Death from Nostalgic Sentiment Or a New Narrative for Rural Ireland?

Eugene Cummins,
Chief Executive of Roscommon County Council

Previously.....

• 27th October, 2016
  Revitalising Small Towns on the Island of Ireland: The Role of Local Government

• 26th April, 2018
  Rural Policy: A Coherent Approach or Mis-mash!

• 26th September, 2019
  Death from Nostalgic Sentiment Or a New Narrative for Rural Ireland?
Last in the Series!

- You will be glad to hear that I will not be talking about the scourge of one-off rural housing.
- The Proliferation of septic tanks.
- One-off rural houses that cost more to build than they are worth.
- “Local Need” – one definition fits all?

Nostalgic Sentiment

- What do “I” mean?
  Several ways of looking at “it”

- Like an adult dwelling on the great times he/she had one day as a child playing, and longing for that nonsense/happiness to be again in their present life

- As a child I remember the “fair day” on the 18th of every month on the streets of our little town –
  - Now we have them on the streets of our big towns
Nostalgic Sentiment – cont’d

- Or, perhaps, the 5 bedroom concrete box / house built inappropriately in the countryside for Mam and Dad and the 1.4 children
- Or, perhaps, the Shoe shop in the middle of the street that was once there
- Or a longing for a world without online shopping – so that we can justify our Rates
- Or, Buildings in town centres that are dead – bring them back to life – Or more appropriately to bury them (demolish them)
- Longing for horse and carts and bicycles

Nostalgic Sentiment – cont’d

- Perhaps some of you are inclined to cry – thinking of your past, childhood when towns were full
- Churches were full too
- When we weren’t allowed to think for ourselves
- When those who were privileged by their wealth or their past, kept “the poor” in their place
- No refugees, no questions of morality to be asked
- A small world
Nostalgic Sentiment – cont’d

- Great times!
- We need to get over it
- We need to plan for the future
- We need to get rid of our chains and shackles
- We need to use our intelligence
- We need to do what is right
- We need to give, create and define hope

Today!
I am going to concentrate on Town Centres

Town Centres are fundamental to our Society

- Previous Conferences
- Town Centre renewal and regeneration
- The curse of dereliction
- The growing need for housing
- Modern “town” centres or perhaps “family/community” centres
- A mechanism to gather people – to let them mix, talk, bump into each other, chat....
- We need to create little parks, places for people to sit and relax, to bring air and light into people lives
- The need to be in a crowd – to see smiles, laughs and families living – to get a sense of what living is
Dereliction – “The Problem”

- If Dereliction is “The Problem” – we might for the moment see it as ‘a hole’
- Local Authorities, Departments, Communities etc. – each reflected as ‘a person’
- Many attempts to solve the problem over the years
- Papers, Conferences, Theories – but the problem still exists
- Every Department and Local Authority getting involved – but the problem is still there

Consider then!

Departments

Geniuses

Know-It-Alls

Experts

Consultants

Intellectuals

Communities

Academics

Local Authorities
Consider – cont’d

THE PROBLEM

Is there any Hope?

- Yes – definitely – somewhat obvious solution... - but before I give the solution...

- Consider two towns:
  - Town A – Full of Nostalgic Sentiment – little hope
  - Town B – Full of Hope

- What makes Town A and Town B so different?
- What happened?
- What’s different?
Boyle - The Story!

• In June 2017, Roscommon County Council buys Royal Hotel – derelict for years - an eye sore

• Slowly thereafter we consulted with the Community and prepared a vision and a plan for the town and Environs

• Boyle 2040 – The Plan

• The Irish Times – Thursday, 3rd January, 2019

• Smith, a partner in Smith Kelly Scott estate agents, had an insight into the downturn. He had seen his own workforce drop from 11 to 2 within weeks when, as he recalled, “the phone stopped ringing”. But now he is happy to report it is ringing off the hook and residential property around Boyle is “flying”.

• Suddenly, almost everything changed

Historic Towns Initiative
Local Authorities!

- All suffering from chronic Nostalgic Sentiment
- **Cure** still being trialled but in the meantime the odd Town had **died**
- Our Planning Department and Planners are weighed down with the burden of the past and obsessed in conserving the **past**
- Landlords with unreasonable expectation holding Communities to ransom
- And of course one off **rural housing** or as I prefer to call them - nails for town centre coffins

---

**What is this?**

*(about as useful as an ash-tray on a motorbike)*
Solution

- Only three “Things” needed

1. Direct and Proactive Local Authority intervention
   - Acquisition of Derelict Sites

2. A Plan

3. Buy-in from the Community

Everything is possible when these three “Things” are in place

Solution – cont’d

- Of course the solution must bring with it
  - Innovation
  - Imagination
  - Freedom

- Planners
  - Of course must respect the past but not be controlled by it
  - Loose their obsession with architectural conservation and perfection
Thank You