

County Galway Rural Resource Study

Laurencetown Summary

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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 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.

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Laurencetown Rural Development Study

Introduction

Many rural areas have experienced unprecedented change over the past decade in the structure of their economies and in population decline. These changes require adjustments to manage their effects not only 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 Laurencetown as a community has adapted to change and to identify the challenges in maintaining Laurencetown as a viable community and a desirable place to live.

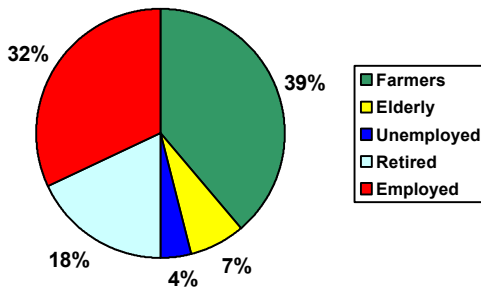
In 1997 Laurencetown Community Enterprise group was established and this group produced a local development plan. Later representatives of this group were contacted and the purpose of the Laurencetown Rural Development study was explained to them. Their assistance in promoting the study was obtained.

The Laurencetown study is part of a wider County Galway study of rural development, which was prompted by major changes in EU Agricultural policy. 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 viable 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 by analysis of census data. These were (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. Laurencetown was selected to represent the better land area, which accounts for a large part of East Galway. From each of the area types a community was selected and a survey was completed in 2002/2003. Five different types of households were identified namely: (i) farm households, (ii) elderly (>65 and living alone), (iii) retired households, (iv) unemployed and (v) working households but non-farm. Figure 1 shows the different household types identified from the electoral register in two Electoral Divisions of Laurencetown and Kylemore comprising the study area.

Figure 1: Household Types of Laurencetown



From these figures it is clear that in Laurencetown farming is still an important sector with 39% of households engaged in some farming. Close on one third of households are economically active in occupations other than farming, while the remaining households are predominantly elderly persons living alone or retired households. From the 165 households comprising the Laurencetown community 85 were selected randomly from the different household types and were surveyed in January of 2003.

Survey Results; The Rural 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.

Farm Structures and Incomes

The scale of farming was relatively large with drystock, suckling and sheep farming the main farm enterprises (Table 1). However, farm incomes were generally low with 58% of farm incomes under €10,000 and a further 27% between €10,000 and €20,000 income. This demonstrates the reason why many farm households had another source of income.

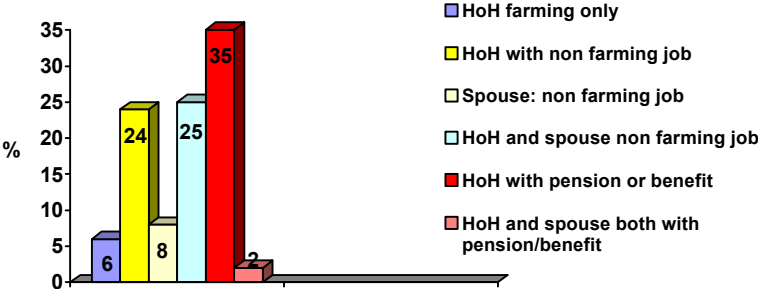
Table 1: Farming in Laurencetown

Average Farm Size	43 hectares
Predominant Farm System:	
<i>Dry cattle/suckling</i>	49%
<i>Dry cattle</i>	29%
<i>Sheep</i>	22%
Farm Income:	
€10,000	58%
€10,000 < 20,000	27%
Part-time Farming	60%
Full-time Farming	40%

Household Incomes

A summary of the income sources of all households is shown in Figure 2. While Laurencetown still has a major farming community only 6% of households depended on farming alone. Fifty seven percent of all households had an earned income. Thirty seven percent of households had an income from a pension or other state transfer, many of those including farm households.

Figure 2: Percent of Households by Income Source



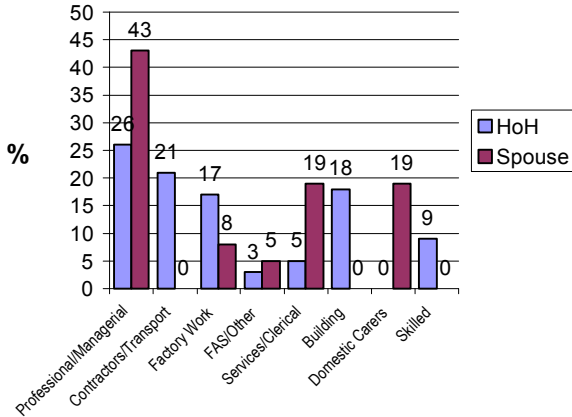
HoH = Head of Household

Occupational Structures

Information on the occupational structures of heads of households¹ and their spouses is presented in Figure 3. Forty three percent of spouses at work had professional/managerial employment, in the main teachers and nurses. By contrast heads of households had less skilled jobs such as agricultural contractors / drivers (21%), and factory workers (18%). It is noteworthy that 19% of spouses had clerical/services type jobs, while a further 19% worked in domestic/carers jobs.

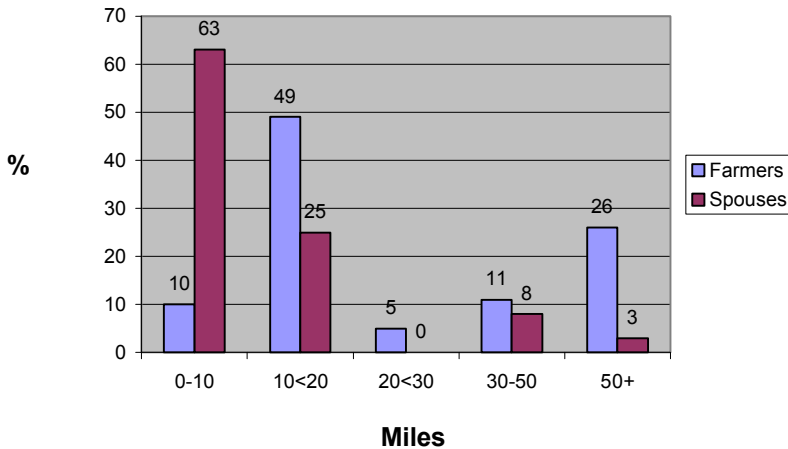
¹ In the survey heads of households were reported to be predominantly male

Figure 3: % Occupations of Heads of Households and Spouses



The distances travelled to work, one way, by the head of household and spouse are shown in Figure 4. Sixty three percent of spouses worked in the Laurencetown vicinity (<10 miles) as compared with 10% of household heads. On the other hand 26% of the heads of households travelled over 50 miles to work, which indicates that they are prepared to commute to Galway whereas 3% of the spouses travelled that distance to work. The principal destinations were the local towns of Ballinasloe, Portumna, Loughrea and Galway. Private car was by far the most common form of transport. Sixty three per cent of households did not regard commuting as a problem and a further 23% accepted commuting as a fact of life.

Figure 4: Distance to Place of Work



Survey Results; The Rural Community

The main resource of any community is its people. The latest census of population (2002) shows that Laurencetown had a 6% decline in population over the last six years. This compares with a growth in the County population of 9% in the same period.

Human Resources

Two aspects of the human resource in Laurencetown 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 spouses were aged between 40 and 65. Twenty six per cent of household heads were 65 or over as compared with 15% of spouses. Conversely 14% of household heads were 40 years or younger with 20% of spouses in the category. In general spouses (mainly female) were younger than household heads.

Fig 5: Age Profile of HoHs and Spouses

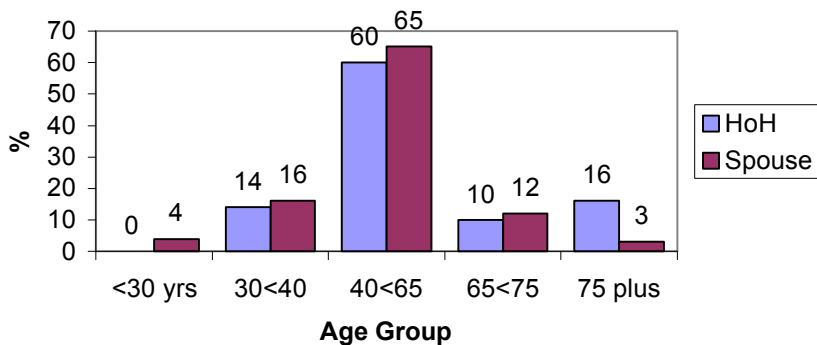
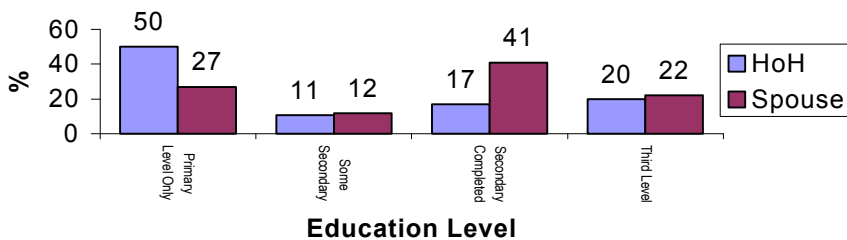


Figure 6 presents the profile of the highest educational level achieved by both household heads and spouses. Fifty per cent of household heads had primary level only. Spouses had higher educational levels as indicated in that 22% achieved third-level standard and 41% having completed secondary level.

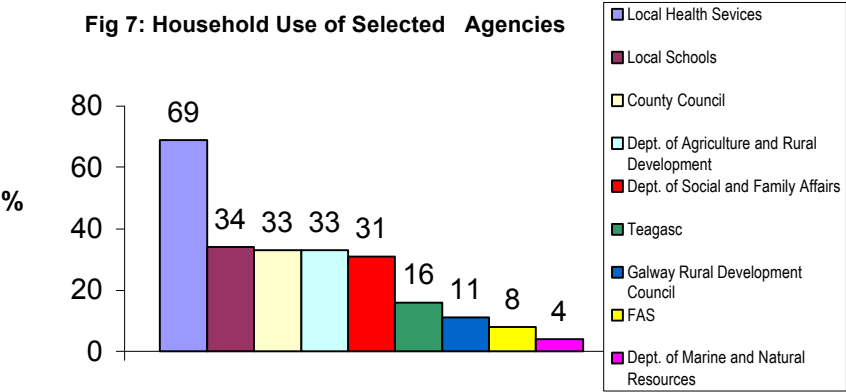
Figure 6: Educational Profile of HoHs and Spouses



Local Agencies and Services

An important aspect of community vitality concerns the use of and satisfaction with local agencies serving different community constituents. 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 (69%), local schools (34%) County Council (33%) and Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (33%). The Department of Social and Family Affairs were in demand by 31% of the community. The high usage of the health services was likely due to the relatively high proportion of elderly and retired households in the community. In general the services of these agencies were readily available to all household types and user satisfaction was overall adequate to good.

Fig 7: Household Use of Selected Agencies



Apart from the state agencies, consumer services are another important dimension of community well being. Information on the satisfaction of households on a range of services is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Household Satisfaction with local services

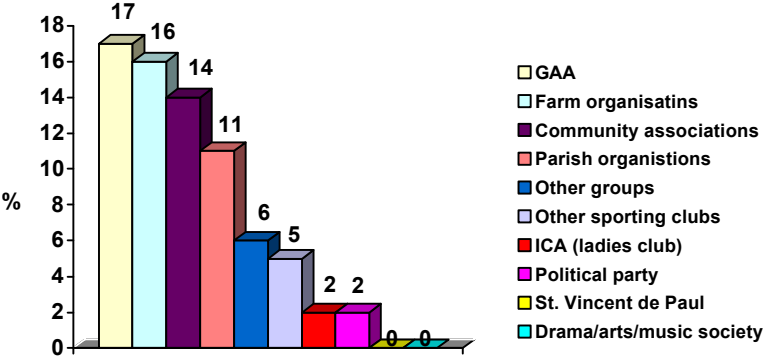
Service	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Don't Know	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Shopping	4	19	34	41	2	100
Education	37	54	1	8	0	100
Leisure activities	0	13	11	65	10	100
Churches	16	61	13	4	6	100
Post office	11	50	22	15	3	100
Bank	0	30	19	10	41	100
Activities for Youth	0	12	18	57	12	100
Security for Elderly	0	53	21	24	3	100
Access to jobs	0	7	4	86	7	100
Water supply	4	63	13	20	1	100
Public transport	0	7	3	78	13	100
Child care facilities	1	50	16	4	29	100
New house construction	1	67	20	10	2	100

The services ranked as excellent were notably education (37%), churches (16%) and the post office service at (11%). In contrast many local services were ranked as poor, in particular shopping (41%), leisure activities (65%), youth activities (57%), access to jobs (86%) and public transport (78%). The greatest felt needs in the community were access to jobs, better public transport and better health services.

Community Participation

A crucial dimension of a viable community is the level of participation in both formal and informal social contacts. A measure of formal participation was taken as the involvement of households in voluntary organisations in the area. Figure 8 presents the results for heads of households.

Figure 8: Head of household membership in local organisations



It is evident from Figure 8 that heads of households most frequently were members of the GAA (17%), farm organisations (16%), community associations (14%) and parish organisations (11%).

Informal social contacts, such as visiting friends or going to a match were also examined. Table 3 is a summary of the results.

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

Household Type	Visiting friends %	Have friends visit %	Go for a drink %	Card Playing	Go to a match %
Farmers	53	46	46	26	11
Elderly	40	50	30	0	0
Retired	66	57	25	24	8
Employed	67	57	38	24	0
Unemployed	50	50	66	33	0

It is clear that the activities engaged in most frequently by all categories were visiting friends or having friends visit, averaging over 50%. Going for a drink was most common with farmers and the unemployed, 46% and 66%

respectively. Card playing is still an important activity for rural people with 26% of farmers and 33% of the unemployed playing cards once a week.

Attachment to own Place

The attitudes and sentiments of residents about their own place is an important aspect of life in a local community. The responses to a number of attitude statements are good indicators of how people feel about their own place; those are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Level of agreement with attitude statements about the area

Attitude Statement	% Agreement
The longer I live here the more I feel I belong	97
If I was in trouble most people would go out of their way to help me	92
Most people in the community can be trusted	96
Young people can have a better way of life if they remain in the area	21

Apart from some concern for young people remaining in the area the attitudes expressed were very positive about Laurencetown.

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

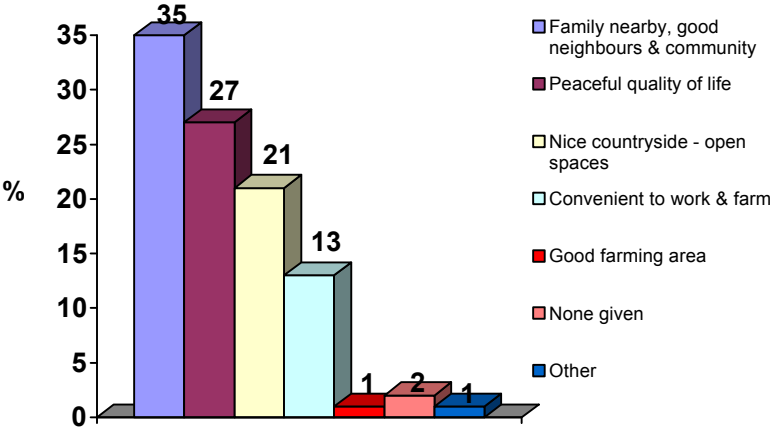
Table 5: Respondents feeling of safety in selected circumstances

CIRCUMSTANCE	% feeling safe
To leave the door unlocked if you were going out for an hour or so	47
Walking alone in the neighbourhood after dark if you were alone	62
Being alone at home at night	89
Safe from crime and violence in the community	100

Households generally felt secure about their safety in a range of circumstances. This feeling of security extended across all household types though elderly householders expressed a degree of concern about some circumstances, especially leaving the door open for some time.

The positive sentiments expressed about Laurencetown are endorsed in that 95% of households stated that they liked living in their own area. The main advantages of living there are summarised in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Advantages of living in Laurencetown



The traditional sentiments of placing high values in family and neighbours are clear in that 35% of households indicated this as the main advantage. A peaceful quality of life, free from stress and a nice countryside were other advantages frequently expressed.

Conclusions

Laurencetown is a small community in East Galway comprised of the two Electoral Divisions (ED) of Laurencetown and Kilmore. Historically a good farming area with fertile land it is suitable to a wide range of farming enterprises. In the recent past the population has declined marginally and in all it is comprised of 165 households.

It is a mixed community in occupational terms with farm families still accounting for 40 percent of all households. However, of those who farm 60 percent had another job. Households in non-farm occupations accounted for one-third of all households and a further quarter were either elderly or retired. A small number of households were headed by an unemployed person.

This household typology is indicative of the economy of the community. Farm incomes were relatively low and for many depending on farming only household incomes were considered inadequate. Farmers with off-farm jobs tended to work in un-skilled jobs such as the construction industry, which seem less secure in the case of an economic slump. Conversely, farmer spouses tended to work in professional or clerical jobs. Non-farmers and their spouses were engaged in a wide range of occupations, many of them in professional and managerial positions.

The Laurencetown community is mainly an indigenous one and most were very satisfied with it as a place to live. The proximity of family and good neighbours and the peaceful quality of life were seen as its most notable attributes. Householders generally expressed a strong attachment to the area and most felt it was a safe place to live, free from crime and violence.

The study showed however that there were a number of issues, which adversely affected the area, notably the lack of public transport and access to jobs locally. The absence of sufficient leisure facilities was another difficulty, especially for younger people.

The long distances some residents travel to work is a reflection of the lack of local employment. One quarter of household heads travelled in excess of 30 miles one way to their place of work, some going as far as Galway City. While commuting was not generally perceived as a problem, the long-term sustainability is of concern.

The development of a viable community in Laurencetown depends on how well these difficulties are recognised and solved. Opportunities for young people to work and live a satisfying life in their own community are critically important. EU and national policies extol the need for rural development but the policy measures available seem less adequate. The Galway County Development Plan “Working Together” recognises the need to strengthen the economies of rural villages and rural areas and identifies the critical need of appropriate information and communication technologies such as broadband to support rural enterprise. Moreover, those technologies would also provide much needed support to deliver better educational and health services. Given the appropriate infrastructure the locational disadvantage of rural areas can be much improved to facilitate a range of enterprise in the service sector or in community support activities. The need for indigenous enterprises to protect vulnerable rural areas to events such as factory closures in local towns was well illustrated during the study period.

While solving problems of employment seem beyond the capacity of individual communities on their own it is clear from the range of activities indicated and developed in Laurencetown that there is a community core which still has unharnessed potential. It is vital that this community vibrancy be primed and supported in a form of partnership with the relevant development agencies and with appropriate incentives and policy measures.