



## Looking forward not back: nostalgia and the rural idyll versus sustainable futures

Des McCafferty

ICLRD Conference

*Death from Nostalgic Sentiment or a New Future for Rural Ireland?*

Dundalk: 26<sup>th</sup> September 2019

## Outline of presentation

1. Nostalgia, myth and the rural idyll
2. Long-term rural (and urban) change in Ireland, 1966-2016
3. Some reflections on implications for sustainable development

# The power of nostalgia

“We all know what “getting our country back” means. **It’s snorting a line of the most pernicious and debilitating Little English drug, nostalgia.** The warm, crumbly, honey-coloured, collective “yesterday” with its fond belief that everything was better back then...It’s the knowledge that ...nothing we can build will be as lovely as a National Trust Georgian country house, no art will be as good as a Turner, no poem as wonderful as If, no writer a touch on Shakespeare or Dickens, nothing will grow as lovely as a cottage garden, no hero greater than Nelson, no politician better than Churchill, **no view more throat-catching than the White Cliffs** and that we will never manufacture anything as great as a Rolls-Royce or Flying Scotsman again.”

THE TIMES June 12 2016, 12:01am,  
The Sunday Times

Brexit: AA Gill argues for 'In'

We all know what “getting our country back” means. It’s snorting a line of that most pernicious and debilitating Little English drug, nostalgia



John Constable, The Hay Wain, 1821

## The Rural Idyll in Post-industrial Britain

George Vicat Cole,  
Harvest Time, 1865





Paul Henry, Keel Village, Achill Island, c. 1911

## The Rural Idyll in Post-Celtic Revival Ireland



Paul Henry, The Turn of  
the Road, c. 1940-1941

## “Ideal Ireland”...a rural Ireland

“The ideal Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age.”

From De Valera, E. “On Language and the Nation”, radio address , St Patrick’s Day, 1943

## Critiquing the rural idyll

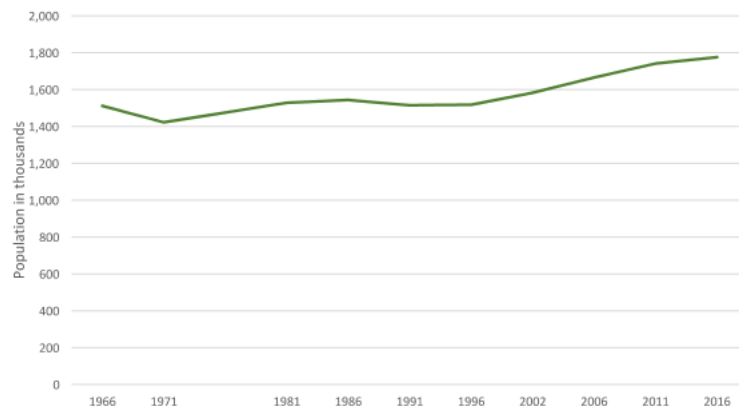
“the rural idyll is a visioning of rural areas by a hegemonic middle-class culture, imposed on rural residents” (Halfacree, 1993)

The rural idyll is responsible for “exacerbating many aspects of rural poverty and disadvantage in the UK and elsewhere” (Shucksmith, 2016)

“The compensation for depopulation, underdevelopment and neglect has been reverence, homage, sentimental devotion”. (O’Toole, 2019)

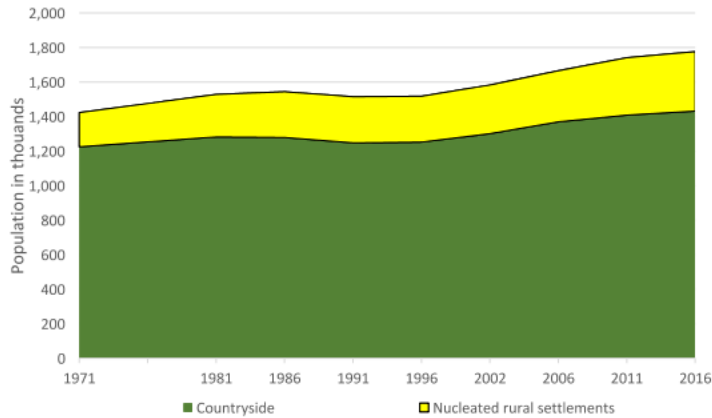
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## Rural population change 1966-2016



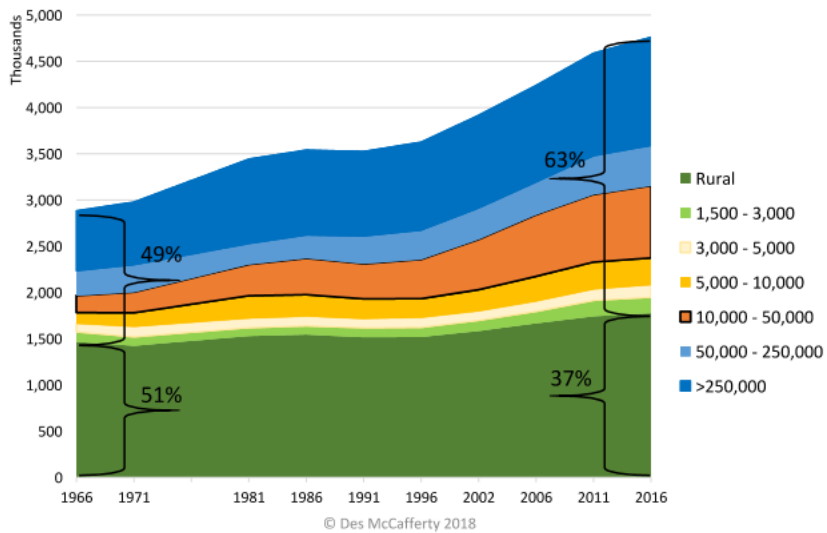
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## Components of rural population change 1971-2016



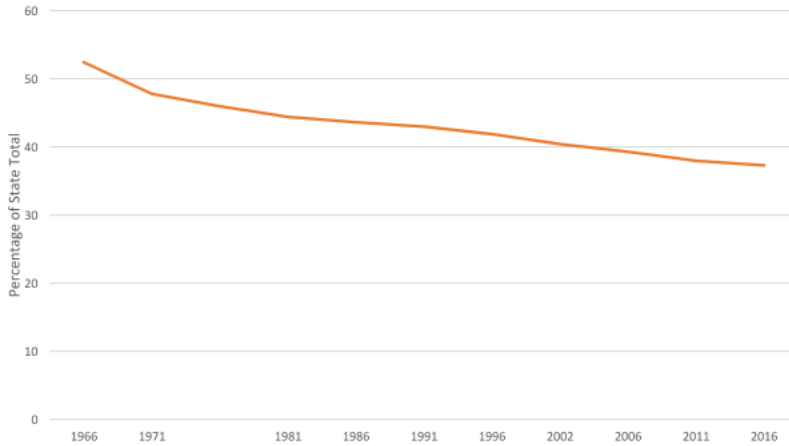
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## Population growth and urbanisation 1966-2016



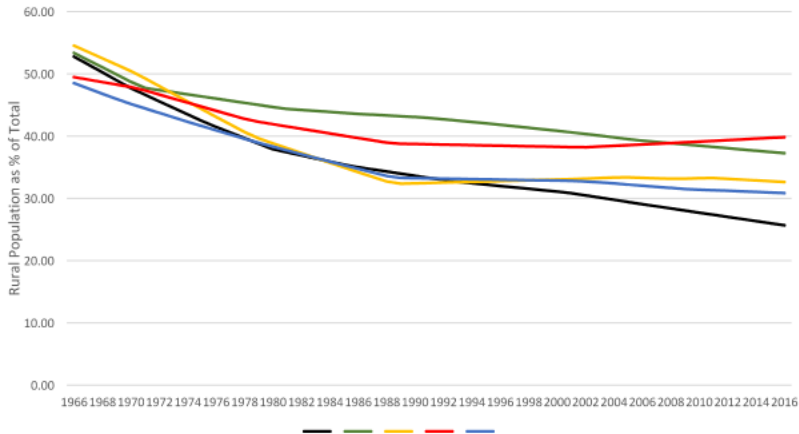
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# Rural share of total population 1966-2016



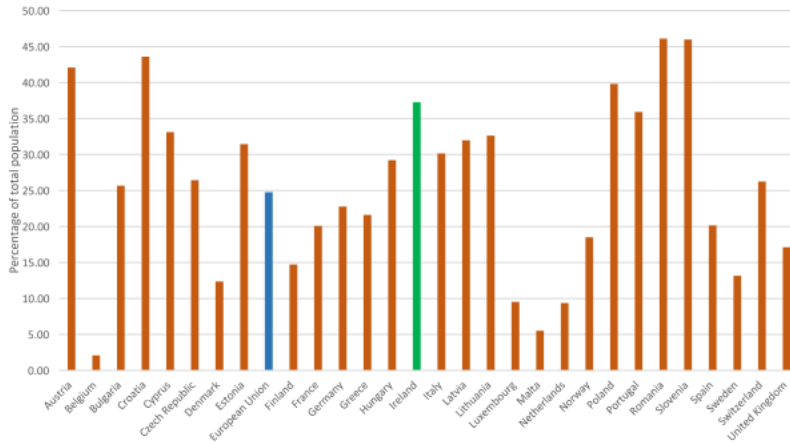
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# Rural decline in international perspective



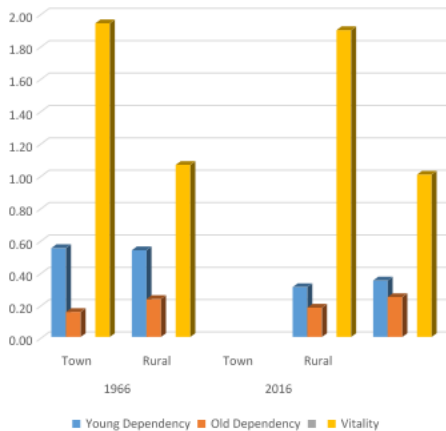
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# Comparative rural population share in EU28, 2016



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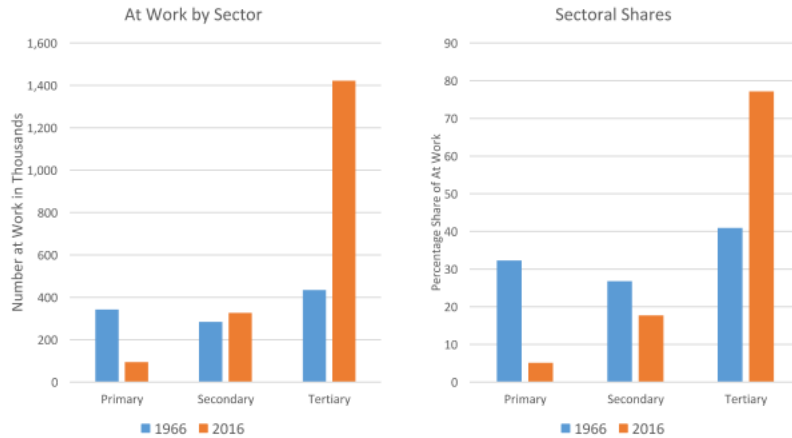
# Demographic indices 1966 and 2016



Index	% Change 1966-2016	
	Urban	Rural
Yng dependency	-43.8	-34.8
Old dependency	17.3	5.0
Vitality	-2.2	-5.6

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# Economic Restructuring 1966-2016



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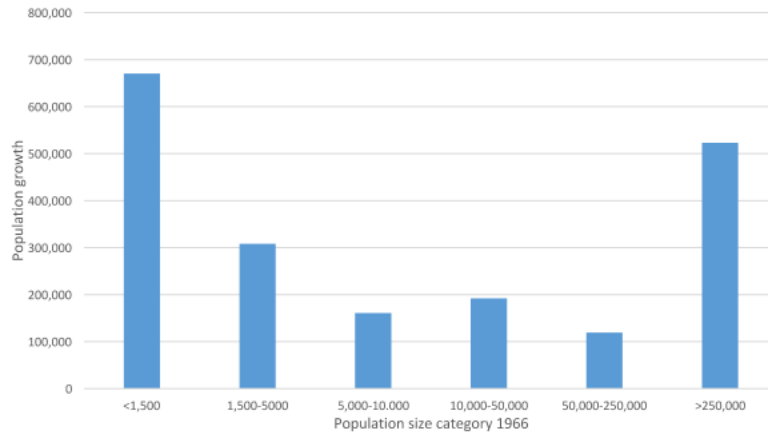
## Population growth 1966-2016 by settlement size category 1966

Size category	1966		2016	1996-2016	
	No of centres	Population (000s)	Population (000s)	Population growth (000s)	Share of population growth
> 250,000	1	650	1,173	523	26
50,000 – 250,000	[2]	183	303	119	6
10,000 – 50,000	11	182	374	192	10
5,000 – 10,000	[18]	118	278	161	8
1,500 – 5,000	[67]	190	498	308	16
<1,500	N/A	1,465	2,135	671	34

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## Population growth 1966-2016 by settlement size category 1966



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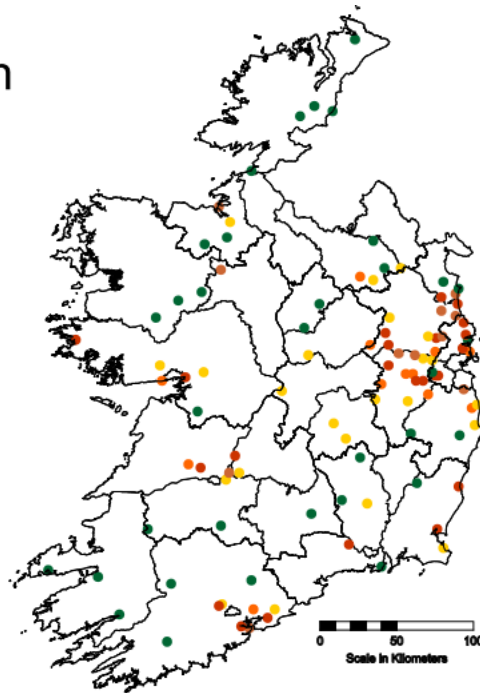
## Emerging urban centres 1966-2016

Size category 2016	No.	Population 2016	No. commuter towns	No. in the GDA
1,500 – 5,000	87	211,028	54	27
5,000 – 10,000	11	77,965	10	10
10,000 – 50,000	5	70,410	5	4
All	103	359,403	69	41

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## Emerging urban centres, 1966-2016

Ratio of Out- to In-Commuting



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## Historic performance of the second tier cities

City	Forecast 1986 <sup>1</sup>	Actual 1986	Actual as % forecast
Dublin Co	1,125	1,021	91%
Cork	205	174	85%
Limerick-Shannon	130	85	65%
Galway	65	47	72%
Waterford	95	41	43%
IRELAND	3,430	3,541	97%

<sup>1</sup>As projected by Buchanan under the 'Regional Centres' strategy

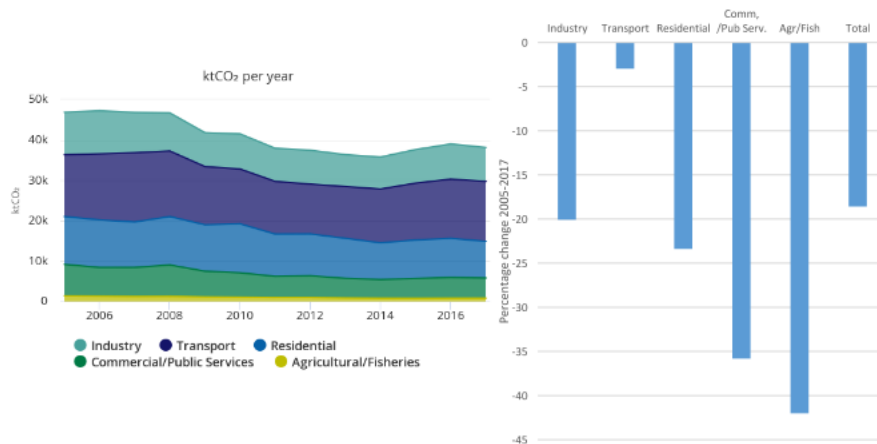
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## Characterising urbanisation 1966-2016: “hierarchical deconcentration with spatial decentralisation”

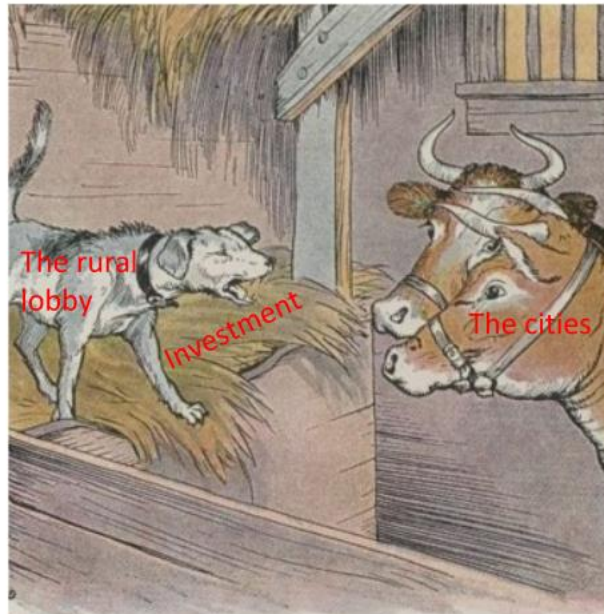
- In general, strongest growth performance has been in smaller places
- The number of urban places has doubled
- To a considerable extent the urbanisation of Ireland has taken place in rural Ireland
- But the emerging urban centres are largely commuter towns

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## Carbon Dioxide Emissions by Sector, 2005-17



Source: SEAI <https://www.seai.ie/data-and-insights/seai-statistics/key-statistics/co2/>



Source; Wiki Commons

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## National Planning Framework: Fears rural Ireland will be 'forgotten about'

 **Conor Finnerty** | Feb 6, 2018, 5:45am



Thank you!

