

County Galway Rural Resource Study

Gorumna Summary

Jim Frawley,

Teagasc, Rural Economy Research Centre

Noel O'Meara,

Galway Rural Development Company

John Whirisky,

Teagasc, Rural Development Resource Centre, Athenry

January 2005

County Galway Rural Resource Study

Teagasc wish to express its gratitude at the level of co-operation and partnership exhibited throughout the planning and conducting of this study.

Galway Rural Development contributed in a major way to the success of the study. Noel O'Meara, on secondment from Galway Rural Development, was the visible face of the study in each community. The results of the study will be used to focus programmes and schemes of LDSIP and NRDP within the county and to further foster relationships with the other organisations involved.

Galway County Council has been a key partner in the design and delivery of the study and their financial contribution is gratefully acknowledged. The outcomes of this study provide useful detail on which local authority partnerships actions can be based.

Cuireann Údarás na Gaeltachta fáilte roimh an tuarascáil seo agus tá an -sásta go raibh sé ar a chumas cúnamh deontais a chur ar fáil. Tá o bhfuil an suirbhé seo ag baint le Ceantar na nOileán i nGarumna i gConamara. Tá an tÚdarás buíoch do Chomhairle Ceantair na nOileán a thug cúnamh agus comhoibriú iomlán don obair seo.

The authors also wish to thank the partnership group Cumas who also contributed to the study. Teagasc is pleased to have led this study and appreciate that the results can be used to give further relevance to the programmes carried out by the agencies, not alone in Galway, but also in many other counties throughout the country.

*Jim Frawley
John Whiriskey
January 2005*

Acknowledgements

The authors express their gratitude to the following who assisted in the study:

- The Gorumna families who participated in this study
- The Chair and members of Comhairle Cenatar na nOilean Teo. in particular Mr Martin O Laoi (Chairperson) and Mr Sean O' Loinsigh (Secretary).
- Ms Celine Ni Dhireain & Mr Sean O'Driscoll , Managers of Cohmaire Ceantar na nOilean Teo.
- An tA th Eamon O' Conghaile CC , Leitir Meallain for assistance with parish newsletters & local notices.
- The funding agencies :
Galway Rural Development Co. Ltd. (represented by Mr Eamon Kealy);
Udaras na Gaeltachta (represented by Mr Mairtin O Cadhain).
Galway County Council (represented by Mr Frank Dawson) &
Cumas Teo. (represented by Mr Gearoid O Cosgora)

Gorumna Rural Development Study

Introduction

Many rural areas have experienced unprecedented change over the past decade in the structure of their economies and population. These changes require adjustments at the individual and household level but also in the way local agencies and services support rural communities. The purpose of this study was to examine how Gorumna as a community has adapted to change and to identify the challenges in maintaining Gorumna as a viable community and a desirable place to live.

Gorumna is an island in South Connemara 56 km west of Galway city. Predominantly an Irish speaking community, much of its land is marginal to farming and fishing is traditionally engaged in by many families on the island. Between 1996 and 2002 the population of Gorumna declined by 10% in comparison with an increase of 9% in the aggregate rural areas of the county. Gorumna has an active Community Development Council (Comhairle Contar na n'Oileach) and other agencies also provide support for the community including Cumes Teo, Meitheal na Gealtachta, Udaras na Gealtachta, Roinn na Gealtachta as well as other agencies that operate throughout the county.

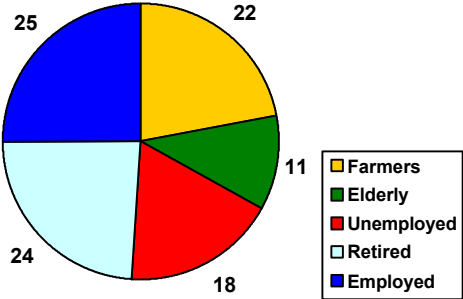
The Gorumna study is part of a wider County Galway study of rural development, which was prompted by major changes in EU Agricultural and Rural Development policies. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is being widened increasingly to incorporate a view of the viability of the farm household and the broader rural community and its environment. EU and National policies clearly state their aims to maintain vibrant rural areas, which are connected to the mainstream of regional and national economies. However, it is less clear as to what specific measures are appropriate and how rural communities themselves can participate. In this study, the perspective was that sustaining a viable rural community was based on two

aspects namely (i) a sound economy and (ii) a rural community demographically balanced and inclusive in an amenable environment.

Methods

Five distinct types of rural area in County Galway were identified; (i) a peri – urban area (mainly near Galway city), (ii) remote peripheral area (Connemara) (iii) areas with high forest cover and two farming type areas, (iv) representing the better land and (v) other farming area. Gorumna was selected to represent a remote peripheral area, which is typical of many small communities in the west of Ireland. Five different types of household were identified and a random sample selected from each type. The household types were (i) farm households, (ii) elderly (>65 and living alone), (iii) retired households, (iv) unemployed and (v) working households but non-farm. From the 386 households comprising the ED of Gorumna 100 were selected and surveyed in late 2003. Figure 1 shows the different household types identified from the electoral register in Gorumna Electoral Division (ED).

Figure 1: Proportional Distribution of Household Types in Gorumna



Just over one-fifth of households were engaged in some farming activities while a further quarter had non-farming occupations only. More than half the

households were not economically active being either retired (24%), elderly (11%) or unemployed (18%), indicating a degree of dependency on welfare and other payments in the area.

Survey Results: The Economy

A number of aspects of the economy are considered namely; (i) farm structures and incomes, (ii) sources of household income and (iii) occupations and community patterns.

Income Sources

The scale of farming was very small (Table 1) with over half the farmers having 5 hectares or less and an average farm size of 8.5 hectares. The predominant system of farming was almost entirely suckling/drystock. Farm incomes were very low with more than 90% earning less than €5000 in 2002 and the remainder with less with €10000. Despite the low farm incomes only 28% of farm households had other sources of earned income, either by the operator or spouse; though many had pensions or welfare payments as indicated below.

Table 1: Farming in Gorumna

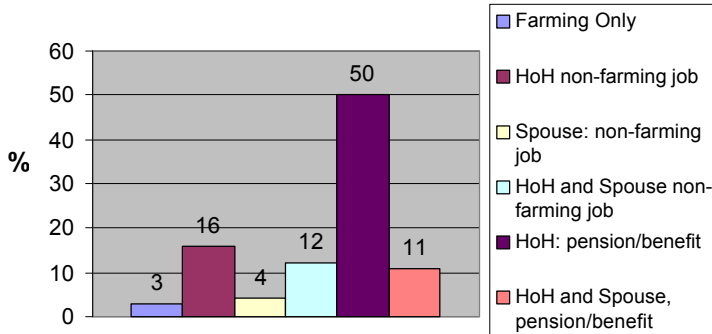
Average Farm Size	8.5 ha
Predominant farm system: Suckling/Drystock	All
Farm incomes <€5,000	91%
€5,000 - €10,000	9%
Part time farming¹	28%

¹ Part time farming: operator and/or spouse have an off farm job

Household Incomes

A summary of the income sources of all households is shown in Figure 2 below.

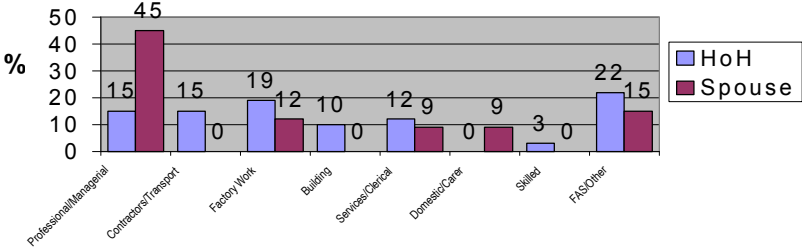
Figure 2: Households by Income Source



More than 60% of households in Gorumna had an income in the form of a pension or welfare benefit either by the household head to both the household head and spouse. Just 3% of households depended only on farming as a source of income. The remainder of households had an income from off-farm earned employment either by the household head, spouse or both. For those with non-farm jobs the occupation structure of heads of households¹ and spouses are presented in Figure 3.

¹ In the survey heads of households were reported to be predominantly male.

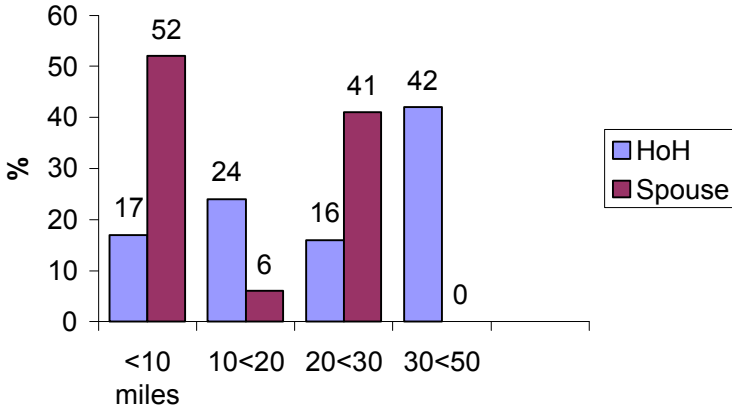
Figure 3: Percentage Occupations of Heads of Households and Spouses



Forty-five percent of spouses at work were engaged in professional managerial types of employment, many of them in teaching and nursing. In contrast only 15% of household heads had a similar occupation. Factory work, transport operatives, building and participation in work schemes, such as FAS were the main occupations of household heads. A smaller proportion had skilled occupations such as electricians, plumbers etc. In general the higher skill levels of spouses is reflective of their higher educational levels, which was similar to other communities studied in Co. Galway.

Information on the location of work and distances travelled was also obtained. Figure 4 shows a summary of the distances travelled both by the head of household and spouse.

Fig 4: Distance to Place of Work



Spouses in general travelled shorter distances to work than heads of households with more than half of them working in or near Gorumna itself. In contrast 42% of household heads travelled between 30 and 50 miles to work (one way), Galway city being a common destination. Another 16% of household heads travelled between 20 and 30 miles as did 41% of spouses. Notwithstanding the long distances most householders accepted commuting as 'a fact of life' but a substantial minority felt the distances were too far.

Other Income Sources

Being an island community with Irish as the spoken language the potential of sourcing income from other sources was examined. With regard to (1) the sale of seaweed, (2) Irish language college accommodation and (3) tourism only a very small proportion of households (1-3%) reported income from these sources. However, about one-fifth of households on the island had some income from fishing, in the main sea salmon. All household types participated to some extent in this activity. A small proportion of employed households were engaged in net fishing.

It is difficult to quantify how much these other activities contribute to the local economy but in the main they were confined to only a minority of households. Though tax and welfare concessions are available with respect to income from some of these activities many felt there is much unexploited potential with regard to the natural resources. More than half the households felt there were restrictions on the development of natural resources. With respect to tourism there is a lack of general tourist facilities in the area as well as poor roads. Depleted fish stocks and lack of fishing skills were some of the restrictions hindering the fishing sector. The view that a change in the current negative policies towards small scale fishermen as compared with farmers, was identified as the main option to secure the potential of the fishing industry as well as the provision of better access to markets.

Survey results: The Rural community

Two aspects of the human resource in Gorumna were studied; namely the age profile and educational status of household heads and their spouses. The age profile, shown in Figure 5, revealed the majority of household heads and more than two-thirds of spouses were aged between 40 and 64 years. On the other hand 15% of the heads of household and 23% of spouses were under 40 years of age. More than one-third of household heads were 65 years or more indicating an ageing population.

Figure 5: Age Profile of Heads of Households and Spouses

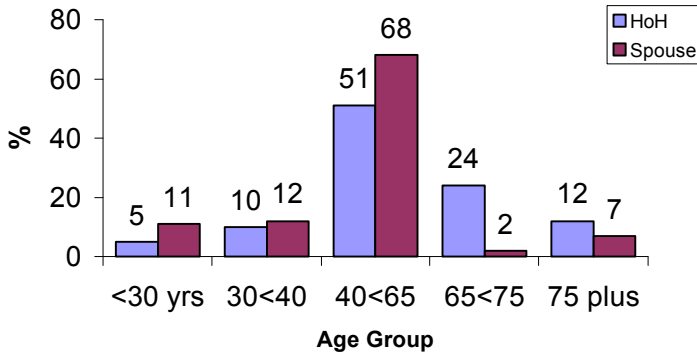
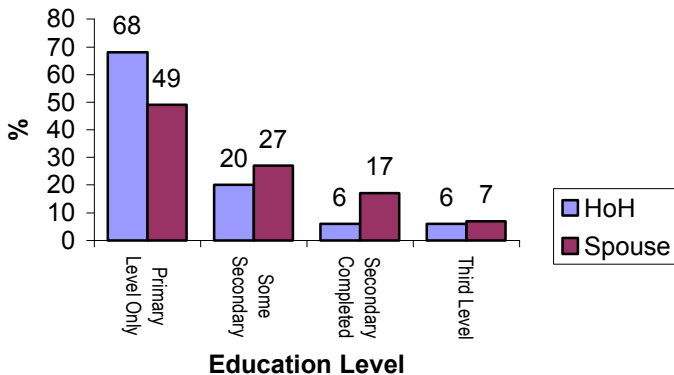


Figure 6 presents the profile of the highest educational level achieved by both household heads and spouses. More than two-thirds of household heads and close to half of spouses had primary educational only. Conversely only a small minority of both household heads and spouses had third level. To some degree these low levels of education can be attributed to the older age structure of households in the area.

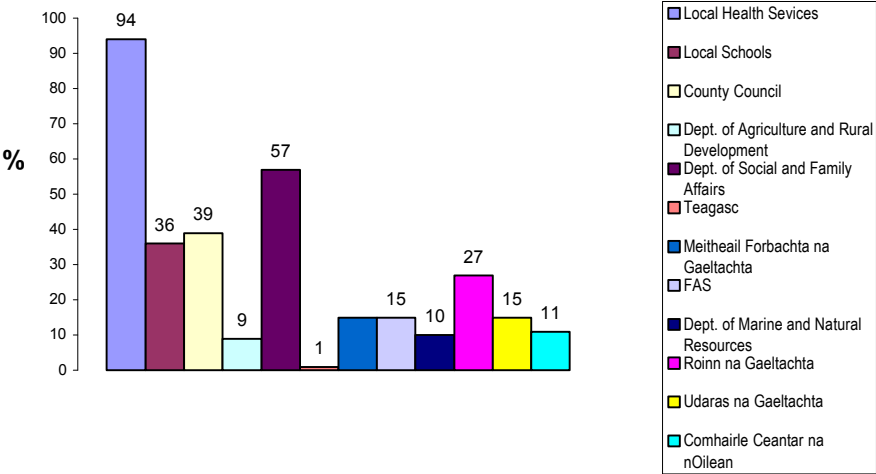
Figure 6: Educational Profile of Heads of Households and Spouses



Local Services and Agencies

Local agencies serving rural communities play an important part in ensuring that rural communities remain viable and are well serviced. Figure 7 indicates the level of use of selected agencies in the community. The local agencies most in demand in the area were the health services (94%), schools (36%), County Council (39%) and Dept. of Social and Family Affairs (57%). In this Gaeltachta area Roinn na Gaealtachta (27%), Udaras na Gaeltachta (15%) and Comhairle Ceantar nOilean (11%) were also in demand. The high usage of the health services was likely due to the relatively high level of elderly and retired households in the community. The satisfaction level was generally good except that there was some concern with the County Council especially with respect to promptness of response and quality of roads. Shorter waiting lists and better community services were the main improvements needed in the health services.

Figure 7: Usage of Agencies by Households



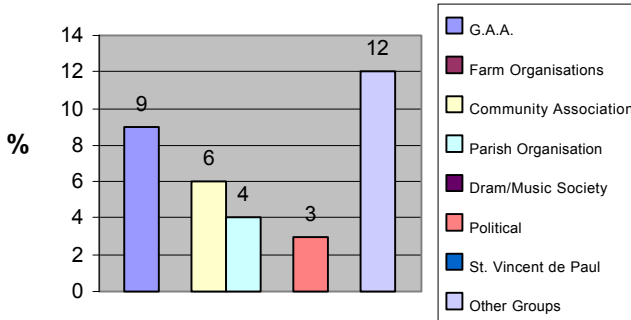
Services and leisure activities are a very important dimension of community life. Information on the satisfaction level of households on a range of services and leisure activities is summarised in Table 2. The satisfaction level was good for many of the services but the main exceptions were access to jobs, shopping, leisure activities, activities for youth, public transport and childcare facilities. The greatest felt needs in the community were for access to jobs, leisure activities, public transport and childcare facilities.

Table 2: Household Satisfaction with local services and amenities

Service	Excellent/Good %	Satisfactory %	Poor %
Shopping	15	58	26
Education	89	9	1
Leisure Activities	2	48	51
Churches	95	4	0
Post Office	92	8	1
Bank	29	56	14
Activities for Youth	4	32	64
Security for Elderly	42	37	20
Access to jobs	3	16	82
Water Supply	29	45	26
Public Transport	13	40	48
Childcare Facilities	21	40	46

A crucial dimension of a viable community is the level of formal and informal social contact. A measure of formal participation was taken as the level of involvement in voluntary organisations in the area. As outlined in Figure 8, it can be seen that only a very small percentage of heads of household were members in local organisations.

Figure 8: Head of Household membership in local organisations



Informal social contacts were examined by way of identifying the regular social activities of respondents. Across all household types visiting friends/relatives or having them visit was the main activity identified (Table 3). Going for a drink on a regular basis was also a common activity for all categories of household in the Gorumna area except for the elderly.

Table 3: Activities engaged once a week or more by household types:

Household Type	Visiting friends %	Have friends visit %	Go for a drink %	Go to a match %	Card Playing
Farmers	60	60	30	7	5
Elderly	71	71	0	0	0
Retired	43	0	40	0	0
Employed	63	52	44	22	4
Unemployed	59	35	24	6	18

The responses to a number of attitude statements are indicative of how people feel about their community; and give an impression of people's satisfaction level with living in their own community. These are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Level of Agreement with Attitude Statements

Attitude Statement	% Agreement
The longer I live here the more I feel I belong	94
If I was in trouble most people would go out of their way to help me	98
Most people in the community can be trusted	96
Young people can have a better way of life if they remain in the area	78

Table 4 suggests that there is a strong sense of belonging in the Gorumna area and people feel strongly that they can trust their neighbours or go for help in time of crisis. There was some concern as to whether young people would have a better way of life by remaining on in the local community.

In a similar way householders were asked how safe they felt about living in their own community (Table 5).

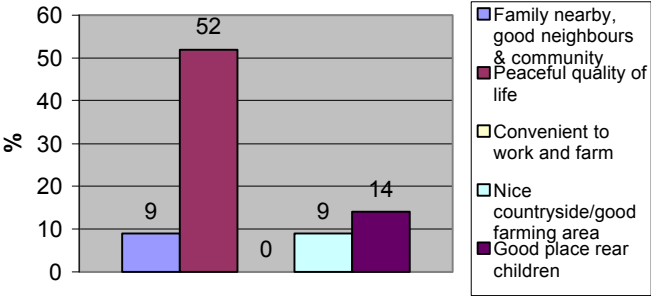
Table 5: Respondents Feeling of safety in selected circumstances

CIRCUMSTANCE	% feeling safe
To leave the door unlocked if you were going out for an hour or so	55
Walking alone in the neighbourhood after dark if you were alone	94
Being alone at home at night	96
Safe from crime and violence in the community	93

People in Gorumna generally felt very safe about living in their community. There was little fear about walking alone after dark, being alone at home at night and people generally felt safe from crime and violence. The only concern they may have was at leaving their home unlocked when they went out for an hour or so.

The positive sentiments and feelings about Gorumna were endorsed in that 99% of householders stated they liked living in the area. The main advantages of living in the area are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Advantages of living in Gorumna



A peaceful and tranquil quality of life was the main attribute of Gorumna, which endeared people toward living there. A good place to rear a family, family, neighbours, friends and a scenic countryside were other advantages cited. The fact that 61% of present householders returned from abroad, mainly the UK and USA, many to retire, is an indication of the strength of sentiments generally held towards Gorumna.

The Irish Language

A defining feature of Gorumna is that Irish is the everyday spoken language, linking the island to a long tradition of Gaelic culture and heritage. Irish as a spoken language is mainly seen as a positive aspect of the community (Table 6).

Table 6: Advantages of Irish as a spoken language

Advantage	%
It's our culture	55
For grant purposes	21
To get a job in the area	5
For tourism	1
No advantage	18
Total	100

Fifty five percent of households felt that the advantage of Irish as a spoken language was the expression of their culture. Approximately half that proportion indicated more mundane reasons such as eligibility for grants or to get a job. However, eighteen percent did not see an advantage.

About one-third of households felt that there were disadvantages with Irish mainly because English was also necessary and to a lesser extent because of the difficulties experienced by the elderly in hospital or students pursuing third level education.

More than 60% of households felt that the future of Irish as a spoken language was secure but the main threat was that many young people did not speak Irish on an everyday basis. Inadequate government support for Irish was the view of about one-third of households, mainly because of a lack of native speakers in public service positions or because of poor educational facilities.

Conclusions

Gorumna is an Irish speaking community, typical of Connemara and much of the western seaboard. In recent years it has experienced significant population decline and a weakening of the traditional marine and farming sectors. Galway city, more than 50 km distant is the nearest urban centre and major source of employment and commerce.

The demographic structure is an ageing one; more than one-third of households were headed either by elderly persons living alone or retired persons. Unemployment is also high with 18% of heads of households being out of work on a long term basis. This unbalanced population structure is reflected in the economy with more than 60% of households in receipt of a pension or a welfare payment indicating the degree of dependency on transfer payments in the area.

More than one-fifth of households in the area were farmers composed of very small farms of poor land deriving extremely low farm incomes. Just 3% of all households in Gorumna depended only on farming while the remaining quarter of households had an earned income either by the household head and/or spouse.

For household heads at work in off-farm employment a wide range of occupations were represented but in general they tended toward unskilled jobs or state assisted schemes. Spouses in the main had more skilled employments. Commuting more than 30 miles to work was not unusual, especially for heads of households.

Only a minority of households derived an income from the unique resources of the community such as the landscape, the sea or the Irish language. The contribution of tourism or language related activities either in employment or income was very small. Sea fishing especially salmon was an income source in about one-fifth of households but its contribution was difficult to quantify. It

seems clear however that the natural resources that abound are not exploited to an acceptable level. The unique link of land with the sea was seen by many as an essential attribute of coastal areas, which is not sufficiently recognised in policy measures to sustain such areas. By comparison with the supports available to farming and agriculture they seem very inadequate. In this regard strong views were expressed in the survey that more positive policies towards local fishermen were required as well as investment in tourist facilities to more fully exploit these resources.

In community terms many positive aspects of life in Gorumna were identified. Almost all households liked to live there and held strong attachments towards their community. The peaceful and tranquil pace of life was the major asset and most felt safe from crime and violence in the area and in their homes. An endorsement of these attachments is the finding that more than 60% of households had returned from overseas to live in Gorumna, many to retire.

The attachment to the Irish language and its cultural significance is a major component of community life in Gorumna. However there are fears that its future is not sufficiently secure. Young people are increasingly speaking English and the ongoing demographic changes are not in its favour. The essential question that arises is whether Gorumna and communities like it can maintain a balanced and vibrant community on the basis of a weakening economy. The indications from the study suggest no.

It is revealing that the most critical support identified by households to improve the social and economic well being of rural families was the creation of local jobs. Clearly this is a challenge for all the state and local agencies concerned. In this regard Gorumna has a number of active local agencies such as the Community Development Council, Cumas Teo, Udaras na Gealtachta and Meitheal Forbhairt na Gealtachta who are well positioned in conjunction with support from state agencies to lead effective measures to regenerate the economy. Without a stable economy the existence of communities such as Gorumna, which are the repositories of Gaelic culture and heritage, can not be sustained.

Apart from the critical need to develop the local economy other community issues emerged from the study. Improved access to health services was a concern for many households. Given the older demographic structures prevailing it is likely these issues will continue and possibly intensify. The lack of leisure activities, especially for youth was another major concern. Other issues were improved roads and water/sewerage utilities. In general, the popular perception is that these health and community needs must be supplied by the state but increasingly local communities are becoming involved in servicing community needs such as the provision of retirement facilities. It seems appropriate that more joint community/state initiatives should be encouraged and facilitated in the future.