

RESUSCITATION OF THE IRISH GAELTACHT*

KEVIN C. KEARNS

SCATTERED along the western and southern coast of Ireland, from County Donegal to County Waterford (Fig. 1), are residual Irish-speaking areas known collectively as the *Gaeltacht*.¹ Relics of a once viable and far larger cultural community, these districts now exist as "survival pockets" that preserve the distinctive language and culture of the Irish race. Little more than a century ago the *Gaeltacht* covered almost all of the western third of Ireland, and its population exceeded one and a half million. But disruptive incursions by the British, coupled with neglect on the part of the home government, have reduced it to a withered remnant that covers only about 6 percent of the country's territory (Fig. 2) and holds less than 3 percent of its population.

No large-scale moves were made to "save the *Gaeltacht*" until 1956, when the government acknowledged that the community was on the verge of extinction. Thanks to a program to restore the Irish language and to foster a stronger national identity, these areas have come to be regarded as "our link with the past and the

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¹ The Gaelic language belongs to the Indo-European language group. It developed from Common Celtic, a tongue once used by a large prehistoric tribe that inhabited continental Europe, Ireland, England, Wales, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, and northwestern France (Brittany). Eventually Celtic split into what are now known as Breton, Welsh, Cornish, Manx, Irish Gaelic, and Scottish Gaelic. Both Cornish and Manx are now extinct. Until the tenth century the language of Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man was the same. Later, Scottish (eastern Gaelic) began to diverge from Irish (western Gaelic). The literary language of both areas remained much the same well into the seventeenth century, but the spoken tongue evolved quite differently. Today Scottish Gaelic is distinct from Irish Gaelic in both sound system and in grammar. The term "Irish," rather than "Gaelic" or "Irish Gaelic," is used almost exclusively throughout Ireland. See Daniel Corkery: *The Fortunes of the Irish Language* (Mercier Press, Dublin, 1968); Kenneth H. Jackson: *The Irish Language and the Languages of the World, in A View of the Irish Language* (edited by Brian Ó Cuív; Dublin Stationery Office, Dublin, 1969), pp. 1-10; and "Language," in *Encyclopaedia of Ireland* (Allen Figgis, Dublin; and McGraw-Hill, New York and Toronto; 1968), pp. 115-122.

► DR. KEARNS is an associate professor of geography at the University of Northern Colorado, Greeley.

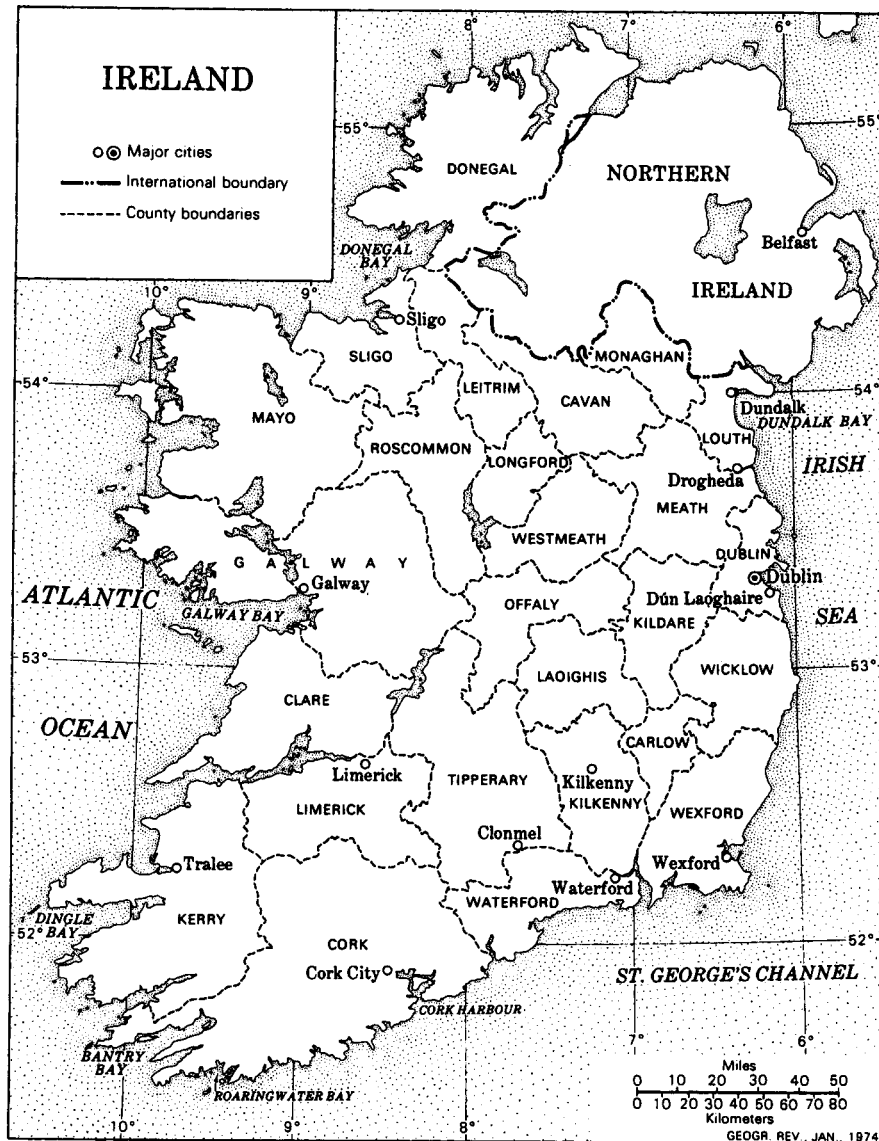


FIG. 1

repository of our cultural heritage.”² Now their preservation so engages the Irish government that an aura of crisis is manifest. The gravity of the situation is underscored by the admonition that without further and more drastic intervention by the state “the

² Martin Brennan: *Language, Personality and the Nation*, in *View of the Irish Language* [see footnote 1 above], pp. 70–80; reference on p. 78.

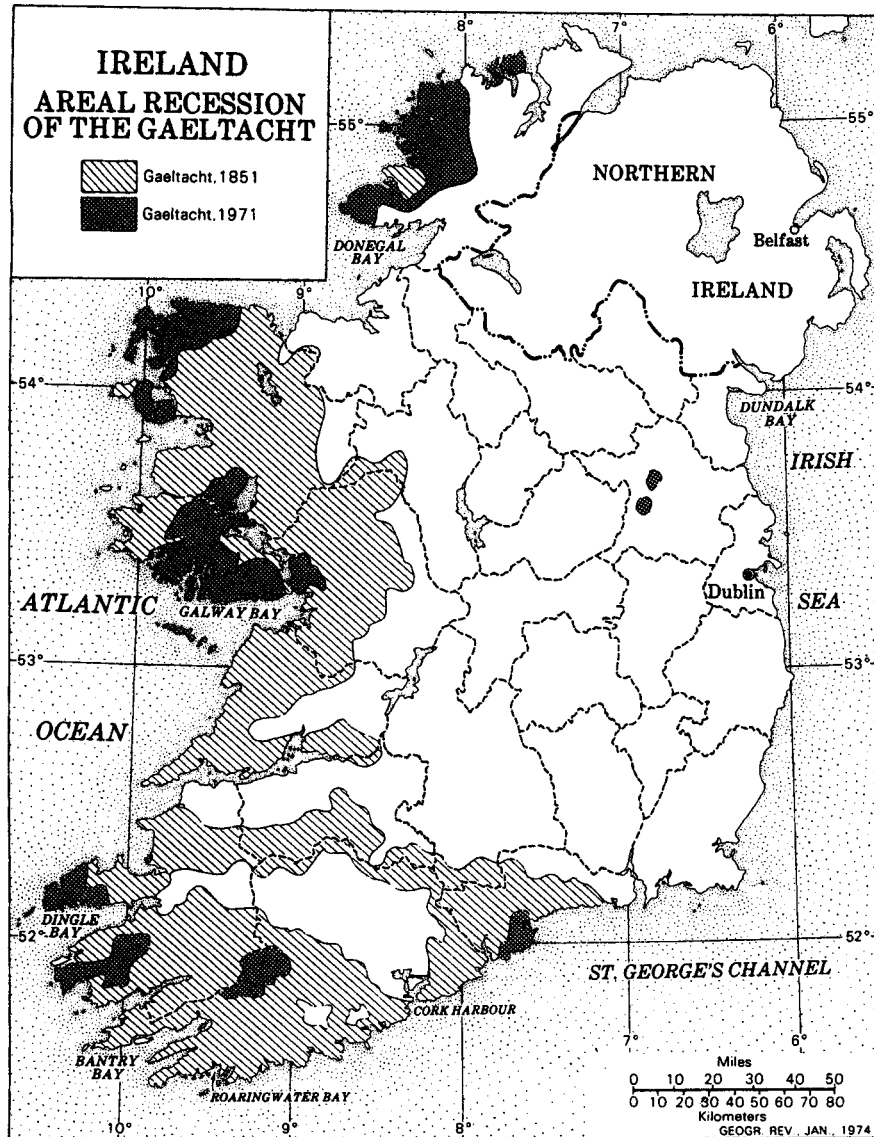


FIG. 2 — Areal recession of the Gaeltacht. Sources: View of the Irish Language [see text footnote 1], p. 138; and An Action Programme [see text footnote 7], frontispiece.

Gaeltacht will have almost entirely vanished by the year 1990.”³ To be sure, the struggle to save the Gaeltacht from extinction transcends the singular effort to salvage a minority culture. It has

³ Breandán S. MacAodha: *The Galway Gaeltacht Survey, 1968–1969* (2 vols.; Social Sciences Research Centre, University College, Galway, 1971), Vol. 1, p. 28.

acquired monumental national significance, being proclaimed as "one last slender chance . . . to undo the harm that has been done and to preserve for our children the very *ethos* of the state."⁴ To a great extent, survival of the Gaeltacht has become synonymous with retention of the distinctive Irish national character. In this

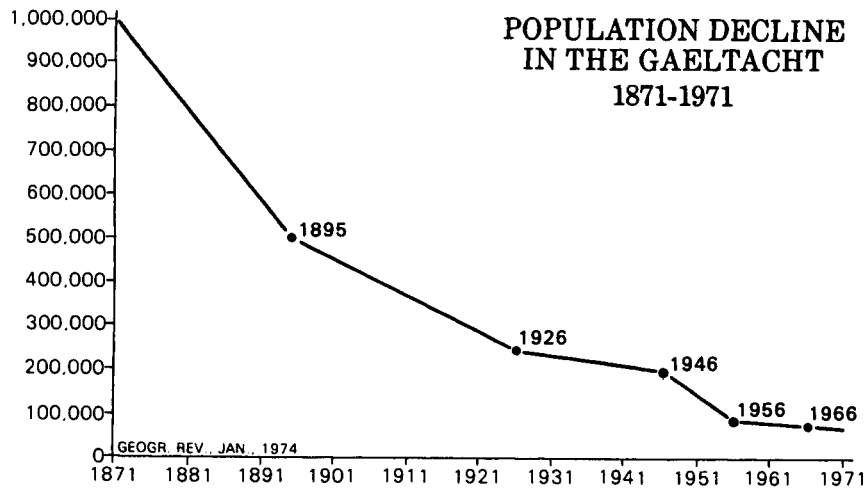


FIG. 3 — Population decline in the Gaeltacht. Sources: Census of Population of Ireland, 1971 [see text footnote 8], Vol. 1, p. 152; Caoimhín Ó Danachair: *The Gaeltacht, in View of the Irish Language* [see text footnote 1], pp. 112-121; reference on p. 118; and *An Action Programme* [see text footnote 7], p. 313.

context, I shall examine the rationale for, and progress of, government-sponsored plans that seek to resuscitate this community and to preserve it as a viable cultural entity.

RECESSION OF THE GAELTACHT

Some 1,200 years ago Irish was the language of all Ireland. Since that time, however, the forces of history have impinged on the language and on its territorial base. The Irish speech was forced into desuetude, first by Norsemen, then by Normans, and later — and more calamitously — by the British. Repressive British penal codes that outlawed the use of the vernacular caused it to ebb away at an ever-increasing rate during the seventeenth century. Concurrently, the bounds of the Gaeltacht were pushed toward the remote parts of western and southern Ireland. The extreme peninsularity of the present-day Gaeltacht suggests the despera-

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

tion of this retreat. By the 1851 census, the first in which information on language was included, only about a million and a half people, less than 25 percent of Ireland's population,⁵ were using Irish daily in the Gaeltacht, which in this period covered roughly the western third of the country. This linguistic decline continued unabated for the next forty years. The 1891 census disclosed that only 8 persons in every 1,000 were unable to speak English but that 855 in every 1,000 could speak no Irish,⁶ which meant that the Irish-speaking population had been reduced by about two-thirds (Fig. 3). The linguistic diminution continues: at the time of Irish independence in 1921 the number of Irish speakers had fallen to about 250,000, and by the outbreak of World War II only 200,000 people retained Irish.⁷ In 1961 this figure dropped to 78,524, and in 1971 to 70,568.⁸ Today the Irish-speaking population resides in a Gaeltacht area that has shrunk to 1,860 square miles, in the seven counties of Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Cork, Waterford, and Meath (Figs. 1 and 2).⁹

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE RESTORATION OF THE IRISH LANGUAGE

That a separate language contributes to the imprint of a distinct nationality is widely accepted. "In the creation and preservation of national consciousness, language has played a major role. Each nation strives to have a language of its own, a common language which forms the strongest unifying symbol in the life of a national community."¹⁰

Despite the decline of the Irish language, Ireland has always

⁵ B. S. MacAodha and E. A. Currie: *Ireland: A Systematic and Regional Geography* (Educational Company of Ireland, Dublin, 1971), p. 129.

⁶ Maureen Wall: *The Decline of the Irish Language*, in *View of the Irish Language* [see footnote 1 above, pp. 81-90; reference on p. 81. Two years after these alarming figures were publicized the now-well-known Gaelic League was founded to encourage wider use of Irish.

⁷ "An Action Programme for the Gaeltacht" (Gaeltarra Éireann/SFADCO Working Group, Dublin, 1971), p. 313.

⁸ "Census of Population of Ireland, 1971" (Central Statistics Office, Dublin, 1972), Vol. 1, p. 152.

⁹ The two tiny districts of Ráth Cairn and Baile Gib, County Meath, where almost a hundred families from Irish-speaking areas were resettled by the Land Commission between 1935 and 1939, were granted official Gaeltacht status in 1967. The precise delimitation of the official Gaeltacht areas has been set forth in "Gaeltacht Areas Order, 1956" (Government Publs. Office, S.I. No. 245, Dublin, 1956), and in "Gaeltacht Areas Order, 1967" (Government Publs. Office, S.I. No. 200, Dublin, 1967).

¹⁰ Hans W. Weigert and others: *Principles of Political Geography* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., New York, 1957), p. 384.

treasured it, for it is the ancestral tongue in which much of the Irish culture and tradition is expressed. But centuries of British tutelage established Irish as the language of cultural and economic backwardness, while English was officially regarded as the language of progress. With the advent of independence, however, the attitude toward the mother tongue was reversed abruptly, as it was drawn on to foster pride among a people trying to shape their destiny. Irish came to be particularly revered because it obtruded as the one remaining symbol of distinctiveness in a country engulfed by British culture. It is in this historical context that the role of the Irish-speaking Gaeltacht can be most clearly comprehended.

In the mid-1950's the government of Ireland adopted as policy the premise that "separate identity is a crucial value for Irish people" and that the Irish language is the essential instrument for "preserving their individuality and distinctiveness as a people."¹¹ The most explicit ideology and commitment espoused by the government toward its language is found in "The Restoration of the Irish Language."

The Irish language is the most distinctive sign of our nationality. Our present situation as an independent state derives in large measure from the idealism evoked by the Irish language movement. The need for this idealism is now as great as ever. A small state has the particular need to preserve its national traditions, to strengthen its independence of outlook and to safeguard its identity. . . . It is through Irish as a living language that we and those who come after us can most surely retain a lively sense and understanding of the unique and essential elements of the Irish character.¹²

Because of the importance of the language as the matrix of Irish nationality, a program has been devised to restore its use. English will not be discarded; rather, a system of bilingualism will be established in which the two languages will be used, each within its own domain. The plan depends on the survival of the Gaeltacht; as the Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language admonished, should the Gaeltacht be allowed to perish, the "will to preserve and spread the Irish language as a spoken tongue elsewhere would probably vanish with it."¹³ As a result, a program to revive the Gaeltacht was launched in 1956 with the creation of

¹¹ "Implementing a Language Policy" (Comhairle Na Gaeilge, Dublin, 1972), p. 1.

¹² "The Restoration of the Irish Language" (Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language, Dublin, 1965), p. 6.

¹³ Brian Ó Cuív: *Irish in the Modern World*, in *View of the Irish Language* [see footnote 1 above], pp. 122-132; reference on p. 130.

Roinn na Gaeltachta (Department of the Gaeltacht) which was empowered to stem the population drain by providing employment opportunities and essential amenities, to improve living conditions, especially housing, and to nurture a more favorable self-image, a feeling of confidence, and a sense of pride among the population.¹⁴

TABLE I—GAELTACHT POPULATION

COUNTY	POPULATION IN GAELTACHT AREAS		PERCENTAGE CHANGE, 1966-1971	PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN AGGREGATE RURAL AREAS IN EACH COUNTY, 1966-1971
	1966	1971		
Cork	3,368	3,269	-2.9	+0.6
Donegal	23,932	23,158	-3.2	-1.5
Galway	21,716	21,204	-2.3	-2.7
Kerry	8,095	7,729	-4.5	-2.1
Mayo	14,762	13,447	-8.9	-6.8
Meath	924	895	-3.1	+4.9
Waterford	833	866	+3.9	+2.0
TOTAL	73,630	70,568	-4.2	-1.3

Source: Census of Population of Ireland, 1971 [see text footnote 8], Vol. 1, pp. xvii, 152, and 153.

POPULATION

Depopulation has been the most persistent enemy of the Gaeltacht. While the population of Ireland has fallen by about 50 percent since its 1851 level of 6.5 million, that of the Gaeltacht has decreased by about 95 percent, from 1.5 million to only 70,568. This precipitous decline is largely attributable to emigration, one of the most salient features of Gaeltacht life.

Historically, people were motivated to flee the Gaeltacht by the economic consequences of potato famine, land impoverishment, fragility of land tenure, and general overpopulation. Some of these forces are still operative, but in recent years the foremost cause of emigration has been undisputably poor employment opportunities. Recent studies in western Ireland reveal that the reason cited most often for migration is the inability to secure a job. One particularly conclusive study, which measured the impact of new industries in counties Sligo and Clare, found that more than 60

¹⁴ Immediately following its appointment, *Roinn na Gaeltachta* undertook the task of redefining the Gaeltacht. Recognition had previously been given to two classifications: the *Fíor Gaeltacht*, in which at least 80 percent of the population spoke Irish; and the *Breac Gaeltacht*, in which 25 to 79 percent of the people used Irish daily. In 1956 these distinct designations were dropped. As far as I can determine, the redefinition was not made on any quantifiable base, and the single term "Gaeltacht" denotes areas where the "vast majority" of the populace retains Irish.

percent of the 334 persons employed in two new industries would have emigrated had it not been for the new plants.¹⁵ Similarly, a survey of the Galway Gaeltacht showed that two-thirds of the secondary-school children intended to emigrate.¹⁶ More than half of those who favored the action gave reasons of employment, yet more than three-quarters said they would remain in the Gaeltacht if work were available.

Even the types of employment available counter the desire of youth to remain in the Gaeltacht. A sampling of aspirations among Galway Gaeltacht youth disclosed that most females favored occupations like teaching, nursing, office work, dress design, and civil service and that males preferred to be teachers, lawyers, policemen, and office workers.¹⁷ Distressingly, most of these positions are in great scarcity throughout the area, and in order to realize their ambitions aspirants are compelled to leave home.

The national population trend has finally reversed itself: in 1971 Ireland's population was 2,978,248, an increase of nearly 3.3 percent over the 1966 population of 2,884,002.¹⁸ Conversely, the decade between 1956 and 1966 saw the Gaeltacht population diminish by 14 percent, from 85,630 to 73,630. Between 1966 and 1971 decline continued, but at a slackened pace of only 4.2 percent (Table I).

Although depopulation has been mitigated, the fact remains that, with the exception of Waterford, all of the Gaeltacht districts have continued to lose people in the past five years. Furthermore, with the exception of Galway and Waterford, all Gaeltacht districts lost population at a higher rate than did the aggregate rural areas in the counties they occupy. A partial explanation for the relative well-being of the two exceptions may be that the cities of Galway and Waterford (albeit beyond the limits of the Gaeltacht) were recently designated national growth centers and were awarded new industrial estates, which offer employment to people in the Gaeltacht.¹⁹ More certain is that the Waterford Gaeltacht has

¹⁵ Denis I. F. Lucey and Donald R. Kaldor: *Rural Industrialization: The Impact of Industrialization on Two Communities in Western Ireland* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1969). For an equally illuminating study of the problems that cause rural emigration throughout Ireland see Damian Hannan: *Rural Exodus: A Study of the Forces Influencing the Large-Scale Migration of Irish Youth* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1970).

¹⁶ MacAodha, *op. cit.* [see footnote 3 above], Vol. 1, p. 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁸ Census of Population of Ireland, 1971 [see footnote 8 above], Vol. 1, p. xii.

¹⁹ In a letter dated October 11, 1972, P. S. McMenamin, assistant manager of the Irish Industrial Development Authority, indicated that he agrees with my explanation.

benefited from employment opportunities created by the building of a Waterford glass factory in Dungarvan, only seven miles away.²⁰

The Gaeltacht also suffers from an unfavorable male/female ratio. The number of females per hundred males is eighty-nine, ten fewer than the national figure. Specifically, in 1971 there were 37,266 males and 33,302 females in the seven communities.²¹ This disparity decreases the natural growth potential by contributing to lower marriage rates. As it is, the distinction between late marriage and failure to marry is a hairline one, especially where migration has greatly depleted the stock of nubile women.²² Still another product of emigration is the higher-than-normal percentage of dependents (persons under fifteen years of age and over sixty-five). The dependency rate for the Gaeltacht is 449 per 1,000, as contrasted with 424 per 1,000 for Ireland.²³ Citing the Galway Gaeltacht as a model, about 32 percent of the population are less than fifteen years old, 31 percent are between fifteen and forty-five, and 13 percent are more than sixty-five. All Gaeltacht areas suffer from this affliction, but in some places it has been devastating. A striking case in point is an isolated village of 300 people in Donegal, where "there are fewer than a dozen people between the ages of 21 and 40."²⁴

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A synoptic view of sectoral employment distribution in the Gaeltacht draws attention to its economic plight (Table II). No fewer than 66 percent of the labor force are engaged in agriculture — more than twice the percentage for all of Ireland. The paucity of industrial opportunities is equally apparent, for only 10 percent of the workers are employed in this sector. For services the 17.1 percent figure contrasts sharply with the 39.2 percent national

²⁰ Personal correspondence from Nollaig Ó Gadhra, information officer, Gaeltarra Éireann, Sept. 22, 1972.

²¹ Census of Population of Ireland, 1971 [see footnote 8 above], Vol. 1, p. 152.

²² For an insightful analysis of the effects of this situation on life in a rural Gaeltacht community, see David G. Symes: *Farm Household and Farm Performance: A Study of Twentieth Century Changes in Ballyferriter, Southwest Ireland*, *Ethnology*, Vol. 11, 1972, pp. 25–38.

²³ "Regional Industrial Plans, 1973–77" (Irish Industrial Development Authority, Dublin, 1972), Part 1, p. 36.

²⁴ Eileen Kane: *Man and Kin in Donegal: A Study of Kinship Functions in a Rural Irish and an Irish-American Community*, *Ethnology*, Vol. 7, 1968, pp. 245–258; reference on p. 245.

proportion. And the unemployment rate is considerably higher than it is in the nation as a whole. The discordancy of these figures portrays the salient features of the area's economy: its pronounced agrarian character, lack of resources, dearth of skilled labor, and meager industrial opportunities. These are the chief forces of economic attrition that have beset the Gaeltacht for centuries.

TABLE II—DISTRIBUTION OF SECTORAL EMPLOYMENT IN GAELTACHT AREAS
(EXCLUDING MEATH), 1966
(In column percentages)

SECTOR	DONEGAL	MAYO	GALWAY	KERRY	CORK	WATER- FORD	ALL GAELTACHT AREAS	ALL IRELAND
Agriculture	59.4	67.6	71.9	68.9	63.7	60.7	66.0	29.8
Industry	11.4	9.2	9.4	7.1	11.2	15.1	10.0	26.3
Services	18.3	14.8	15.3	19.4	22.9	21.5	17.1	39.2
Unemployed	10.9	8.4	3.4	4.6	2.2	2.7	6.9	4.7
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: An Action Programme [see text footnote 7], p. 339.

AGRICULTURE

Basic agricultural activities in the Gaeltacht comprise mixed tillage, dairy farming, and the raising of sheep and cattle on commonages. Despite its preponderant role in the economic life of the Gaeltacht, however, agricultural production is not encouraging. In fact, 80 percent of the land is classified as nonagricultural or as marsh, bog, or mountain.²⁵ Among the factors that impede productive farming are generally poor soils, antiquated techniques of cultivation, and the small size of most plots. The average number of agricultural acres (crops and pasture) per person is only 12.7, compared with 29 for Ireland. Actually, about 2.6 percent fewer people have been employed in agriculture each year since the late 1950's.²⁶ A myriad of problems account for this. Most farms are small and inherently uneconomical: 68 percent have fewer than thirty-nine acres and half have fewer than fifteen acres. More than half of all farmers have no clear land title. Sixty-four percent are more than fifty years old; and slightly more than half of these older farmers have no prospective heirs, as a result of emigration. Given these facts, it is reasonable to assume that agriculture will continue to give way to occupations that offer greater remuneration and

²⁵ Restoration of the Irish Language [see footnote 12 above], p. 52.

²⁶ An Action Programme [see footnote 7 above], p. 185.

future security. It has, in fact, been estimated that only 14,000 people, or about half of the total labor force, will be employed in farming by the late 1970's.²⁷ As agriculture declines the industrial sector must logically take up the slack.

BACKGROUND TO INDUSTRIALIZATION

In 1958 Roinn na Gaeltachta established a statutory board, *Gaeltarra Éireann*, to act as its principal instrument for industrial development in the Gaeltacht. Today, of all the government boards charged with national development Gaeltarra is generally accepted to have the most difficult task.²⁸ Its original responsibility was simply to assist in a modest manner the continued operation of the few existing traditional industries. Many of these plants were dilapidated and incapable of modernization. Most had been built more than fifty years earlier by the Congested Districts Board, not to realize a profit but to provide jobs that enabled an extremely depressed population to rise above the level of starvation. Not only did the industries fail to make money, but it was felt by many that they were utterly incapable of doing so. Losses were justified by the phrase "social considerations." Failure to examine critically the potential of these industries when they were established may be ascribed to a negative attitude on the part of many board members, the British, and even many Irish toward the concept of Gaeltacht development. Strong feeling existed that manufacturing, by its very nature, was alien to the area. This situation was exacerbated by the popular notion that only traditional occupations were linguistically safe here.

During the first seven years Gaeltarra operated and, wherever possible, renovated its inherited industries. Then, in 1965, its powers were augmented dramatically. Impotent to thwart continuing emigration, Roinn na Gaeltachta granted Gaeltarra the liberty to develop new industries and to enter into development schemes with nongovernmental organizations and firms. Hence, the myopic views of past decades were abruptly jettisoned. That population declined by some 12,000 during Roinn na Gaeltachta's first decade in operation was no doubt the prime factor which

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ "Gaeltarra Éireann: Policy and Objective," *Development* (Dublin), No. 130, Mar., 1972, pp. 9-11; reference on p. 9. This is because of the critical and delicate task of having to "interrelate objectives — social, political, economic, commercial, cultural and perhaps even humanitarian."

motivated this policy change. The realization that increasing numbers of people were commuting every day from the Gaeltacht to outside communities for employment also had a sobering effect.²⁹ Despite its apparent economic benefits, the practice has an unaffordable sociolinguistic influence.

ATTRACTING NEW INDUSTRY

It is no easy task to lure industry to the Gaeltacht. In the main the problems — lack of skilled labor, glaring infrastructural deficiencies (poor roads, utilities, and communications), remoteness from major ports and airports, and the absence of urban amenities necessary to draw top managerial and technical personnel — are endemic to most of western Ireland. To compensate for these constraints, Gaeltarra offers prospective industrialists, be they Irish or alien, generous “incentive packages.” The most persuasive are outright cash grants of up to 66 percent for factory construction and for the purchase of machinery (compared with a maximum of 50 percent for other underdeveloped parts of the country) and additional sums for capital requirements ranging up to 49 percent of the total cost.³⁰ Training grants for industrial workers are also available. No less effective is full relief from income tax on profits earned for a period of fifteen years, followed by another five years of partial relief. Moreover, Gaeltarra has added a personal touch by assisting incoming management personnel in their efforts to locate suitable housing, by helping to pay for moving expenses, and by recruiting labor.³¹ These personal services should not be underestimated in an assessment of Gaeltarra’s success.

In 1971 Gaeltarra spent Ir£1,350,000 for industrial development.³² The standard limit for a single industrial project is Ir£20,000; extra concessions, however, can be negotiated if a factory is deemed especially strategic. For instance, Gaeltarra has an abiding interest in the amelioration of emigration, especially as it affects the disproportionate male/female ratio. Consequently,

²⁹ In the Galway Gaeltacht, for example, 695 people travel each day by car or bus into the city of Galway to work.

³⁰ “Ireland’s Special Development Regions,” *Administration* (Dublin), Vol. 20, No. 1, 1972, p. 78.

³¹ Interview with Denis F. McCarthy, Western Regional Manager, Irish Industrial Development Authority, Western Office, Galway, Aug. 21, 1972.

³² An Action Programme [see footnote 7 above], p. 139. In 1971, Ir £1 was worth US\$2.40.

generosity may be elastic for industries that employ females predominantly.³³ Most of the firms that have taken advantage of the incentive schemes are Irish, but a number of companies from the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, Denmark, and Belgium have located in the Gaeltacht. For some local residents this intrusion evokes images of economic imperialism and elicits outcries about the permissiveness of Gaeltarra. In light of past experience, such feelings are hard to condemn. But the policy is a practical one, since Gaeltacht dwellers tend to avoid risks and responsibilities even though opportunities are available. In reality, pitifully few local persons have taken advantage of grants to start their own businesses. This is bemoaned by Gaeltarra, for many small industries could be operated without external management.

MAJOR AND MINOR INDUSTRIES

Two types of industry are recognized in the Gaeltacht, major and minor. The four major industries — finished tweed clothing, knitwear, toys, and plastics — are, to a great extent, owned and operated by Gaeltarra. Tweed and knitwear are traditional industries, and the seemingly incongruous manufacture of toys also preceded the creation of Gaeltarra. These industries have been expanded and their efficiency increased. Tweed, knitwear, and toys are now manufactured in thirty-four different factories throughout the Gaeltacht. Each is, nevertheless, somewhat concentrated in a particular community. Knitwear (most notably hand-knit sweaters) is well entrenched in the Donegal and Mayo Gaeltacht, tweed in Donegal, and toys in Galway. Knitwear and tweed are the largest providers of jobs, for they employ 982 and 142 people respectively. In view of the high rate of female emigration, it is notable that 938 of the 982 persons employed in manufacturing knitwear are women.³⁴ The toy business has long incurred heavy losses, but with a new factory at Spiddal (Fig. 4) and with improvements at the other two factories it is hoped that profits will soon be seen. At present this business employs 116 persons, of whom 74 are women.

Plastics is the youngest and, to date, smallest industrial enterprise. Established in 1967, it was initially limited to fiberglass furniture. Recently, however, emphasis has shifted to plastic

³³ Interview with McCarthy [see footnote 31 above].

³⁴ "Gaeltarra Éireann: Present Operations," *Development*, No. 130, Mar., 1972, pp. 17–19; reference on p. 18.

industrial equipment. Only 32 people are employed in plastics, but its long-range potential is bright. At this writing a new plastics factory is going up in the Galway Gaeltacht which will employ 100 people,³⁵ and another grant has been approved for a plant in Donegal to offer 30 new jobs initially.³⁶



FIG. 4 — The recently built toy factory in Spiddal, a small town in the Galway Gaeltacht.

In 1972 Gaeltarra, in addition to operating major industries, was assisting, to varying degrees, some 123 minor industrial projects³⁷ which comprised the manufacturing of garments, embroidery, carpets, and souvenirs, the processing of fish, seaweed, and wood, meat processing and packaging, boat building, and electronic engineering. New industries, many of which are owned by non-Gaeltacht Irish firms and by foreign companies, are springing up. A factory that produces fancy yarn in Donegal and the production of marble in Galway, by a process developed in Italy, are just two examples.

Gaeltarra's strategy for locating these new industries favors both the nucleated and the dispersed approach. The demand for

³⁵ "Gaeltarra Éireann: New Plastics Industry for An Cheatrú Rua" (unpublished document provided by Gaeltarra Éireann, Galway, June 2, 1972), p. 1.

³⁶ "Gaeltarra Éireann: Another New Industry for Gaoth Dobhair Industrial Estate" (unpublished document provided by Gaeltarra Éireann, Galway, Sept. 20, 1972), p. 1.

³⁷ "Gaeltarra Éireann" (unpublished document provided by Gaeltarra Éireann, Galway, 1972), p. 8.

concentrated and highly economical industrialization has been met by the establishment of two modest industrial estates, one in Donegal and the other in Galway, and single factories have been spread strategically throughout the countryside. For the most part, the allocation of industries corresponds with the size of the Gaeltacht. Donegal and Galway have received the lion's share; Waterford and Meath the fewest. That most industry is of the dispersed type is testimony to the residents' strong desire to take factory jobs near home while they continue to farm on a part-time basis. This allows the continuation of private land ownership, perhaps the construction of a new home, and the putting away of some profit. Surprisingly, under this arrangement many farm owners employed in industry have increased their agricultural output. A shift to more capital-intensive agriculture is the explanation, since farmers now have the means to purchase better farm implements and more fertilizers.

OVERVIEW OF INDUSTRY

In the Gaeltacht economic development is important primarily because it serves the greater cause of cultural preservation. Consequently, Gaeltarra's industrial success can best be gauged by the emigration-preventive employment it has created. In mid-1972 nearly 1,900 people were working in Gaeltacht industries. Of this total, 1,300 were in major and 600 in minor industries.³⁸ Though encouraging, this still falls short of meeting the need. It is estimated that between 1971 and 1976 another 3,000 industrial positions must be created.³⁹ This demand, it should be noted, is based on Roinn na Gaeltachta's prediction that the population will increase to 77,400 by the latter date, a hope which may prove delusory.⁴⁰ The major thrust of new industrialization is directed toward the two Gaeltachts of Galway and Mayo, where 900 and 600 additional manufacturing jobs are envisioned by 1976.⁴¹

Although the government has reason to display confidence in its

³⁸ My compilation, based on figures given in *ibid.*

³⁹ "Regional Industrial Plans 1973-77, West Region" (Irish Industrial Development Authority, Dublin, 1972), p. 17.

⁴⁰ An Action Programme [see footnote 7 above], p. 39. This prediction is founded on the conviction that not only can people be discouraged from leaving the Gaeltacht but Gaeltacht expatriates can be lured home again. An effort is now being made to contact former residents, most of whom have settled in Dublin and London, in the hope that they will consider resettlement at "home," if a job can be guaranteed. This topic is well treated in Conor Brady: *The Age of the Affluent Emigrant*, *Irish Times* (Dublin), Aug. 15, 1972, p. 10.

⁴¹ "Four Year Plan to Bring 1500 Jobs to Gaeltacht," *Connacht Tribune* (Galway), Aug. 18,

achievements, industrialization in the Gaeltacht has failed to reach expected levels of development. Some factories, many of which were inherently unprofitable, have been forced to close down. Even in viable industries problems have surfaced that are ordinarily not insurmountable but are serious enough to elicit expressions of displeasure from management. Most often voiced are complaints about inadequate roads, unreliable water and electricity supply, and consistently poor telephone service.⁴² Disquietude also has arisen over difficulty in retaining workers, especially women, once they acquire a skill. This suggests that a decent job is not always enough and that an impoverished social climate may contribute strongly to emigration. Another drawback is the pronounced reluctance of some people to accept factory jobs. This problem is not peculiar to the Gaeltacht but is common throughout the country, particularly in rural areas where people have difficulty adjusting to the regimentation of industrial life. A social stigma has long been attached to factory work, and people are often willing to take a lower-paying position to "put on a tie and push a pen" in order to gain prestige⁴³ — which implies that some social reorientation must accompany economic development.

The influx of non-Irish-speaking (most commonly English) managers and technicians has been the most bedeviling problem, for it frequently increases pressures to use English in the plant. To minimize this risk Gaeltarra is hastening its efforts to train Irish speakers for managerial positions. Further alleviation has come from the willingness of some foreign personnel to learn Irish, for which educational grants are readily available. Interestingly, industrial personnel from continental Europe have been more sympathetic to and respectful of the Irish language than have the English speakers.⁴⁴ Another trend in preservation has been the number of factories established by joint ownership, a good example being the new Celtics Plastics, Ltd. factory in Galway, which is a partnership project between German and Irish interests.

1972, p. 16. This article explicitly states that the injection of new industry is aimed directly at curtailing further emigration.

⁴² Interview with P. S. McMenamin, Dublin, Aug. 14, 1972. These complaints are common in almost all of the new industries that are scattered throughout the western region of Ireland.

⁴³ Interview with McMenamin [see footnote 42 above]. I am convinced that this mental attachment to the social stigma could easily be dispelled by an effective propaganda program aimed at informing the public about modern industrial work.

⁴⁴ Correspondence from Ó Gadhra [see footnote 20 above].



FIG. 5 — Peninsular landscapes like this one in the Galway Gaeltacht are a major attraction for the growing tourist industry.



FIG. 6 — The rugged, stark beauty of the Gaeltacht landscape is increasingly being "discovered" by the more adventurous travelers.



FIG. 7 — Jaunting cars, still a common mode of transportation in parts of the Gaeltacht, are an important feature of the cultural landscape.

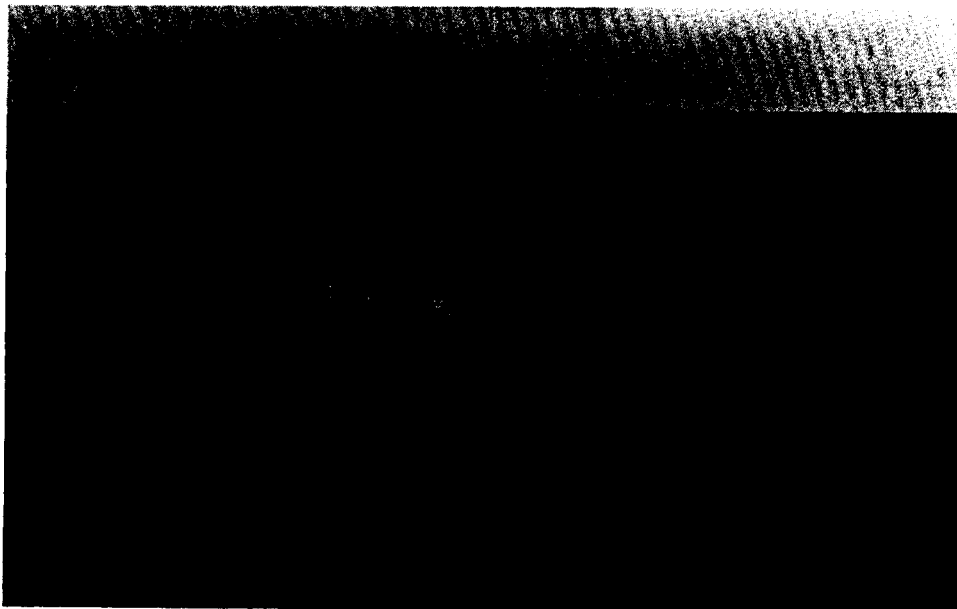


FIG. 8 — The centuries-old occupation of cutting peat is still significant in terms of employment in parts of the Gaeltacht.

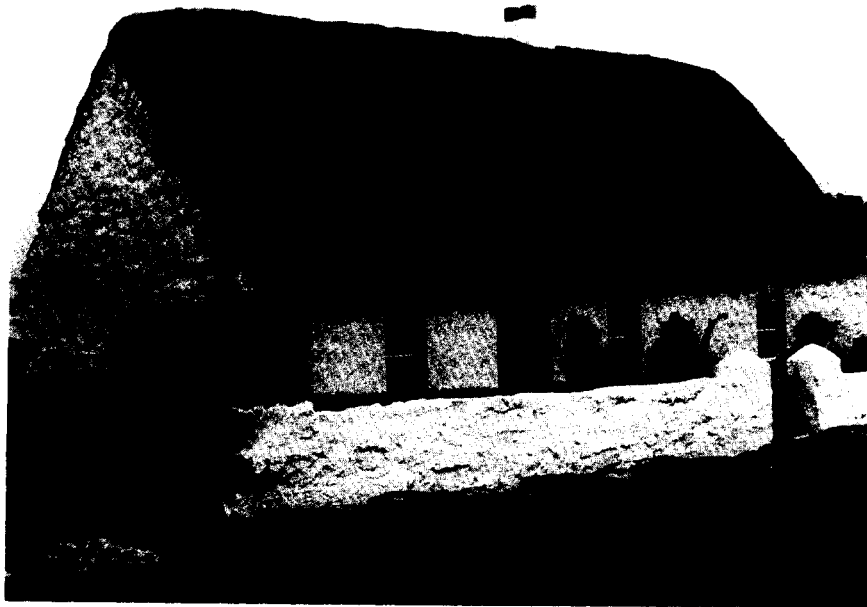


FIG. 9 — The family-owned guesthouse is the most common type of tourist accommodation in the Gaeltacht. Despite their simplicity, most guesthouses are attractive, well groomed, and meticulously clean. They offer excellent service and food.

TOURISM: REWARD VERSUS RISK

Tourism offers one of the most feasible prospects for economic development. It is already well established in much of the country, and it is a major source of national income. Western Ireland in particular has counted heavily on tourist dollars to spur economic growth.⁴⁵ Cities such as Cork, Galway, and Limerick have long catered to tourists. For the most part, however, this development has bypassed the Gaeltacht.

Many areas of the Gaeltacht possess attributes that are important to the tourist trade. Few regions can match the scenic wonders of the peninsulas in counties Kerry, Galway, and Mayo, where mountains, lakes, streams, and spectacular coastal cliffs and seascapes abound (Figs. 5 and 6). The cultural attraction is probably even greater. In mode and tempo of life (Fig. 7) this is the

⁴⁵ In the early 1970's income from tourism fell off sharply in western Ireland. As a result the Western Development Committee was formed to "save the west of Ireland" and to give special attention to the Gaeltacht ("Report Proposes Western Development Council," *Irish Times*, Aug. 19, 1972, p. 13). The decline in tourism may be attributed largely to the political situation in Northern Ireland, since many prospective tourists associate tension and violence with the entire island.

Ireland of centuries past, neatly parceled by meandering dirt roads and stone walls. People work at the traditional occupations of peat cutting (Fig. 8), seaweed gathering, and knitting. Kelp kilns stand beside small clusters of thatched-roof houses. And the presence of the distinctive Irish language is a constant reminder that here indeed is a land quite apart from any other.

Despite these attractions, tourism has been miniscule, its development shackled by some formidable constraints. The paucity of essential amenities like restaurants, shops, banks, and even public rest rooms, linked with the scarcity of such fundamental requisites as decent water supply, sewerage, and telephone service, renders standard tourist comfort nearly impossible. This explains why tourists have always been content to travel through the area without staying in it and accounts for the notable fact that in the Galway Gaeltacht there are only two registered hotels, with a total forty-eight rooms. The only tourist business of importance has been a modest "bed and breakfast" guesthouse trade clearly oriented toward the more adventurous travelers (Fig. 9).

These deficiencies notwithstanding, tourism can, with proper doses of capital, become an integral sector of the economy. But an unbridled onslaught of outsiders could wreak havoc on local culture by bringing increased pressures for English speech. Unchecked, this could exact a terrible sociolinguistic toll. Thus the issue of tourism in the Gaeltacht has become controversial, eliciting emotional pleas both for and against. At best it would offer increased employment opportunity and regional development. Aside from being a useful economic activity in itself, tourism could well create an environment favorable to further development. New opportunities in retail shops, services such as the rental of bicycles and boats, babysitting, pony and jaunting car rides, and local tours could all be an outgrowth of the larger plan. At worst tourism could demolish the culture. It has been likened to "a plague of locusts which brings to the natives material prosperity and cultural corruption, undermining traditional ways of life, contaminating arts and crafts with the vulgarity of the souvenir industry and levelling down indigenous culture to a uniform mechanised stereotyped form."⁴⁶ This contention is supported by the experience in western Galway, where the Gaeltacht has receded

⁴⁶ MacAodha, *op. cit.* [see footnote 3 above], Vol. 1, p. 34.

most rapidly in the vicinity of towns and villages whose dominant function has long been tourism.

Although the government is not unmindful of these risks, it is acting on the conviction that tourism, carefully controlled, can strengthen rather than weaken the distinctive culture by providing impetus to preserve and expand traditional folkways, house types, and crafts. No new tourist accommodations are allowed without approval of Roinn na Gaeltachta — and the attraction of great numbers of people and the establishment of large hotels has been deemed “quite inappropriate to the Gaeltacht.”⁴⁷ To date, approval has been granted only for small hotels that create a “completely Irish atmosphere” for guests and that employ Gaeltacht residents. The Kerry Gaeltacht has fared best. Two new hotels have been completed, the larger of which has room for eighty persons, and by the end of 1973 two additional modest hotels will be opened. There is also a new “holiday village,” which comprises a small hotel and several holiday cottages. In all cases, Irish is the language normally used by the staff, and entertainment is based on the wealth of local songs and dances. Within these confines the character of nascent tourist facilities has been that of small hotels, guesthouses, rented cottages, camping sites, and youth hostels, all designed to harmonize with the environment.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

HOUSING

By even minimal modern standards many of the dwellings in the Gaeltacht are eminently unsuited for habitation. Fully a quarter of the houses are estimated to be more than a hundred years old.⁴⁸ No current statistics are available for the area as a whole, but in 1961 fewer than 20 percent of the 18,500 households in the Gaeltacht had a piped water supply and only about 70 percent had electricity.⁴⁹ More recent figures are available for individual areas. In 1968, 24 percent of Donegal Gaeltacht households had piped water, but only 18 percent had a flush toilet and 12 percent had running hot water.⁵⁰ Of the Galway Gaeltacht population only 10

⁴⁷ An Action Programme [see footnote 7 above], p. 201.

⁴⁸ “West Donegal Resource Survey, Part 3: Economic, Demographic and Sociological Aspects” (An Foras Talúntais, Dublin, 1969), p. 79.

⁴⁹ “The Gaeltacht,” in *Encyclopaedia of Ireland* [see footnote 1 above], pp. 161–164; reference on p. 164.

⁵⁰ West Donegal Resource Survey [see footnote 48 above], p. 80. In Donegal the annual rate of water pipe and sewerage installation has crept along at only 2 percent.



FIG. 10 — A traditional double-gabled house constructed of boulders, with a thatched roof. Many of these dwellings are more than a hundred years old, and most are without piped water and electricity.

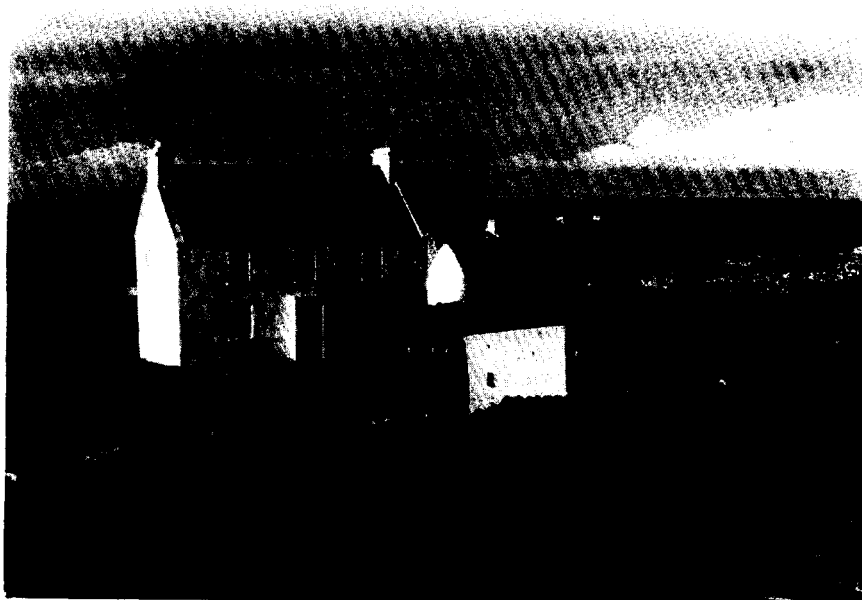


FIG. 11 — A new, grant-assisted home built of concrete blocks, complete with a tile roof, piped water, a sewerage system, and electricity.



FIG. 12 — The promotion of "sports days" is doing much to alleviate the boredom and monotony of Gaeltacht life. Usually organized by the parish council of the local Catholic church, these well-attended events feature foot races, donkey races, and boat-rowing contests.

percent enjoyed the advantages of public water supply in 1969, but they had to suffer frequent breakdowns in pumping equipment.

Next to creating jobs, Roinn na Gaeltachta regards melioration of housing as its major goal. In response to this exigency, maximum grants of Ir£800 are available for the construction of new homes.⁵¹ Piped water, sanitary facilities, and electricity are also crucial, and lesser grants are given for these. On the average, about 150 new houses are built and 300 major home improvements (mostly in bathrooms and kitchens) are made annually under this program.⁵² Viewed in the light of a population that exceeds 70,000, however, such progress is diminutive. This is the result not of limited funding but of the pronounced reluctance by many people to seize opportunity, a situation best explained by the unfortunate lack of "an awareness on the part of householders for the advantages of modern conveniences in the home and a knowledge of the existing scheme."⁵³ In short, Roinn na Gaeltachta

⁵¹ Interview with Tadhg Ó Heallaithe, staff member of Roinn na Gaeltachta, Dublin, Aug. 20, 1973.

⁵² "White Paper on the Restoration of the Irish Language" (Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language, Dublin, 1969), p. 12.

⁵³ West Donegal Resource Survey [see footnote 48 above], p. 106.

has not sufficiently promoted its home-building program, and this bodes ill for future development.

The new grant-assisted houses stand in striking contrast with the traditional double-gabled, thatched-roof dwellings and have noticeably altered the cultural landscape in some Gaeltacht areas (Figs. 10 and 11). Most of the new structures are doubtless a vast improvement over the old, but some problems have cropped up. In Galway, for example, the majority are constructed of cement blocks with tile roofs. Many are quite attractive, architecturally sound, and well provided with utilities. Others, however, are proving less than ideal. Too often lack of imagination and variety has resulted in a depressing sameness. Disquietude also has been aroused because of shoddy construction. Where level sites are at a premium houses have been built on artificial piles of loose stones, and uneven settling results in serious cracking. Dampness, too, has been a source of irritation to owners.

NEED FOR BASIC AMENITIES

Second to unemployment a lethargic social climate has probably motivated most people to leave the Gaeltacht (Fig. 12). This assumption is supported by the MacAodha study of secondary children in Galway who expressed an intention to migrate.⁵⁴ Some 12 percent gave dissatisfaction with their social life as the primary reason for wanting to leave. Disaffection with the social milieu stems from a host of factors. Life in the Gaeltacht has always been somewhat lackluster because of the poor rural character, and certainly the tradition of emigration has been socially debilitating. But in recent times, according to residents, the dearth of essential amenities has bred the most discontent.

There are few large towns in the Gaeltacht. Those that do exist are generally of the "crossroads" type: usually only a church, school, post office, and a few simple stores. Shops ordinarily carry poor selections of goods and often, by necessity, charge prices higher than those in towns outside the area. Services are notably lacking. Law offices, automobile repair and shoe shops, and similar businesses are either scant or nonexistent. Perhaps the most striking testimony to inferior socioeconomic status is the almost total absence of banks. Not until 1968 was even a small suboffice of a bank built in Galway.

⁵⁴ MacAodha, *op. cit.* [see footnote 3 above], Vol. 1, p. 11. For another treatment of the importance of social life in the decision to emigrate, see P. Pentony: Psychological Barriers to Economic Achievement, *Econ. Research Inst., Paper No. 25*, Dublin, 1965, pp. 18-19.

People are growing less tolerant of these deprivations. This is largely attributable to more roads, automobiles, and public transportation (mostly buses). Although these have been welcome additions and have made life easier, they also have vastly increased mobility. Now people casually journey to towns and to shopping centers outside their neighborhoods. According to Gaeltacht residents, better prices, higher quality, and a greater range of goods provide the stimulus. As a predictable consequence, small local stores close, thus lowering the capability of the Gaeltacht to support its population. For some unexplained reason Roinn na Gaeltachta, albeit bewailing the predicament, has done little to remedy it.

Equally important to the social structure are the entertainment and recreation facilities. There has always been a shortage of movie theaters (of which the Irish are so fond), libraries, dance halls, golf courses, swimming pools, theaters for stage performances, playing fields, and restaurants. Only belatedly did the government decree that "if the Gaeltacht is to hold its people and attract outsiders with needed skills and experience, entertainment must be seen as a necessity, not a luxury."⁵⁵ Even the importance of the local pub as a social and entertainment center has been recognized. To redress past neglect Roinn na Gaeltachta offers grants covering 80 percent of cost for erecting or improving theaters, entertainment halls, handball alleys, and the like. Some welcome recreational facilities have been added, but, as in the case of home building, too few persons have availed themselves of this offer.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO DEVELOPMENT

No efforts to resuscitate the Gaeltacht, regardless of how well motivated or financially supported, can be successful unless they are paralleled by a revival of human spirit. The aura of psychological negativism that pervades the area constitutes one of the most intractable barriers to economic and social development. Generations of emigration, unemployment, and poverty have imbued the population with despair and cynicism. The self-confidence that comes with achievement and success has had little chance to develop, and this has had a widespread dispiriting effect. Equally regrettable is the government-fostered tradition of substituting welfare handouts for opportunities. Although "being on the dole" has legitimately enabled many families to make it

⁵⁵ An Action Programme [see footnote 7 above], p. 73.

through difficult times, it has also diminished human incentive. That some parts of the Gaeltacht are today characterized by a "general unwillingness [on the part of the people] to do an honest day's work" is, in the estimation of many, attributable to the well-intentioned but ill-conceived efforts of the state.⁵⁶

Negative thinking is by no means a thing of the past. A high degree of xenophobia is still prevalent. It works against new ideas and development by outsiders and in several instances even impaired my efforts to obtain personal data. Increasingly, Roinn na Gaeltachta recognizes that long-range development success is contingent on altering the mood of apathy and outright cynicism. For example, in certain communities people share such an alarming degree of pessimism and defeatism about their condition that they find it difficult, if not impossible, to envision new industries and growth centers in their neighborhood.

Recent developments have created new psychological problems. Increased travel to non-Gaeltacht towns, coupled with more visits by summer tourists, has had an unsettling effect. No less disruptive has been the ascendancy of television and movies, which too often portray the external world as a place of unlimited opportunity and prosperity, thus nourishing the idea that "home" (in the Gaeltacht) is old-fashioned, poor, and boring. As a result, people are compelled to formulate new perceptions of themselves, which often result in the stark realization of their socioeconomic plight. These perceptions abet the cause of continued emigration and contribute to pessimism. In such an atmosphere it has been exceedingly difficult for Roinn na Gaeltachta to promote optimism, pride, and confidence in the future.

SUMMARY AND PERSPECTIVE

The Irish government feels that the survival of the Gaeltacht is inextricably linked to success in restoring the national language. For precisely this reason, the commitment has been made to prevent it from perishing. To some this may be a quixotic notion, but to those who are familiar with Ireland, past and present, it is more often a highly rational program founded not on utopian

⁵⁶ MacAodha, *op. cit.* [see footnote 3 above], Vol. 1, p. 9. An interesting study of the incentive and work attitudes of Gaeltacht residents has been made by Eileen Kane, an anthropologist, who notes that many people who could be productive prefer to qualify under a minimum income requirement and "keep only a patch of potatoes and rely for cash upon the 'dole,' old-age pensions, and a wide range of government aids" (Kane, *op. cit.* [see footnote 24 above], p. 245).

ideals but on pragmatism. It must be borne in mind that the independent Irish Republic is only a little more than fifty years old and in many respects is still striving to establish economic viability and national direction. Moreover, the country is at an important juncture in its economic and political evolution, since it recently entered the European Common Market. The move toward multinational cooperation comes at a time when "it is notable that within the European Economic Community the lowering of political and economic barriers is being accompanied by (or is indeed generating) a conscious movement towards preserving national identities in language, culture and traditions."⁵⁷ Crisply put, Ireland now more than ever before needs to establish some sort of clear national identity. The government, by endeavoring to resuscitate the Gaeltacht, is responding to this need, for only from the Gaeltacht can there come a distinctly Irish character with which all countrymen can identify.

Sensitive to the delicate task of carefully weaving together economic and social objectives, the Irish government has approached Gaeltacht development with caution. At all stages it has been mindful of the great risks associated with its "intrusion" on Gaeltacht life. But the fact remains that without state assistance the Gaeltacht is doomed to perish by attrition in a few decades. Thus the government has had little choice but to intervene for the sake of the dying community.

So far, this strategy of cautious intervention and assistance has met with varying degrees of success. Nonetheless, enough progress has been made so that some provisional conclusions can be drawn. For instance, economic problems are proving to be more readily solvable than social ones. The significance of the fact that nearly 2,000 people are now employed in industry is unmistakable. These employment opportunities have doubtless figured prominently in the dramatic decline in depopulation. Industrialization has injected the area's economy with new capital, and for many people both income and living standards are on the rise. However, it can be argued that new industries benefit only a minority of the Irish-speaking populace. In rebuttal, a weighty question must be posed. Would greatly accelerated efforts to industrialize the

⁵⁷ An Action Programme [see footnote 7 above], p. 255. A recent application of this theory to Belgium is found in Glenn V. Stephenson: *Cultural Regionalism and the Unitary State Idea in Belgium*, *Geogr. Rev.*, Vol. 62, 1972, pp. 501-523.

Gaeltacht effect a positive result? In my estimation such a policy would probably create a pace of change detrimental to the cause, for under such circumstances people would have greater difficulty in adjusting to progress. One does not move from the nineteenth century to the twentieth overnight. The transition must be gentle, with minimal cultural disruption. Evidence that older residents are encountering adjustment problems is visible even now. Furthermore, because the economic growth of the Gaeltacht is important primarily in that it serves the greater cause of cultural preservation, the present tempo of industrialization seems judicious.

Kindred to industrialization has been the establishment of tourism, one of the brightest potential suppliers of employment. But owing to the imminent risk to language and culture, advances in this sector have, by necessity, been slowed by caution. The judgment exercised by Roinn na Gaeltachta in this sensitive area is laudable. Tourist facilities established under its guidance, mostly in the Kerry Gaeltacht, have proven successful thus far: jobs that allow residents to remain near home have been provided and the Irish atmosphere has been retained. That these accommodations have contributed to the advancement of cultural or linguistic deterioration is not evident.

Socially, the Gaeltacht shows signs of discarding its lethargic profile. Increased employment, higher incomes, and improved housing have unquestionably had a salutary effect on morale in the Gaeltacht. The reduction of emigration has been equally important. Coupled with the government's prediction of a substantial population increase by 1976, decreased emigration has noticeably boosted morale in many Gaeltacht communities. After decades of hollow promises, measurable progress has finally been made. People are more willing to remain in the Gaeltacht because they are witnessing change and development. These encouraging achievements should not, however, obscure the fact that serious problems remain and that much work still needs to be done.

If any facet of development begs for attention it is the need for increased amenities. The continuing absence of shops, services, and recreational facilities cannot be lightly dismissed, for with their new mobility many residents will continue to seek these out in non-Gaeltacht towns. This habit, if allowed to persist, will surely prove to be sociolinguistically harmful. In light of the generous grants available for melioration of these deficiencies it is

lamentable that so little local participation has been evoked. This augurs ill for rapid solutions to social problems and boldly suggests that the government plans could be better promoted.

The Gaeltacht remains vulnerable, but economic and social development has not led to the wholesale abandonment of the traditional culture, and fears of rampant anglicization have thus far proven to be unfounded. Consequently, it is being shown that the matrix of the culture, namely the Irish vernacular, can remain intact. The Gaeltacht has even begun to assume its larger role of contributing to national welfare, for a number of schools have been established and are attended during the summer months by children and adults from other parts of the country who seek proficiency in Irish. No one knows at this time what the outcome of the efforts to resuscitate the Gaeltacht will be. In view of what has already been accomplished there appears to be ample reason to believe that it can be saved. But whether it can effect a nationwide restoration of the language while imparting a national identity is questionable.