *Note in Viaggio* sought to standardise and improve the music offer in Veneto. In order to achieve this goal, different DMOs from a wide territory were selected as partners. This triggered the operators involved in realising an innovative offer able to attract both Italian and foreign tourists even in less touristic areas. The intervention model, once delineated, operated particularly on four main fields:

1. B2B[27] formation, composed by open tables with regional actors;
2. Definition of a synergic plan of action;
3. Verification of the proposal's quality and attractivity;
4. Promotional activities.

Resources and operators of the territory included in the project have also been mapped, in order to manage them properly and to recognise more easily possible targeted markets and music tourist characteristics (*ibid*.). From a temporal point of view, *Note in Viaggio* was divided into three main phases with a multitude of different interventions and activities. The first phase (creation of the experience) was delineated to enhance networking strategies among stakeholders and operators in order to promote an effective management of local resources thanks to a better understating of the territorial's offers. Tables and formative activities have been directed particularly to the creation of operators' awareness concerning the opportunities linked to music tourism, to a better knowledge of this market and to the acquisition of all the skills related to digital marketing, cross-selling, business planning, event management and both online and offline promotional tourism commercial strategies. The second phase (sharing the experience) had the purpose to bring, thanks to the partnership with different organisations to an enlargement and a reinforcement of the stakeholders' networks, and to the experimentation of products and logics projected in the first phase. The last phase of the project (diffusion and promotion), has been characterised by educational indoor activities aimed to reinforce partners' storytelling abilities in proposing their offer.

Early results have evidenced the perception and recognition of music tourism as an autonomous experience, and they have also brought to new proposals and offers, like the appreciation of music within contexts of historical and architectural value (*ibid*.). Different itineraries have been planned in the area of Venice, Verona and Vicenza (the administrative capital of Veneto – and internationally renowned tourism destination, plus two major cities

[27] Business-to-business.

of the region). These forecasted the combination of music activities with the local artistic heritage, services and resources of the area of pertinence. New itineraries were developed to accomplish different targets (*ibid*.), offering exclusive musical journeys within fancy venues (such as the Palladian villas, UNESCO World Heritage Sites). An example is represented by *Music in Palladio's Landscapes*, an itinerary proposed in the Vicenza area. This experience represents an exclusive musical journey which combines the visit of Palladian villas in the countryside, following the history of the region and of its main architect – Andrea Palladio (1508-1580). While no further achievements were recorded in subsequent years, *Note in Viaggio* contributed to propose new and alternative tourism paths in a context (Veneto) traditionally suffering from overtourism. Moreover, it provides a clear and strong methodology with potential for replication, leaving the door open for further research. This case study placed an emphasis on Classical music – a feature that fieldwork has demonstrated to be relevant within Co. Louth's musicscape. Beyond that, *Note in Viaggio* shows how to coordinate different music tourism proposals, proposing music either as a stand-alone product as well as a component of a wider experience, linking sounds and melodies with the appreciation of other aspects of one destination's tangible and intangible heritage. It also demonstrates the importance of providing local stakeholders with training in digital marketing, cross-selling, business planning and event management, with the aim of strengthening local DMOs.

These case studies demonstrate that music and intangible heritage are valid themes which can be used by destinations and tourism planners to enhance and enrich their travel offer. CREATOUR, Atlantic Culturescape and *Note in Viaggio* show that music can become a successful driver for tourism development strategies in small urban and rural areas, enriching and complementing traditional themes of a destination, such as built heritage, scenic landscapes or gastronomy. Co. Louth and its stakeholders can thus learn from these experiences a series of a procedures that can guide their work in creating, sustaining and implementing a potential music tourism development plan for the north-east of Ireland.

5.10. Conclusions

The scope of this chapter was to analyse and critique the development of tourism in Co. Louth, idealising the contribution of music for a profitable tourism planning strategy. Music has been recognised as a potential strong resource for the north-east of Ireland, with music tourism becoming the vehicle to express this prospective in order to benefit the local

economy and the reputation of this territory. After an analysis of Louth tourism system and of its offer, the SWOT analysis confirmed a series of opportunities that can turn this county into an interesting niche music destination with potential to attract domestic as well as overseas visitors. A hypothetical implementation phase, where first steps to trigger this project are acknowledged, was then proposed towards the end of the chapter. International case studies illustrate the achievements of some comparable precedents for any stakeholder or active actor capable of starting or proposing a music tourism development in the region, showing potential benefits that could be gained by implementing similar strategies.

Through this activity, I "filled the gaps", connecting all the different themes emerged in the previous chapters, encompassing notions of cultural, heritage, experiential and niche tourism, the importance of this sector in Ireland and the sum of music traditions and experiences in Co. Louth and in the north-eastern territories. The next – and last – section is going to conclude with a series of observations and aims, proposing a series of recommendations for a sustainable future.

Conclusions and Recommendations for the Future

Music contributes to the enrichment of a destination's culturescape, establishing connections and enhancing its sense of place. It represents an interesting opportunity to appeal to tourists searching for alternative and "authentic" experiences. Music tourism is a niche segment of the wider cultural, heritage and experiential tourism sector. While Ireland is an established music tourism destination, the musical production of some of its territories is not proportionately acknowledged within promotional discourses, with some traditions remaining overlooked and neglected even in the gaze of local inhabitants themselves. My research sought to investigate the potential of music for tourism enhancement in Co. Louth and in the north-east of Ireland, proposing and implementing new tourism experiences in the region.

In order to investigate alternative paths for strengthening the tourism offering of a region that remains of secondary importance within the Irish tourism landscape, three main research questions were posed. They mirrored the interest in understanding the relationship between music and tourism, as well as the desire to examine how local music heritage could be incorporated into regional marketing tourism strategies. Three main objectives were also identified, and they reflected the interest in creating a taxonomy of music experiences in the region, while critiquing current tourism strategies and developing proposals for local music tourism enhancement. An ethnographic approach was utilised with a qualitative analysis of information gathered during fieldwork that focused on engaging with actors that "make" music in the area. Thus, *desiderata* express sentiments of principal stakeholders interested in seeing their music valued on the national and international cultural scene.

Results demonstrated that this area, which I identified as a music cluster (Krims 2011), proposes interesting music activities and initiatives, not only related to the world of Irish traditional music but a broader sphere of music. In particular, music from this region – comprehensive of mostly small-scale events characterised by high levels of informality and spontaneity – has been observed as a potential cultural attractor for targeted experiential music tourists looking for particular, alternative and intimate forms of engagement with sounds and melodies. Since Co. Louth does not attract large numbers of tourists, it does not suffer from overtourism and commodification phenomena, thus offering opportunities for niche tourism development (Novelli et al. 2022) based on intimacy and edutainment. Nevertheless, research has outlined that the level of awareness of such offer, and the amount

of knowledge associated with more historical musical elements, are still quite low in the perception of visitors, but also local people and stakeholders. This is also due to a weak tourism promotion of the region, which has historically been left behind main destinations. Music in Ireland has been already understood as an expression of Irish identity and culture, and local folk music is traditionally inserted within tourism promotional materials. The further step this research tries to reach is the use of music as a key element to allow less visited destinations to gain recognition, proposing themselves on the international market through an alternative approach, exploiting the richness of local music experiences.

My focus on Co. Louth and the surrounding region highlighted the role and potential of music for tourism development in the north-east of Ireland throughout a triangulation between ethnomusicology, tourism and territorial studies, advancing knowledge and critiquing the relationship between the island, its (traditional) music and music tourism phenomena. In order to balance a research whose main themes arise from two different fields of study (tourism and music), this project saw the convergence of two paradigms: tourism sciences and ethnomusicology. The former advances the search (and even the "invention") of themes like "tradition" and "authenticity" for commercial purposes, while the latter questions their meaning, origins and development. The importance of combining these two different perspectives lies in the creation of wider point of view, able to understand, express and balance a complex reality through an holistic gaze.

This research represents an important contribution within the field of international cultural tourism, as it explores new sustainable paths suitable for a market of music enjoyers. More specifically, this study has engaged with niche, heritage and experiential forms of cultural travels with a focus on music phenomena. Music is understood as a precious form of art, as an intergenerational and international form of communication – perhaps even as a sort of language (Dubost and Slaby 2013) – and also as "complex whole", with multiple theories, ideas and approaches to analyse its contribution for and within cultures and societies (Nettl 2005; Agawu 2016). The combination of sounds and emotions (Seeger 1991) has been recognised globally as an important element associated with intangible heritage that can enrich several tourism experiences (UNWTO 2018), and music in Ireland is recognised as an important component of the visiting experience in the destination.

According to the research field, this study could bring several social, economic, educational and cultural benefits to Co. Louth and surroundings. Developing results of this project would benefit tourism and cultural operators in the territory, examining participative (and thus sustainable, from a social point of view) management for tourism initiatives. With

their emphasis on small-scale, intimate and grounded social interactions, the shape of music encounters in Co. Louth is a valuable opportunity to enhance the local tourism experience within the Ireland's Ancient East branding campaign. Music remains a powerful pull factor for many cultural tourists, and the quality and forms music encounters have in the region give Co. Louth and neighbouring territories the possibility to compete as tourism destinations within Ireland and internationally. Cultural impacts are related to the virtuous circle that could be activated. The more local culture and music initiatives are identified for the project, the more they could have a national – and even international – resonance, being promoted globally thanks to the power of the WorldWideWeb and processes of glocalization (Haller et al. 2019). This work can also, by extrapolation, have relevance to communities across the island of Ireland and internationally in relation to tourism, becoming a useful case study for future activities engaging with both tourism and ethnomusicology analysis. Nevertheless, the research has also implications for local place plans, community music and music education initiatives. Thus it is important that these academic outputs are not only aimed at a scholarly audience but engage and communicate with external stakeholders and operators.

Final recommendations for the future include a series of proposals I have formulated based on my research, that could set the ground for the development of an integrated music system for the area. A network of music festivals in Co. Louth and surrounding counties to coordinate and promote every music initiative in the territory should be established; this activity could be implemented through the application of digitals tools, such as apps or websites. A digital portal could work both as Visit Louth landing section as well as an autonomous website, hypothetically named *Ceol Lú* (music of Louth). Ideally, this page would include an interactive map of Co. Louth – the territorial epicentre – and sections of Meath, Monaghan and Armagh (retrieved from or inspired by the QGIS project illustrated in Chapter 3), where music initiatives (concerts, festivals, etc.) are displayed and updated. Traditions would also be acknowledged, together with local music history notions available throughout the use of a pointer while users engage with the map. Such web engine could be developed within the academic environment of DkIT, as an activity realised by students of School of Informatic and Creative Arts during their course of studies. The Department of Hospitality – with a series of new undergraduate programmes – may also be involved in this project.

It is my hope that this study will inspire additional further research, with specific regards to the concepts of regenerative tourism and degrowth principles applied to the travel

industry. The small-scale music activities in the context of niche tourism provides Co. Louth and the surrounding territory with a pathway towards sustainable tourism that is also regenerative as it supports local communities' engagement with their local culture and heritage, overcoming the disruptive challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Tourism is an international phenomenon, extremely relevant for the global economy. Following the aftermath of COVID-19 and its subsequent crisis that paused the movement of people and social interactions in an unprecedent way (the two pillars on which tourism and music lie), it is necessary for every destination to rethink its potential offer, trying to find new alternative and renovated forms to attract and engage with tourists. In this sense, music tourism in Louth can potentially be understood as a regenerative theme for the local economy and community. In addition, the nature of the majority of Co. Louth music experiences, and their interest in remaining small and intimate events, represents a chance to engage with a degrowth approach applied to tourism, providing opportunities to investigate this alternative paradigm in the Irish context.

In conclusion, my aim is that this project can serve as the basis for future research on the connection between music, tourism and the role of music tourism to enhance competitiveness and reputation of "minor" areas. At the same time, I hope my research will inform a future tourism strategy for the area with a deeper interest towards music and sounds. Moreover, I believe it holds potential for application beyond Ireland, particularly in destinations that are often overlooked or underrated from a tourism perspective, yet possess strong musical traditions, like in the Italian *Quattro Province* (Bicego 2024). These contexts would provide opportunities to apply my research methods and findings, proving their international applicability.

Appendices

A. Events Attended

Name	Place	Typology	Year(s) of attendance
Alfi	Oriel Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2024
An Chúirt Chruitireachta (International Harp Festival)	Termonfeckin and Drogheda, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2022-2023
Ardee Baroque Festival	Ardee, Co. Louth	Classical Music Festival	2022
Bedside Community	Spirit Store, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Rock Concert	2023
Boyne Music Festival	Drogheda, Co. Louth	Classical Music Festival	2022
Boyne Summer Fest	Drogheda, Co. Louth	Community Festival	2024
Boyne TradFest	Drogheda, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2023-2024
Boyne Valley Trad & Folk Fest	Drogheda, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2023
Brigid, Lady of Light	An Táin Arts Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Arts Concert	2024
Carlingford Heritage Centre Spring Series	Carlingford Heritage Centre, Carlingford, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2024
Celebrating John Hannon and the Song Heritage of South Armagh	Crossmaglen, Co. Armagh	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2022

Comb Your Hair and Curl It	Oriel Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2024
Dave Flynn Conducting the Oriel Traditional Orchestra	Íontas Theatre, Castleblaney, Co. Monaghan	Concert (as part of an Irish Traditional Music Festival)	2022
Dea Matrona	Spirit Store, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Rock music Concert	2022
Drogheda Arts Festival	Drogheda, Co. Louth	Arts Festival	2022
Drogheda Traditional Music & Singing Weekend	Drogheda, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2022-2024
Donal O'Connor, Harry Bradley and Libby McCrohan	Oriel Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2022
Dúchas Agus Dóchas	Oriel Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2024
Féile Patrick Byrne	Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2022-2023
Féile na Bealtaine	Mullaghbane, Co. Armagh	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2023
Féile na Tána	Carlingford, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2023-2024
Féile Oriel	Monaghan, Co. Monaghan	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2023-2024
Fifty Celebration of Scoraíocht Lann Léire	Dunleer, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert + Session	2024
Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann	Mullingar, Co. Westmeath	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2022
Fleadh Workshop and Session	Boomerang Cafe, Drogheda, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Workshop and Session	2022

Frostival	Dundalk, Co. Louth	Winter Festival	2023
Harpers in Harmony	St Nicholas' Church of Ireland, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2023
Ímar	Oriel Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2023
Irish Traditional Music Session	Bartender, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Session	2023-2024
Irish Traditional Music Session	Corbetts, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Session	2022-2024
Irish Traditional Music Session	D'Vine, Drogheda, Co. Louth	Session	2022-2023
Irish Traditional Music Session	Lumpers Bar, Ravensdale, Co. Louth	Session	2023-2024
Irish Traditional Music Session	Ma Kearney's, Crossmaglen, Co. Armagh	Session	2022
Irish Traditional Music Session	Mc Hugh’s, Drogheda, Co. Louth	Session	2022-2024
Irish Traditional Music Session	Mo Chara, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Session	2024
Irish Traditional Music Session	Northend Bar, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Session	2023-2024
Irish Traditional Music Session	Phoenix Bar, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Session	2022-2024
Irish Traditional Music Session	Russell’s, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Session	2023
Irish Traditional Music Session	Spirit Store, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Session	2022-2024

Irish Rebel Songs Night with Damien Quinn	Toales Bar, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Folk Music Concert	2022
Joefest	Dromiskin, Co. Louth	Country Music Festival	2024
Legends of Louth	Dundalk, Co. Louth	Community Festival	2023-2024
Louth Contemporary Music Society Festival	Dundalk, Co. Louth	Contemporary Music Festival	2022-2023
Louth Fleadh	St. Olivers Community College, Drogheda, Co. Louth	Competition	2022
Lú: Festival of Lights	Drogheda, Co. Louth	Festival	2022
MÁM	Barbican Centre, Drogheda, Co. Louth	Contemporary Music Concert	2022
Martin Hayes (Solo)	Patrick Kavanagh Centre, Inniskeen, Co. Monaghan	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2023
Oriel Echoes	Scoraíocht Lann Léire, Dunleer, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2024
Our Dear Dark Mountain With the Sky Over It	Oriel Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2024
Past, Present and Future: a Celebration of Music at DkIT	Dundalk Institute of Technology, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Concert (Classical and Irish Traditional Music)	2022

Rehearsals and Concerts with the Oriel Traditional Orchestra	Various locations between Co. Louth, Co. Monaghan, Co. Dublin	Rehearsals and Performances in the north-east of Ireland	2022-2024
Rehearsals and Concerts with Scale Force	Dundalk, Co. Louth	Rehearsals and Performances in various locations around Dundalk	2022-2023
Rónán O'Snodaigh & Myles O'Reilly	Spirit Store, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2024
Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy	Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2022
Séan Corcoran Series	Drogheda, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2023
Seisiún – Oriel Centre Summer Show Series	Oriel Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2022-2024
Slow Sessions Series	Droichead Arts Centre, Drogheda, Co. Louth	Slow Session	2022
Téada + Seamus Begley + Samantha Harvey	An Táin Arts Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Irish Traditional Music Concert	2022
The Midlanders	Toales Bar, Dundalk, C. Louth	Country Music Concert	2022
William Kennedy Piping Festival	Armagh, Co. Armagh	Irish Traditional Music Festival	2022
Your Roots are Showing	Four Seasons Hotel, Monaghan, Co. Monaghan	Folk Conference with a series of Concerts	2024

B. School Research Ethics Committee Approval

DUNDALK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
School of Informatics & Creative Arts
Ethical Approval Form for Research Projects

Researcher Name_Leandro Pessina__ Year __3__ Course PhD by Research in Creative Arts

Title of project **Listening to Louth's Heritage: The role of local culture and traditions in enhancing the tourist experience**

Name of supervisor/s _Daithí Kearney, Ioannis Tsioulakis Date 10/06/2022 revised: 08/01/2024

This application is to be completed by the researcher and where appropriate, in conjunction with the project supervisor. The lead researcher/supervisor is responsible for submitting the completed form to the appropriate Research Ethics Committee (details below)

Please note: If your submission is incomplete or unclear, your application will be returned to you and your project may be delayed.

Section 1

Type of Researcher

Please tick the appropriate box below to indicate the type of researcher you are:

Undergraduate
(proceed to section 2) ☐

Completed Ethical Approval forms for undergraduate research should be submitted to the relevant Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC).

Drec.dcamm@dkit.ie – Department of Creative Arts Media and Music
Drec.dcsm@dkit.ie – Department of Computing Science and Mathematics
Drec.dvhcc@dkit.ie – Department of Visual and Human Centred Computing

Postgraduate
(proceed to section 3) ☑

Completed Ethical Approval forms for Postgraduate research should be submitted directly to the School Research Ethics Committee (SREC).

Ica.srec@dkit.ie

Staff
(proceed to section 3) ☐

Completed Ethical Approval forms for Staff research should be submitted directly to the School Research Ethics Committee (SREC).

Ica.srec@dkit.ie

Section 3

3.1 Application Form Checklist

Please complete Section 3 and provide additional information as attachments.

My application includes the following documentation:	INCLUDED (mark as YES)	NOT APPLICABLE (mark as N/A)
Recruitment advertisement		✓
Participant Information Leaflet	✓	
Participant Informed Consent form	✓	
Questionnaire/Survey	✓	
Interview/Focus Group Questions	✓	
Debriefing material		✓
Evidence of approval to gain access to off-site location		✓
Ethical approval from external organizations. If ethical approval from external organizations is pending give details below		✓

3.2 Project Details

a) Lay description (Maximum 200 words)

Please outline, in terms that any non-expert would understand, what your research project is about, including what participants will be required to do. Please explain any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases.

This research will develop a critical understanding of the potential of Irish music for tourism development in Co. Louth and in the North-East of Ireland, proposing a strategy for local tourism promotion where music is the main attraction, the pull factor to attract tourists and visitors in the region.

The desire is to give to this territory, usually identified as a corridor between Dublin and Belfast – and thus excluded from main tourism stops despite its potential – greater consideration, given all the relevant heritage sites and traditions still present and celebrated.

Since Co. Louth is not a leading tourism destination in Ireland, it does not suffer from overtourism and commodification phenomena. High quality music opportunities here can thus be the lock pick to propose this territory as a compelling "music tourism destination", developing a strategy to attract high quality tourism arrivals, giving them the opportunity to enjoy intangible and tangible cultural heritage in the area.

The development of a theoretical model for management and cooperation of local offer and of local stakeholders (musicians, museums, cultural centers, organizations etc.) will thus be fundamental.

b) Research objectives (Maximum 150 words)

Please summarise briefly the objectives of the research.

Objective 1: Creating a summary, through first-hand ethnography and secondary data, of

local cultural tourism attractions and music-related initiatives. Objective 2: A critical survey of accommodation and music/performance facilities and spaces in the area. This will forecast future impacts based on current infrastructure. Objective 3: Comparing Co. Louth with examples of developments of cultural tourism with a specific focus on local musical traditions and heritage, looking at best practices that may be used as examples. Objective 4: Formulating a coordinated project of local tourism promotion through a participative network of public and private actors interested in the project, where the main element (e.g. local music) is the focus. Objective 5: Dissemination and publication of results.

c) Research location and duration

Location(s)/Population*	DkIT
Research start date	September 2021
Research end date	November 2025
Approximate duration	4 Years

* If location/Population other than DkIT campus/population, provide details of the approval to gain access to that location/population as an appendix.

3.3 Participants

		YES	NO	N/A
Do participants fall into any of the following special groups?	**Minors (under 18 years of age)**		✓	
	People with learning or communication difficulties		✓	
	Patients		✓	
	People in custody		✓	
	People engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug-taking)		✓	
Have you given due consideration to the need for satisfactory Garda clearance?		✓		

3.4 Sample Details

Approximate number	200 / 200
Where will participants be recruited from?	Ethnography: Music-related events, towns in the area Surveys: Pub and Venue owners/managers; accommodation providers as listed online and in cooperation with local tourism

	Destination Management Organisation (DMO). Tourists/potential tourists: online through social media with cooperation of local tourism DMO.
Inclusion Criteria	Being music enthusiasts and local tourism services providers
Exclusion Criteria	None
Will participants be remunerated, and if so in what form? Participants are not going to be remunerated	

Justification for proposed sample size and for selecting a specific gender, age, or any other group if this is done in your research.

There will be no preference in relation to gender, age or any other criteria.

The sample size will be determined by initial desk research on festivals and music events in the area. It is intended to engage with at least one representative of each event (approximately 30), musicians involved in these events (approx. 100), representatives of DMOs (approximately 20), stakeholders including accommodation providers (approximately 20).

Online questionnaires will be developed targeting approximately all venues and pubs (approx. 150) in the county, plus domestic and overseas visitors (engaged through online communities of Ireland and Irish music enthusiasts). For venues and pubs, questions will be about their offer of local music and their interest in being included in any future music tourism promotional activity. (Potential) visitors will be asked about their knowledge of Co. Louth, its heritage and if they would consider to pay this territory a visit during a future trip to the island. The survey will be disseminated via social media. The participant consent will be integrated into the online survey, which will be hosted on OneDrive.

3.5 Risk to Participants

a) Please describe any risks to participants that may arise due to the research. Such risks could include physical stress, emotional distress, perceived coercion e.g. lecturer interviewing own students. Detail the measures and considerations you have put in place to minimize these risks

Potential risks	Strategy to minimise risk
Informed Consent	Information will be provided at the start of surveys and interviews that outlines the following information: • Description of the research project, its aims and objectives. • Description of the benefits & costs of the research to the participants, including time commitment • Description of how participant data will be managed and used. • Details on how to withdraw participation • Contact details for the project lead at DkIT and

	supervisor at DkIT Participants will have to provide consent by selecting relevant boxes prior to commencing the survey. Participants are free to contact the project lead during office hours with any questions concerning the research process. Participants have the right to withdraw participation prior to submitting their responses. There are no formal repercussions for not participating.
Time Burden	The survey will take approximately 10-15minutes to complete.
GDPR Compliance & Research Integrity	
Right to privacy	Participation in surveys is anonymous and no personal data of participants will be revealed in research outputs that arise from this research. Completed survey data to be kept in password protected files on the lead's personal computer in accordance with GDPR guidelines.

b) What will you communicate to participants about any identified risks? Will any information be withheld from them about the research purpose or procedure? If so, please justify this decision.

Participants will be provided with participant information prior to undertaking surveys and/or interviews (see attached). No information will be withheld about the research purpose or procedure.

3.6 Informed Consent

	YES	NO	N/A
Will you obtain active consent for participation?	✓		
Will you describe the main experimental procedures to participants in advance?	✓		
Will you inform the participants that their participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any point?	✓		
If the research is observational, will you ask for their consent to being observed?		✓	
With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	✓		
Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	✓		
Will the data be anonymous?	✓*		
Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation?			✓
Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or will information be withheld? **If you answer yes, give details and justification for doing this**		✓	

below.			
For observational research, the researcher will document the types of music played, common behaviours such as approach to performance/musicking, topics of conversation, reception/attitudes of audiences, and own felt experience. In some instances, performers whose identity is publicized – ie on festival posters, advertising – will be identifiable but for the most part, individuals will not be identified or identifiable. The research will be documented in the form of an ethnographic field diary and field notes will inform the subsequent write-up. *Where appropriate, data will be anonymized but in certain circumstances as appropriate, permission will be sought to identify participants as per discipline norms.			

a) Please outline your approach to ensuring the confidentiality of data (that is, that the data will only be accessible to agreed upon parties and the safeguarding mechanisms you will put in place to achieve this.) You should include details on how and where the data will be stored, and who will have access to it.

This study will adhere to DkIT's guidelines of ethical conduct for conducting research with human participants.

Data are going to be stored on my password protected laptop and associated external hard disk.

I and the supervisory team will be able to access data.

b) Please outline how long the data will be retained for, if it will be destroyed and how it will be destroyed.

All data will be held by the lead investigator for a period of five years, or until a date six months after graduation, at which it will be destroyed.

Section 4

Researcher I have read and I understand the DkIT Ethics Policy available from: https://www.dkit.ie/assets/uploads/documents/Research/Policies/DkIT%20Research%20Ethics%20Policy.pdf

Signed:  _____Print Name: _Leandro Pessina_____ Date: 08/01/2024
(Researcher)

Supervisor: Applications for Ethical Approval of Undergraduate projects are forwarded to the Departmental Research Ethics Committee for approval or referral to the School Research Ethics Committee. Applications for Ethical Approval of Postgraduate and Staff projects are sent to the School Research Ethics Committee for Approval.

I have read and approved this form & information:

Signed:  Print Name: _Daithí Kearney___ Date: 08/01/2024
(Supervisor/Head of Department/ Research Centre Director/ Head of School)

There is an obligation on the researcher and/or supervisor to bring to the attention of the Departmental/School Research Ethics Committee(s): (a) Any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by this form (b) Any ethical issues which may arise during the carrying out of the research; (c) Any ethically significant change made to the project after approval.

Section 5 (For office use only)

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL (FOR UNDERGRADUATE PROJECTS ONLY)

This project has been considered using agreed department procedures and is now:

Approved: ☐

Referred to the School Ethics Committee: ☐

Signed: _____ Print Name: _____ Date: _____
(Chair of Departmental Research Ethics Committee/Head of Department)

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

This project has been considered using agreed School procedures and is now:

Approved: ☒

Rejected (further information sought): ☐

Chair of School Research Ethics Committee
This project has been considered by the Ethics Committee and ethical approval is granted.

Signed: _____ Print Name: Date:
Chair of School Research Ethics Committee

This project previously received ethical approval:
This project has been considered by the Ethics Committee and ethical approval is granted.

Signed: _____ Print Name: Martin Mc Hugh Date: 15 June 2022
Chair of School Research Ethics Committee

Subsequent reapproval

Adèle Commins 13.02.24

C. Interviews and Questionnaires

a. Participant Information Leaflet

Participant Information Leaflet

Study title: Listening to Louth's Heritage: The role of local culture and traditions in enhancing the tourist experience

Researcher Name: Leandro Pessina

Email address: D00252498@student.dkit.ie

Research Supervisor Name: Dr Daithí Kearney

You are being invited to take part in a research study to be carried out at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT).

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, you should read the information provided below carefully and, if you wish, discuss it with your family or friends. Take time to ask questions – don't feel rushed and don't feel under pressure to make a quick decision.

You should clearly understand the benefits of taking part in this study so that you can make a decision that is right for you. This process is known as 'Informed Consent'.

You don't have to take part in this study and a decision not to take part will not effect you in the future.

You can change your mind about taking part in the study any time you like. Even if the study has started, you can still opt out. You don't have to give us a reason.

Why is this study being done?

This research seeks to understand the potential of Irish music for tourism development in Co. Louth and in the North-East of Ireland.

Who is organising and funding this study?

This research is funded by the Irish Research Council (IRC) and supported by Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT).

Why am I being asked to take part?

As somebody involved in music and/or tourism activities in Louth, I wish to draw on your knowledge and experience to inform my study.

How will the study be carried out?

I will be engaging in observational research at a variety of events. I will also invite people to participate in interviews and questionnaire surveys.

What are the benefits?

My research aims to inform the development and improvement of tourism experiences in Co. Louth and the surrounding region, recognising the value of the community of musicians.

Is the study confidential?

All information about participants will be kept private and confidential, unless you give explicit permission to be named.

Where can I get further information?

If you have any further questions about the study or if you want to opt out of the study, you can rest assured it won't impact negatively on you in the future.

If you need any further information now or at any time in the future, please contact:

Name: ***Leandro Pessina*** / ***Dr Daithí Kearney***

Email Address: d00252498@student.dkit.ie / daithi.kearney@dkit.ie

b. Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Study title: ***Listening to Louth's Heritage: The role of local culture and traditions in enhancing the tourist experience***

I have read and understood the **Information Leaflet** about this research project. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐
I understand that I don't have to take part in this study and that I can opt out at any time. I understand that I don't have to give a reason for opting out and I understand that opting out will not have any negative impacts for me.	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐
I have been assured that information about me will be kept private and confidential.	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐
I have been given a copy of the Information Leaflet and this completed consent form for my records.	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐
Storage and future use of information: I give my permission for information collected about me to be stored or electronically processed for the purpose of research and to be used in related studies or other studies in the future but only if the research is approved by a Research Ethics Committee.	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐

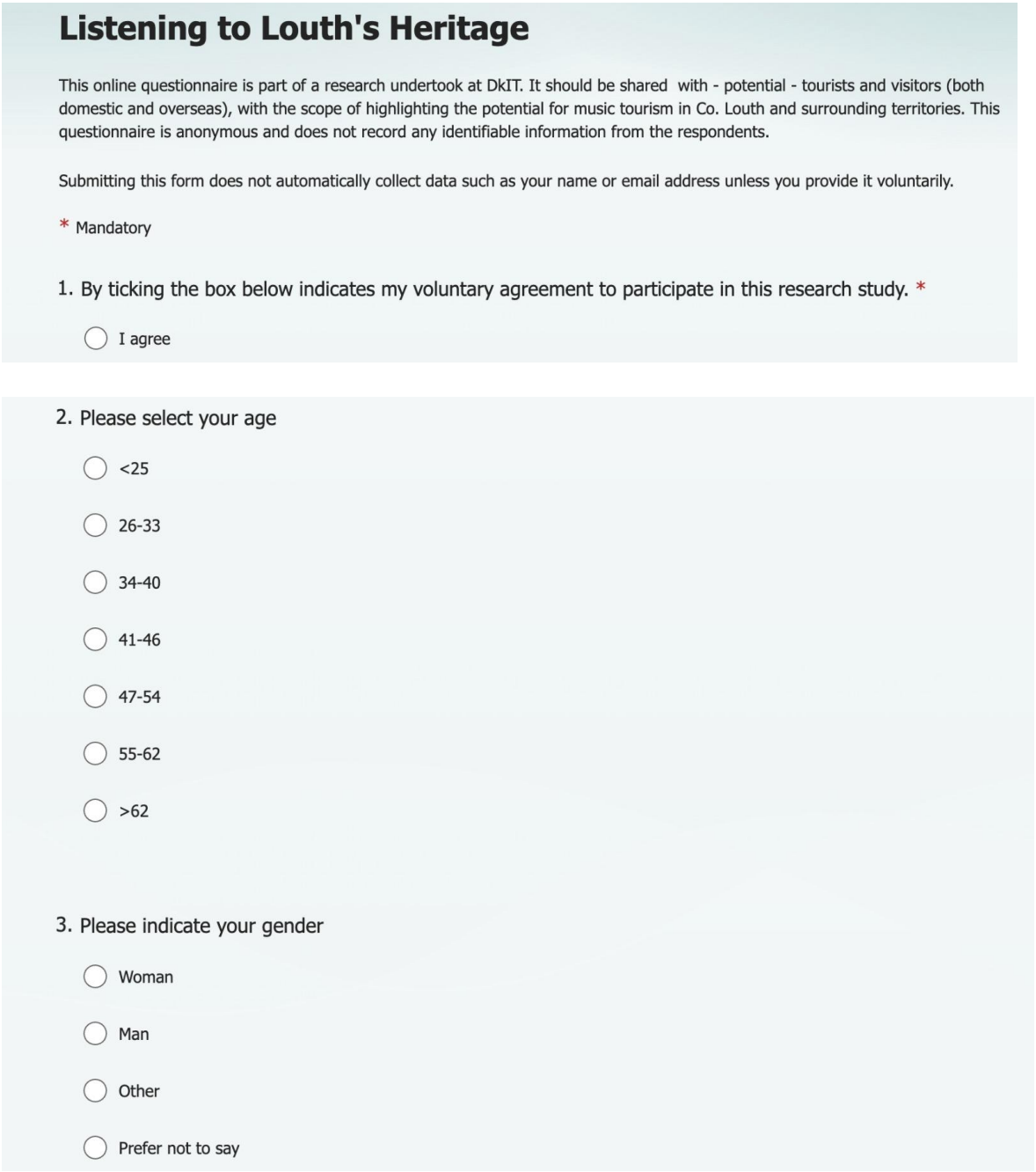
Participant Name (Block Capitals)	Participant Signature	Date

To be completed by the Researcher:

I, the undersigned, have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a way that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Name (Block Capitals)	Qualifications	Signature	Date

c. Online Questionnaire: Tourists (International)



Listening to Louth's Heritage

This online questionnaire is part of a research undertook at DkIT. It should be shared with - potential - tourists and visitors (both domestic and overseas), with the scope of highlighting the potential for music tourism in Co. Louth and surrounding territories. This questionnaire is anonymous and does not record any identifiable information from the respondents.

Submitting this form does not automatically collect data such as your name or email address unless you provide it voluntarily.

* Mandatory

1. By ticking the box below indicates my voluntary agreement to participate in this research study. *

- ◯ I agree

2. Please select your age

- ◯ <25
- ◯ 26-33
- ◯ 34-40
- ◯ 41-46
- ◯ 47-54
- ◯ 55-62
- ◯ >62

3. Please indicate your gender

- ◯ Woman
- ◯ Man
- ◯ Other
- ◯ Prefer not to say

4. What country are you from?

- ○ Ireland/NI
- ○ Great Britain
- ○ Germany
- ○ France
- ○ Spain
- ○ Italy
- ○ Poland
- ○ Russia
- ○ Other European countries
- ○ USA
- ○ Canada
- ○ Australia
- ○ Rest of the World

Send

5. Which transport solution do you use to travel to Ireland?

- ○ Plane
- ○ Ferry
- ○ Other

6. How do you usually travel to Ireland? Alone or in a group?

- ○ Couple
- ○ Family - without children
- ○ Family - with children
- ○ Group of friends
- ○ Organized trips
- ○ Alone
- ○ Other

7. What kind of accommodation do you prefer during your stay?

- ○ Hotel (*/**/***)
- ○ Hotel (****/*****)
- ○ B&B
- ○ Hostel
- ○ Private housing (e.g. Airbnb)
- ○ Camping
- ○ Other

8. When you come and visit Ireland, which are your main destinations?

- ☐ Dublin City
- ☐ Wild Atlantic Way (West coast)
- ☐ Northern Ireland (eg Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Game of Thrones locations and Giant's Causeway)
- ☐ Ireland's Ancient East (East coast)
- ☐ Hidden Heartland (middle Ireland)
- ☐ All of the above

9. Which are the leading reasons/pull factors that attract you to Ireland? Tick as many as you want

- ☐ Heritage sites and history
- ☐ Natural landscapes, settings, walking/trekking/cycling
- ☐ Coastal areas
- ☐ Gastronomy
- ☐ Sports infrastructures
- ☐ Cultures, music, festivals and art performances
- ☐ Shopping
- ☐ Visiting friends/relatives (VFR)
- ☐ Other
- ☐ All of the above

10. What type of music do you expect to experience in Ireland? Tick as many as you want

- [ ] Irish Traditional Music
- [ ] Classical Music
- [ ] Rock/Pop
- [ ] Other
- [ ] All of the above
- [ ] No opinion

11. What do you know about Co. Louth? Tick as many as you want

- [ ] History
- [ ] Heritage sites
- [ ] Music traditions
- [ ] Gastronomy
- [ ] Other
- [ ] None of the above

12. Would you be interested in "intimate" and alternative music experiences such as (tick as many as you want):

- [ ] Irish traditional music sessions
- [ ] Irish traditional music concerts
- [ ] Irish traditional music learning experiences
- [ ] Classical music concert in local amenities and fashionable settings
- [ ] Pop/Rock concerts in small venues
- [ ] Other
- [ ] I am not interested in intimate and alternative music experiences
- [ ] I am not interested in music experiences at all

13. Co. Louth and its surroundings are outside the main tourism areas despite having many interesting heritage sites and important scenic places. Music experiences maintain elements of informality and intimacy which are perfect for people seeking alternative encounters, whether as a musician or as a listener. There are several music series and festivals across a range of genres including Irish traditional and Classical music. North Co. Louth is part of the Oriel region, an important place for Irish poetry and musical traditions. Knowing this, would you like to visit Co. Louth and its surroundings during your next trip to Ireland?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ No opinion

Send

14. Final question: would you like to add anything?

Enter the answer

Send

d. Online Questionnaire: Tourists (Domestic)

Listening to Louth's Heritage

This online questionnaire is part of a research undertook at DkIT. It should be shared with - potential - tourists and visitors (both domestic and overseas), with the scope of highlighting the potential for music tourism in Co. Louth and surrounding territories. This questionnaire is anonymous and does not record any identifiable information from the respondents.

Submitting this form does not automatically collect data such as your name or email address unless you provide it voluntarily.

* Mandatory

1. By ticking the box below indicates my voluntary agreement to participate in this research study. *

- ◯ I agree

2. Please select your age

- ◯ <25
- ◯ 26-33
- ◯ 34-40
- ◯ 41-46
- ◯ 47-54
- ◯ 55-62
- ◯ >62

3. Please indicate your gender

- ◯ Woman
- ◯ Man
- ◯ Other
- ◯ Prefer not to say

4. What country are you from?

- ◯ Ireland/NI
- ◯ Great Britain
- ◯ Germany
- ◯ France
- ◯ Spain
- ◯ Italy
- ◯ Poland
- ◯ Russia
- ◯ Other European countries
- ◯ USA
- ◯ Canada
- ◯ Australia
- ◯ Rest of the World

Send

5. Where do you come from?

- ◯ County Antrim
- ◯ County Armagh
- ◯ County Carlow
- ◯ Co. Cavan
- ◯ Co. Clare
- ◯ County Cork
- ◯ County Derry/Londonderry
- ◯ County Donegal
- ◯ Co. Down
- ◯ County Dublin
- ◯ County Fermanagh
- ◯ County Galway
- ◯ County Kerry
- ◯ Co. Kildare

- ○ Co. Kilkenny
- ○ County Laois
- ○ Co. Leitrim
- ○ County Limerick
- ○ County Longford
- ○ County Louth
- ○ Co. Mayo
- ○ County Meath
- ○ County Monaghan
- ○ County Offaly
- ○ County Roscommon
- ○ County Sligo
- ○ Co. Tipperary
- ○ County Tyrone
- ○ County Waterford
- ○ County Westmeath
- ○ Co. Wexford
- ○ County Wicklow

6. Do you usually visit Co. Louth and its surroundings?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I live in Co. Louth

Send

6.6. Do you usually visit Co. Louth and its surroundings?

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No
- ( ) I live in Co. Louth

7. How do you usually travel to Co. Louth? Alone or in a group?

- ( ) Couple
- ( ) Family - without children
- ( ) Family - with children
- ( ) Group of friends
- ( ) Organized trips
- ( ) Alone
- ( ) Other

Send

8. What kind of accommodation do you prefer during your stay?

- ( ) Hotel (*/**/***)
- ( ) Hotel (****/*****)
- ( ) B&B
- ( ) Hostel
- ( ) Private housing (e.g. Airbnb)
- ( ) Camping
- ( ) Other

9. Which are the leading reasons/pull factors that may attract you to Co. Louth? Tick as many as you want

- [ ] Heritage sites and history
- [ ] Natural landscapes, settings, walking/trekking/cycling
- [ ] Coastal areas
- [ ] Gastronomy
- [ ] Sports infrastructures
- [ ] Cultures, music, festivals and art performances
- [ ] Shopping
- [ ] Visiting friends/relatives
- [ ] Other
- [ ] I live in Co. Louth

10. Is music important for you while you visit the region?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ No opinion

11. Which kind of music? Tick as many as you want

- [ ] Irish Traditional Music
- [ ] Classical Music
- [ ] Rock/Pop
- [ ] Other
- [ ] No opinion

12. Is music the main reason (or one of the primary reasons) to come and visit Co. Louth?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

13. How would you usually experience music here? Tick as many as you want:

- [ ] Concerts
- [ ] Music Festivals/Series
- [ ] Irish traditional music sessions
- [ ] Workshops/music lessons
- [ ] Other

14. Would you be interested in "intimate" and alternative music experiences such as (tick as many as you want):

- [ ] Irish traditional music sessions
- [ ] Irish traditional music concerts
- [ ] Irish traditional music learning experiences
- [ ] Classical music concert in local amenities and fashionable settings
- [ ] Pop/Rock concerts in small venues
- [ ] Other
- [ ] I am not interested in intimate and alternative music experiences
- [ ] I am not interested in music at all

15. What do you know about Co. Louth? Tick as many as you want:

- [ ] History
- [ ] Heritage sites
- [ ] Music traditions
- [ ] Gastronomy
- [ ] Other
- [ ] None of the above

16. Are you aware of a cultural region named "Oriel", also known as "Airgialla", "Oirghialla" and "Uriel"?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

17. Co. Louth and its surroundings are outside the main tourism areas despite having many interesting heritage sites and important scenic places. Music experiences maintain elements of informality and intimacy which are perfect for people seeking alternative encounters, whether as a musician or as a listener. There are several music series and festivals across a range of genres including Irish traditional and Classical music. North Co. Louth is part of the Oriel region, an important place for Irish poetry and musical traditions. Knowing this, would you like to visit Co. Louth and its surroundings during your next trip also because of this music heritage?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

18. Final question: would you like to add anything?

Enter the answer

Send

e. Online Questionnaire: Pubs and Music Venues

Listening to Louth's Heritage: Online Questionnaire for Pubs & Music Venues

This online questionnaire is part of a research undertook at DkIT. It should be shared with pubs and venues from Co. Louth and its surroundings where music events are hosted, with the scope of highlighting the importance of music within their businesses, and the role music may play as enhancing element for the tourism experience of the region - according to their perception. This questionnaire is anonymous and does not record any identifiable information from the respondents.

Submitting this form does not automatically collect data such as your name or email address unless you provide it voluntarily.

* Mandatory

1. By ticking the box below indicates my voluntary agreement to participate in this research study. *

- ◯ I agree

2. What percentage of business in your pub/venue is derived from visitors and tourism?

- ◯ <20%
- ◯ 21-50%
- ◯ 51-80%
- ◯ >80%

3. How often do you have live music in your pub/venue?

- ◯ 1-2 nights per week
- ◯ 3-4 nights per week
- ◯ 5-7 nights per week
- ◯ Irregularly/occasionally
- ◯ No live music

4. What type of music do you typically have? Tick as many as you want

- ☐ Irish Traditional Music
- ☐ Rock/Pop
- ☐ Classical Music
- ☐ All of the above
- ☐ Other
- ☐ No live music

5. Is it difficult to attract an audience for live music in the area?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Unsure/no opinion

6. Is your audience mainly composed by local people or outsiders (people coming from other parts of Ireland or from abroad)?

- ◯ Local people
- ◯ Outsiders

7. In your opinion, is there potential to develop more experiences incorporating music to attract visitors to this region?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

8. Which kind of music experience would have more potential?

- ◯ Irish traditional music sessions
- ◯ Concerts
- ◯ Music festivals
- ◯ Other (e.g. workshops, masterclasses and lessons)
- ◯ Music would not have potential

9. Final question: would you like to add anything?

Enter the answer

Send

f. Online Questionnaire: Accommodation Providers

Listening to Louth's Heritage: Online Questionnaire for Accommodation providers

This online questionnaire is part of a research undertook at DkIT. It should be shared with accommodation providers from Co. Louth and its surroundings with the scope of highlighting the role music may play as enhancing element for the tourism experience of the region - according to their perception. This questionnaire is anonymous and does not record any identifiable information from the respondents.

Submitting this form does not automatically collect data such as your name or email address unless you provide it voluntarily.

* Mandatory

1. By ticking the box below indicates my voluntary agreement to participate in this research study. *

- ◯ I agree

2. How well would you rate the accommodation provision for tourists in the region

- ◯ Excellent
- ◯ Good
- ◯ Average
- ◯ Poor
- ◯ Very poor

3. What are main attractions for tourists in your region? Tick as many as you want

- ☐ Heritage sites
- ☐ Natural landscapes, settings, walking/trekking/cycling
- ☐ Coastal areas
- ☐ Gastronomy
- ☐ Sports infrastructures
- ☐ Cultures, festivals and art performances
- ☐ Shopping
- ☐ Other
- ☐ All of the above

4. Where do your guests usually come from? Tick as many as you want

- [ ] Ireland/NI
- [ ] Great Britain
- [ ] USA
- [ ] Canada
- [ ] Australia
- [ ] Germany
- [ ] France
- [ ] Spain
- [ ] Italy
- [ ] Russia
- [ ] Poland
- [ ] Other European countries
- [ ] Rest of the World

5. In your opinion, can music be integrated into the tourism offering in Louth?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ No opinion

6. In your opinion, what are the challenges developing tourism in Louth? Please describe

Enter the answer

7. In your opinion, are links with surrounding counties/Northern Ireland well developed in the context of tourism in Louth?

Enter the answer

8. Final question: would you like to add anything?

Enter the answer

Send

D. Academic Training

Course Title	Course Description
Research Integrity – Second Edition	Online course on EPIGEUM consisting of a series of modules on responsible research practices; research management and record-keeping; data selection, analysis, and presentation; scholarly publishing; professional responsibilities; conflicts of interest; the involvement of human participants; intellectual property; and export controls.
Research Methods	Online course on EPIGEUM comprehensive of a series of modules on developing a research question, conducting a literature review, and carrying out field research.
GIS-Science for Climate Justice	Online course organised by the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on Climate Justice at the University of Padua, supported by the European Union's Erasmus+ programme. It proposes the principles of climate change and environmental justice with open-source Geo-Information and Communication Technologies (Geo-GITC).

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