

# Abair Trad Report

Clár Éire Ildánach Creative Ireland Symposium

Red Store, Youghal, Co. Cork

Saturday 24 June 2017

“The Traditional Arts symbolise and embody the creativeness of Irish people for generations and *Abair Trad* seeks to explore the potential for the traditional arts within the Creative Ireland Programme.”

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Cork  
County Council  
Comhairle Contae Chorcaí



COMHALTAS



Clár Éire Ildánach  
Creative Ireland  
Programme  
2017–2022



## Abair Trad: Clár Éire Ildánach

# Creative Ireland Symposium Summary Report

## Réamhrá / Introduction

*Abair Trad* was a community based response to the Irish Government's Creative Ireland programme that was held in The Red Store, Youghal, Co. Cork on Saturday 24th June 2017. Organised by Craobh Eochaille CCÉ with the support of Cork County Council, the symposium sought to debate, discuss and share ideas about the value and importance of culture and creativity in the context of the new programme. The event was attended by a number of invited speakers and valued contributions from the audience which comprised of a range of stakeholders including members of various branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, creative arts practitioners, and parents.

The symposium recognised that the traditional arts symbolise and embody the creativeness of Irish people for generations and sought to explore the potential for the traditional arts within the Creative Ireland Programme.

The event was hosted by local Comhaltas Chairman Mícheál de Buitléir and facilitated by Dr Daithí Kearney from the Department of Creative Arts, Media and Music at Dundalk Institute of Technology. The morning featured presentations from Michael O'Reilly (Creative Ireland), Conor Nelligan (Cork County Council), Dr Matt Cranitch (musician), Dr Michelle Finnerty (UCC), Dr Jessica Cawley (Creative Traditions), Willie Larkin (Tradtime™), Maurice Mullen (Ceoltóirí Cluain Tarbh), and Dr Adèle Commins (DkIT).

Through short presentations, group discussions and roundtable talks, the day brought together practitioners, policy-makers, academics and other stakeholders covering the five pillars of the exciting five year Programme. This report seeks to share their ideas and outline a vision for the traditional arts in a creative Ireland.

What is unique about Creative Ireland is that it is not a top-down approach, it is up to community groups to embrace this plan to draw together all of the artistic, creative and cultural offerings in a unified County Plan. We hope that this is the start of further conversations that will inform and include the voice of the community in Cork and further afield.

## Executive Summary

The traditional arts, including Irish traditional music, song and dance are an integral part of our cultural heritage and should be central to future developments in terms of creativity and cultural innovation. The following points are drawn from the presentations by invited speakers and contributors from the audience. More complete discussions can be read in the subsequent sections.

- While not significantly highlighted in documents to date, the traditional arts including Irish traditional music, song and dance, can and should be part of the Creative Ireland programme, with many current projects and activities mirroring the aspirations of the programme.
- Irish traditional music, song and dance can create and enhance a sense of place and sense of community particularly when projects focus on local themes and engage the artists that are located within those communities.

- The traditional arts are an accessible art form that should be available to children from the earliest opportunity and this can be also enhanced through online resources and online delivery of educational projects.
- We should not assume a lack of interest amongst a community in an art form because of a current absence in their community. A wide range of traditional artistic activity and endeavour, from music to lace-making, can attract an interest amongst a broad range of people and bring with them many other benefits for the individual and the community. Thus, we must address geographical gaps in provision and access.
- Community based organisations such as Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann are central to the successful promotion of the traditional arts in Ireland but this can be linked to school based activities.
- Better communication and the development of networks are necessary to facilitate a sharing of knowledge and skills and greater collaboration between individuals, institutions and organisations.
- There is a need to identify, support and acknowledge leaders and nurture new leaders in communities in the context of the arts.
- Projects should identify several phases that can be funded successively for purposes of sustainability and greatest value.
- The importance of experiencing live music, such as performances by musicians in the classroom, cannot be underestimated.
- Creative Ireland needs to recognise the individuality and independence of some creative practitioners such as solo Irish traditional musicians but also utilise their experience and abilities as a resource for collaborative projects.
- Schools need to work together to ensure fair and equal access for all pupils to the arts but also need to create links with their communities.
- There is a need to ensure that time is dedicated to the learning of Irish traditional music in schools and that the wider community, beginning with parents, are involved in this process.
- As creative drivers in their regions, third level institutions are valuable resources and partners who can enhance programmes and projects supported by Creative Ireland and address some of the needs and resource deficits that exist in communities.
- Creative Ireland could develop a charter to be signed by every academic institution to support and develop creativity in their communities, with potential for hosting artist-in-residence schemes, performance groups and rehearsal spaces, access to technology and skills, etc.
- Tourism and other industries provide opportunities for jobs but employment should not be the sole focus or motivation for funding and financing projects.

Through the presentations and discussions, it is recognised that Irish traditional music contributes significantly to a sense of well-being in Ireland, has been of significant benefit to people in Youghal and surrounding areas and, with further support, could benefit many more people in social, cultural and economic terms.

Amongst the challenges were the need to provide schools and teachers with the resources, skills and knowledge to include Irish traditional music in their programme of learning, acknowledging the challenges presented by time. The accessibility and pervasiveness of popular culture in society through technology can and must be addressed by schools, institutions and organisations including

broadcasters. There is a need to develop an ethos and philosophy where engagement, participation and consumption of local artistic activities is valued, not for the potential financial reward but rather for the social and cultural value that enhances the well-being of individuals and their communities.

It is necessary to think holistically about developing projects drawing upon the vision of Creative Ireland so as to share knowledge and thinking, reach all people in our society, be inclusive and learn from each other, support each other and avoid duplication.

It is clear that there is already much good being achieved in terms of creativity and the traditional arts with great enthusiasm for further activity and action. There is a need for greater awareness of this activity, the development of a network through which information and knowledge can be shared, and support for projects in terms of resources including finance, space and promotion.

## Conclusion

The *Abair Trad* symposium highlighted the importance of discussion and engagement with grassroots when endeavouring to develop plans that can both take into consideration the ideas of individuals and communities and be subsequently implemented by these same individuals and communities.

People experience culture and creativity in a wide range of spaces. These spaces can be unconnected but inform the cultural understanding formed by the child and continued through to adulthood that shape our well-being, how we view ourselves, and how others view us. There is also a culture that is sharing our knowledge, experiences, successes and failures. This creates a culture of endeavouring to do better, to support others, and to challenge policy-makers to listen to and act upon what is being realised at the grassroots.

Education emerged as a central theme in the presentations, discussions and comments during *Abair Trad*. In terms of education, opportunities and access to Irish traditional music differ from school to school; similarly there is inconsistency in out of school provision in different places. We need to address these imbalances and ensure fairness. We need to create opportunities for continuing professional development for teachers and practitioners and form collaborative networks through which information and experiences can be shared. Positive experiences should be shared and replicated, while we can learn from common challenges and negative experiences.

Sustainability should be a key measure of the success of Creative Ireland. Projects should respond to lived experience, can include practitioners visiting classrooms and community settings, and should be accessible to all in our communities. All activity needs to acknowledge and appreciate the presence of children and be open and flexible to the needs of children. However, in order for activities to be successful, they must also involve adults as part of a community understanding of sharing culture and creativity and involving all members of our community. The traditional arts should be central to a holistic approach to developing a culture of creativity in Ireland.

Cultural activity requires leadership and we must acknowledge and value our cultural leaders who inspire participation. We must encourage young people to be leaders within their own communities and inspire their peers to be creative. We need to ensure that existing leaders, including teachers, parents, practitioners and volunteers, are supported and resourced and discussions highlight the

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need for both training opportunities and greater networks to facilitate communication and collaboration.

Projects cannot be considered as isolated events but rather their potential for development and extension over time and long-term value must be considered, not in terms of employment but in terms of how they will benefit the lives of people in our society.

We need to utilise all resources available to us and like Creative Ireland, we need to think outside of narrow boxes such as arts, sports, tourism, health and justice. Resources include artists in our communities, spaces including schools, colleges and community centres, and the internet. While the internet provides new opportunities for learning and engagement with culture and creativity, it also creates challenges. We must maintain local identities and a sense of ownership in the face of homogenised popular culture. Neither can we allow the internet to replace the live and lived experience of the concert or tutor.

The *Abair Trad* event raised many questions and brought forward ideas and suggestions for development. It is clear that there is much enthusiasm for continuing the conversation, finding answers to questions and sharing knowledge. If Creative Ireland is a facilitated invitation, then those in control must continue to invite and meet the challenges presented by those invited. It is through ongoing discussion that collaborations will develop, networks will form, and success will be achieved.

Daithí Kearney

July 2017



