



**WATERFORD INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

**The 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language and the Irish Speaking  
Communities: an Ethnographic Investigation**

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study researched the impact of the recent Irish policy for language promotion and revival, the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language, on language usage in the country, especially in the Gaeltacht regions. It aimed at ascertaining how the policy had been received by the population and assessing its effects, so far, on Irish speaking communities.

The research employed ethnography as the primary method of investigation. Specifically, the study relied on participant observation and interviews, which were conducted in twelve villages and towns located in the seven Gaeltacht regions.

The research confirmed that the declining usage of the Irish language in Gaeltacht regions was no longer associated with historical or colonial legacies, but was partly the result of a larger worldwide phenomenon faced by all minority languages, with English as a dominant language globally. The research also demonstrated that the seven Gaeltacht counties are not homogeneous. Beyond contrasts of linguistic dialects, there are significant differences between each county, in relation to such variables as economy, geography and social structure, and these differences have significant policy implications. More importantly, the research found that a number of social problems continue to affect rural isolated areas in the western seaboard of Ireland, where most of the Gaeltacht regions are located, adversely affecting language preservation in the area.

As the government strategy for the Irish language is in its initial implementation phases, the study proposed to following up on the policy's progress, especially with regards to the community language planning processes proposed for the Gaeltacht regions.

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## **ETHICAL DECLARATION**

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January 13, 2017

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years the topics of culture and national identity have gained considerable space in domestic government and international agendas due to increasing concerns over cultural homogeneity and globalization (Goldsmith, 2005; Hall, 2006). Policies for the preservation of cultural diversity have shared the concerns of several nations alongside international matters such as defense and economy (Obuljen, 2005). Such concerns have been reinforced by the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2002).

One of the most important components, and the very basis for the consolidation of a culture, is language. Not merely a means for communication, language may reveal a lot about population and customs. While some nations have been busy promoting their language abroad, such as France (Alliance Française), the United States (Binational Centers), Germany (Goethe Institute), Spain (Instituto Cervantes), Britain (British Council) and, most recently, China (Confucius Institute), other languages have lost their force and are on a very dangerous road towards extinction. This is alarming not only for the populations who speak such languages, but the world itself will lose intangible cultural heritage and history, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO (2003).

The Irish Gaelic in Ireland has been described by researchers as a language in irreparable decline (Carnie, 1995) and as definitely endangered according to UNESCO's classification of languages in danger (UNESCO, 2016). Ireland has endeavored for decades to promote the Irish Gaelic within its own territory as a means to halt the rapid decline of its usage (Carnie, 1995; McDermott, 2011). According to several researchers (Carnie, 1995; McDermott, 2011), such policies have failed, despite government efforts. Although having official recognition as the first language of the Republic of Ireland and as an official working language of the European Union (Ireland, 2010), for McDermott, Irish government policies have not been successful in increasing the individual everyday use of the Irish language (2011, p. 27).

Regardless of the failures of past revitalization policies or perhaps because of them, the Irish government established in 2010 a recent and reformulated policy, The 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030. The objective of this policy, according to its strategy paper is 'to increase on an incremental basis the use and knowledge of Irish

as a community language. Specifically, the Government's aim is to ensure that as many citizens as possible are bilingual in both Irish and English' (Ireland, 2010, p. 3).

Seven years after the launching, how has this new policy affected Irish language usage in Ireland? Do the Irish view this policy to promote the revival of the Irish language as in their interest or as a political/electoral goal of the government? The aim of this project, therefore, is to analyze the Irish government's most recent 20 year strategy policy to promote the Irish language. With a primary focus on the contemporary Irish scenario, this research seeks to evaluate the recent Irish policy for language promotion and revival, focusing on its impact on language usage in the country, especially in the Gaeltacht regions. An objective of the present research is to ascertain how well this policy has been met by the population, and what lessons might be learned from this case, so far, for future policy implementation and/or language reform initiatives.

This research project centers on the study of cultural diversity and cultural policies as it refers to the subject of language. According to the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity, established in 2002, cultural diversity is 'as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature' (UNESCO, 2002, p. 4). This declaration has been an important mark on recognizing and promoting a global awareness on issues such as identity, pluralism and human rights (UNESCO, 2002). For UNESCO, cultural diversity is not only 'an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect from human dignity' (UNESCO, 2002, p.4), it is also key for development and is 'essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together' (UNESCO, 2002, 4). For that international organization, 'policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, vitality of civil society and peace (UNESCO, 2002, p. 4).

The question of identity goes hand in hand with cultural diversity, globalization and language. Brant argues that 'identity is the key concept in the construction of cultural policies. Not only does it give a sense to cultural territory, but it incorporates inside itself symbolic elements shared by a group in a way to guarantee its sovereignty as a nation' (2009, p. 34). Brant also suggests that, 'the cultural identity of a population is generally recognized by their unifying elements, like territory, language and religion' (2009, p.34).

Language is an important dimension of cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2003). It embodies intangible cultural heritage, diversity and rights found and supported by UNESCO, through its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2002) and

Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights (UNESCO, 2003). These documents are safeguarded by UNESCO's Constitution Article 1, which has as a basic principle 'the maintenance and perpetuation of language diversity' (UNESCO, 2003, p. 3).

For UNESCO,

Language endangerment may be the result of external forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural, or educational subjugation, or it may be caused by internal forces, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language. Internal pressures often have their source in external ones, and both halt the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions. Many indigenous peoples, associating their disadvantaged social position with their culture, have come to believe that their languages are not worth retaining. They abandon their languages and cultures in hopes of overcoming discrimination, to secure a livelihood, and enhance social mobility, or to assimilate to the global marketplace. (2003, p. 2)

In addition, UNESCO stresses the negative consequences and loss that befall not only the communities facing the extinction of its language, but all cultures as well. As pointed out by UNESCO,

The extinction of each language results in the irrecoverable loss of unique cultural, historical, and ecological knowledge. Each language is a unique expression of the human experience of the world. Thus, the knowledge of any single language may be the key to answering fundamental questions of the future. Every time a language dies, we have less evidence for understanding patterns in the structure and function of human language, human prehistory, and the maintenance of the world's diverse ecosystems. Above all, speakers of these languages may experience the loss of their language as a loss of their original ethnic and cultural identity (Bernard 1992, Hale 1998).

The connection between the idea of identity and language in culture is highlighted by Cesnik and Beltrami, for whom,

The identity of a community is closely related with the language and culture that they share. There is no doubt that the imposition of a language promotes a free way for the integration of an alien identity, as well as the dissemination of their cultural elements facilitates a conquest of the imaginary to promote values of this hegemonic society through its culture. (...) The concept of identity can be seen as 'the combination of repertoires and action, language and culture that allow a person to recognize their link to a particular social group and to identify with it.' (2005, p. 46-47)

It is with these ideas in mind that this research project seeks to analyze the recent 20 year strategy of the Irish language established by the government and understand the role this plays on the Irish national identity. This study aims to investigate how or if this policy has been working in promoting the Irish language within Ireland and if this

governmental objective correlates to what the population wants and thinks today in terms of national identity. Similar to other countries which have also struggled with minority language policies and recognition, such as Wales, the Catalan and Basque regions in Spain (Ó Riagáin et al., 2008) and Quebec in Canada (Thomson, 1995), Ireland has a unique language still used today, which is very much linked to its history, culture and customs. According to the Irish government policy document, Irish Gaelic is a reference point and symbol of Ireland, which directly shapes intangible cultural aspects such as music and literature (Ireland, 2010, p. 6). But is this point of view shared by the Irish people today and do they believe this policy is in fact improving the promotion of the language? The Irish Gaelic, a Celtic language, although the first official language of Ireland and still spoken in rural isolated areas predominantly along the seaboard referred to as Gaeltacht regions, still faces extinction with certain authors, such as Carnie (1995), arguing that the stage for survival has already passed.

At the time it was launched, in 2010, the Irish government strategy paper accentuated that the language had seen its classification in UNESCO change from ‘definitely endangered’ to ‘vulnerable’, as a positive improvement and future perspective for the language (Ireland, 2010, p. 6). However, an updated 2015 version of the UNESCO’s language endangerment atlas has once again placed Irish as ‘definitely endangered’ (UNESCO, 2016). Which reveals that at least in evaluations made by UNESCO, the policy has not yet shown signs of progression. In light of this, it is important to assess if the recent government policy is making headway among Irish speaking communities.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the 20 Year Strategy policy document for the Irish language. Chapter 3 of this study conducts a literature review on Irish language policies. This review focuses on linguistic perspectives, historical analyses, comparative studies, policy analysis, as well as studies on rural Ireland and the Gaeltacht. Chapter 4 describes the research methodology chosen for this research. This section presents the justifications for selecting ethnographical methods and, especially participant observation, as the primary means of data collection. It also highlights the limitations and ethical concerns which guided the fieldwork done during the research. Chapter 5 reveals the findings obtained from the ethnographical observations in all of the Gaeltacht regions visited. These findings have been organized by region. Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the research findings, correlating the data, as much as possible, with prior research and

pertinent literature on language policies and, more importantly, on Irish language and society. Finally, Chapter 7 includes a conclusion of the study and suggests points for further research on the subject.

## 2 POLICY

The Irish government '20 Year Strategy for the Irish language 2010-2030' is a language policy launched in 2010 with the objective of promoting and rehabilitating the Irish language as a viable community and household language in Ireland. For O'Cearbhaill, embedded in this new policy was a governmental change in direction in language policy. According to him, 'the State has now adopted a policy of language preservation as opposed to language revival' (2016).

The policy is presented in a thirty-page long document, divided into six sections: vision, policy context, phased strategy, specific objectives, implementation structures and areas for action. In the first section, which deals with vision, the document outlines the policy's main objectives and aims. According to the document, 'the objective of Government policy in relation to Irish is to increase on an incremental basis the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language. Specifically, the Government's aim is to ensure that as many citizens as possible are bilingual in both Irish and English' (Ireland, 2010, p. 3). In other words, the Government recognizes the difficulties in imposing the wide-spread use of Irish as the country's first language upon society and adopts, instead, an incremental approach to increase language usage by focusing on the community level.

There are four aims listed in this section by the government. These aims seek to, 'increase the number of families throughout the country who use Irish as the daily language of communication' (Ireland, 2010, p. 3), 'provide linguistic support for the Gaeltacht as an Irish-speaking community and to recognize the issues which arise in areas where Irish is the household and community language' (Ireland, 2010, p. 3), 'ensure that in public discourse and in public services the use of Irish or English will be, as far as practical, a choice for the citizen to make and that over time more and more people throughout the State will choose to do their business in Irish' (Ireland, 2010, p. 3) and, 'ensure that Irish becomes more visible in our society, both as a spoken language by our citizens and also in areas such as signage and literature' (Ireland, 2010, p. 3). Curiously, although the document states that the policy seeks the development of a 'bilingual society', this section of the policy acknowledges that, as far as the Gaeltacht areas are concerned, the focus 'needs to be on maintaining the linguistic identity of the community in the Gaeltacht as a distinctive language region, rather than one of bilingualism' (Ireland, 2010, p. 3). More importantly, at the end of this section, the government recognizes the

vital role of education for the language, but stresses that the ‘transmission of Irish as a living language within the family and between the generations’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 3) is just as important, especially when concerning the Gaeltacht regions. It also mentions the maintenance of the Irish language in Northern Ireland as a priority.

In the second section, which sets the policy context, the document reaffirms the fact that the Constitution of Ireland, more specifically in Article 8, establishes Irish as first official language, restores the Government Statement on the Irish Language from 2006. These two items formed the basis for the 20 Year Strategy. The 13 objectives from the 2006 Statement are listed and incorporated in the 20 Year Strategy document, with an additional objective, which is, ‘to support promotion and teaching of Irish abroad, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 4). Some of the main arguments for the policy, pointed out in this section, were the language’s official status as first language of Ireland, its part as European heritage, the 2006 census results in which 42% of the population declared to have an ability to speak the language, among others. Based on such objectives, the document states the following:

The Government believes that the Irish language is of particular importance for the people, society and culture of Ireland. As a spoken community language, Irish is unique to this country and is, therefore, of crucial importance to the identity of the Irish people and to world heritage. In this context, particular importance is attached to the preservation and promotion of Irish in the Gaeltacht in relation to conserving and protecting the heritage, culture and richness of the language where it remains as a household and community language. (2010, p. 5)

Furthermore, this section on the policy context emphasizes international perspectives, mentioning UNESCO reports on languages, cultural diversity, identity and intangible cultural heritage. As stated in this section of the 20 Year Strategy, ‘languages are also primary vehicles of cultural expression and intangible cultural heritage, essential to the identity of individuals and groups. (...) Safeguarding languages, such as Irish, is, thus, a critical task in maintaining cultural diversity worldwide’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 6).

The context section also explains that the Government Strategy is, in fact, organized around three pillars. These are: ‘increasing the knowledge of Irish, creating opportunities for the use of Irish and fostering positive attitudes towards its use’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 7).

The document's third section explains that the entire 20 year strategy was planned as 'a phased strategy', in line with the objectives that were mentioned in the policy context. In other words, the strategy was not conceived to be implemented all at once but by stages. From the point of view of policy theory, the 'phased strategy' made perfect sense. According to Fixsen *et al.*, 'implementation does not happen all at once or proceed smoothly' (2005, p. 15). Dividing policy implementation into stages allows for the monitoring, recognition and solution of problems in a timely manner, without compromising the policy in its entirety. The document lists the following stages of implementation: 'establishment phase', 'implementation phase I – laying the foundations', 'implementation phase II – expanding and deepening' and 'implementation phase III – consolidating' (Ireland, 2010, p. 8). It is worth noting that, according to the policy document, the Government expected 'implementation phase II' to take place during the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Easter Rising and of independence. The timing was supposed to link these occasions to the Strategy (Ireland, 2010, p. 8). Since these celebrations took place during the year 2016, the strategy should be in its consolidating stage, that is, in phase III. However, the evidence indicates otherwise. According to McDonnell, 'a quarter of the way through the 20 years, progress in implementing this strategy lies somewhere between poor and abject' (2016).

In section four, the document underscores the specific objectives of the strategy, which include the increase of, 'the number of speakers who speak Irish on a daily basis outside the education system from 83,000 to 250,000' (Ireland, 2010, p. 9), the increase of, 'the number of speakers who speak Irish on a daily basis in the Gaeltacht by 25%' (Ireland, 2010, p. 9), and the increase of, 'the number of people that use State services through the Irish language and can access television, radio and print media through the language' (Ireland, 2010, p. 9). With respect to the Gaeltacht, the document mentions that, 'it is envisaged that specific targets for individual Gaeltacht areas will be set out in the proposed local language plans' (Ireland, 2010, p. 9).

The fifth section of the 20 year strategy document centered on the implementation structures. Here, it is stated that, 'all sections of public administration and key national and local stakeholders have a role to play in its implementation' (Ireland, 2010, p. 10). The document named three fundamental government structures assigned to deliver the 20 Year Strategy. These were the 'Cabinet Committee on Irish and the Gaeltacht, chaired by An Taoiseach' (Ireland, 2010, p. 10), 'a Senior Officials Group made up of high level

officials from relevant departments’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 10) and the continuation of a ‘Minister and a Government Department (the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs)’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 10). It was also stated that a Strategy Unit within the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs would be in charge of the ‘planning and implementation’ of the 20 Year Strategy. Moreover, that same department would have as main responsibilities ‘overseeing the strategic planning process, monitoring the development of resources, ensuring cross-departmental implementation of initiatives, providing expert advice, overseeing operational plans as developed by the implementation bodies, and publishing updates and relevant documentation for public information’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 10). However, the principal government agency in charge of implementing the strategy was a proposed Irish Language and Gaeltacht Authority (Údarás na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta), which is yet to be established. This new agency would take over the activities of the existing Údarás na Gaeltachta (Ireland, 2010). It is also mentioned in this section that, ‘the specific role and functions of the proposed new Authority will be set down in draft legislation, to be published in 2011’ (2010, p. 10).

The last and longest section of the 20 year strategy document addresses the areas for action. The list includes nine areas for action, which are each explained in sub-themes. These nine areas are:

- Education;
- The Gaeltacht;
- Family Transmission of the Language – Early Intervention;
- Administration, Services and Community;
- Media and Technology;
- Dictionaries;
- Legislation and Status;
- Economic Life;
- Cross-cutting initiatives.

The first area for action is education and it is the area which is the most extensive and detailed. Under this area, seventeen topics are described. These are links to out-of-school usage, partial immersion, national assessment, curriculum for teaching of Irish, pre-school and parental support programs, specialist subject provision, teacher education, mainstream education (primary system), Irish-medium education (primary system), Irish-medium education (post-primary system), higher-level education in Ireland, adult

language learning, advice and support services, education in the Gaeltacht, establishment of schools, An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), and third-level Irish courses abroad (Ireland, 2010, p. 11-19).

The second area for action, which concerns the Gaeltacht, has four topics, which are, respectively, linguistic status of the Gaeltacht communities (new legislation), language planning in the Gaeltacht, planning and development in the Gaeltacht, and delivery of services to Gaeltacht communities (Ireland, 2010, p. 19-21). The third area for action, on administration services and community, has to do with structural changes, measures for Irish in the public service, local language initiatives and plans outside the Gaeltacht, county language plans, language plan for Dublin city and county councils, the important role of the voluntary sector, physical resources centers, as well as An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces (Ireland, 2010, p. 23-25). The fifth area for action includes specific topics on reading, writing and speech, as well as information and communication technology (Ireland, 2010, p. 26-28). The sixth area for action focuses exclusively on the subject of dictionaries (Ireland, 2010, p. 28), whereas the seventh area for action focuses on legislation, including topics centered on legal standing, EU status, new legislation and Northern Ireland (2010, p. 29). The eighth area for action turns to economic life, with topics such as voluntary language schemes, bilingual labelling and packaging, and economic activity as a whole (2010 Ireland, p. 29-30). Finally, the ninth area for action looks at cross-cutting initiatives, with a focus on think tanks, portal sites, EU role for the Irish, and digitization program (Ireland, 2010, p. 30).

Specifically concerning the Gaeltacht, the descriptions found in the second area for action noted that ‘the development of a comprehensive language planning system at community level in the Gaeltacht is central to the strategy that will be put in place to ensure that Irish survives as the community language in the Gaeltacht’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 19). Further, this ‘language planning process will be instigated whereby a language plan will be prepared at community level for each Gaeltacht district. These plans will integrate the approach in relation to linguistic issues, education, physical planning and social and community development’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 20). Also, that they will work or share the ‘same status as town plans’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 21).

The primacy of language planning to the 20 year in Strategy, in all likelihood, was not coincidental. The centrality of language planning to language policy has been amply acknowledged by academic research. For Paulston, for example, 'language policies are

probably best considered as a subset of language planning, an important field of sociolinguistics that emerged in the 1960's, triggered by real-world problems' (1997, p. 77).

Unquestionably, the proposed local language planning process was conceived with two objectives in mind. First and foremost, it was designed to stimulate citizen participation in the policy formulation and implementation. With citizen participation, the government sought to assure the engagement of part of the population to make sure that the policy would be implemented at family and community levels. Without such engagement, the policy would be at risk. Secondly, the local language planning process was a means to receive local content and input in order to formulate plans in accordance to local community needs.

The participative approach to language planning adopted by the Irish policy resonated with most of Paulston's postulates on the subject. Paulston highlights Nelde *et al.* who emphasize that, 'the motor of linguistic planning' is made up of collectivities (...) not necessarily based on territorial linguistic communities' (1997, p. 80).

Also emphasized within the area for action on the Gaeltacht was the need to pay particular attention to the Irish youth. Rather than simply treat the youth as one of the policy's targeted publics, the document approached the topic more comprehensively as the promotion of an Irish language youth culture in the Gaeltacht (Ireland, 2010, p. 21). This statement acknowledged that a viable language policy should not treat children, teenagers, and adults the same way.

The 20 Year Strategy mentions the introduction of new legislation directed at the Gaeltacht. The legislation to be proposed will, 'provide a new definition for the Gaeltacht based on linguistic criteria and repeal the *Údarás na Gaeltachta* legislation to establish a new Irish language and Gaeltacht authority' (Ireland, 2010, p. 29).

It is noticeable that, despite the importance of the Gaeltacht regions for the continuing promotion and preservation of the Irish language, the policy dedicates comparatively few pages to such areas. In a way, this oversight contradicts the policy's vision statement which claimed as a major objective the increase in the use of the Irish language as a community language. The policy document treats 'the transmission of Irish as a living language within family and between the generations' as equally important as 'strengthening the position of the language within our education system' which is, in fact, 'a key focus of this Strategy' (Ireland, 2010, p. 3) The focus on education makes the

recent policy resemble past language policies. The difference, as McDermott highlights, lies in the fact that, ‘the government strategy is now focusing on promoting the use of Irish in civil society, business and economy in addition to traditional areas such as education’ (McDermott, 2011, p. 30).

### **3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The declining levels of everyday use of the Irish language and the recurrent efforts by the national government in Ireland to halt the trend and revitalize the language as the Republic's first language have been the subject of several academic studies. This theme has relevance for those specifically interested in Ireland's cultural affairs. It is also pertinent for those who approach it as an example of the challenges posed by cultural policies targeted at strengthening national identity.

The literature on the subject is diverse and multi-faceted. It includes both Irish and non-Irish researchers. The literature covers the subject in a multidisciplinary manner, involving issues of history, religion, human rights and culture which, sometimes, overlap or complement each other. In general, this literature may be divided into four distinct angles. These are works with a linguistic perspective, works featuring historical analysis, comparative studies, policy analyses and studies of rural Ireland and the Gaeltacht.

The following is a review of each of these perspectives, focusing on their strengths and limitations and how they contribute to understanding the context within which the Irish language policies have been formulated as well as their impact in Ireland's society.

#### **3.2 Linguistic perspectives**

To linguist Andrew Carnie, the Irish policies implemented for the revitalization of the Irish language, until the time of his publication in 1995, had failed. Carnie considers that the Irish language is possibly 'at its most critical stage in history and may very well not survive more than another generation or two' (1995, p. 99). Even worse, that 'it's well on its way to death, unless some radical action is taken' (Carnie, 1995, p. 100). In his analysis, Carnie provides a historical overview of the issues involved in government policies regarding the Irish language. Furthermore, his study suggests possible causes for the failure of the language policy, such as 'putting the burden on the educational system, rather than in promoting the usefulness of the language in everyday life' (Carnie, 1995, p. 110), the lack of Irish media outlets and Irish summer immersion programs which force 'an annual infusion of thousands of English speakers who are reluctant and resistant to the Irish language' (1995, p. 108). It also lists key possibilities for reversing the language's current situation in Ireland. An interesting point highlighted by Carnie is that

unlike minority languages in other countries, the Irish language does have economic support and public recognition. It does not lack resources, such as dictionaries, for example. Nevertheless, despite governmental efforts with, for instance, the language's acknowledgment as the first official language of Ireland and as an official language of the European Union, the decline in daily use of the Irish Gaelic as a social and household language persists (Carnie, 1995; McDermott, 2011). According to Carnie,

The fact of the matter is that there are simply too few Irish speakers and too few environments where Irish is a language which is to be preferred to English. For many 'outward-looking' Irish speakers, Irish is viewed as a 'useless' language. Very few people both inside and outside of Ireland speak it; international commerce and trade are much more likely to be conducted in English. (...) Most publication today seems to me to consist mostly of poetry and traditional stories. This is consistent with the fact that, for many people, unfortunately including government officials, Irish is viewed as a tongue for formal and ceremonial purposes only (that is, for inscriptions on monuments) rather than a language for everyday use (1995, p. 108).

A limitation of Carnie's study has to do with its year of publication. The information given concerning the language and policy have become outdated. For example, he could not have anticipated the formulation of the new government policy for the Irish language, the 20 year strategy, established in 2010. Also, Carnie criticizes the lack of broadcast and specific television stations dedicated to the Irish language. However, an Irish language television channel was launched in late 1996 (Watson, 1996). In addition, data and census figures portraying the situation at the time of publication, which was bleak optimistic, do not reflect today's circumstances.

In an older investigation, dated from 1978, researcher James Cummins adds to the understanding of linguistic and educational perspectives on the Irish language. Despite three decades since its publication, his research presents information that is still relevant today, assisting contemporary analysis. Cummins focuses his study on the experience of language immersion programs in Ireland (1978). Besides providing background information on these language programs, Cummins brings forth results of a quantitative survey carried out with teachers and suggests possible changes for such programs in the future. These results include making teachers aware of 'the need for a supportive home environment if children were to succeed in an immersion school' (Cummins, 1978, p.273) and that, although there are 'negative effects associated with Irish immersion education (...) there is little evidence of detrimental academic effects' (Cummins, 1978, p. 273) Cummins explains that the Irish immersion programs share similarities with programs in

North America. However, the programs diverge ‘in that Irish is not a prestigious language of wider communication (such as French or Spanish) and the only incentives to learn Irish are ethnic and cultural’ (Cummins, 1978, p. 274). For Cummins, ‘enthusiasm for the revival of Irish was adversely affected by the element of compulsion involved in the Government policy’ (1978, p. 275). According to him, a 1975 report showed that the great majority of the population, ‘were dissatisfied with the way it was taught and opposed Government policies involving compulsion’ (Cummins, 1978, p. 275). This led to a change in attitude towards the language and to the development of resentment in children towards learning Irish (Cummins, 1978). Cummins’ study demonstrates the alarming results that an inadequately implemented government policy may have on a population. For Cummins, ‘a necessary condition for an increase in the numbers of immersion schools is a reversal of the belief held by a majority of the population that children doing subjects through the medium of Irish perform less well than children taught through English’ (1978, p. 280).

A major limitation of Cummins’ academic paper is that it was published 37 years ago. But despite this detail, this research provides relevant information that is still valuable to any contemporary analysis. Another limitation is that it is mostly based on quantitative methods, which, although providing a very precise, aggregate view of the problem, lacks a more in depth analysis, which a mixed method approach could have provided. The scope of the paper is also limited to the educational aspect of the Irish language policy.

### **3.3 Historical analyses**

The role of history and of historical determinants in Irish language policy-making is emphasized, to a greater or lesser extent, by several academic papers. This is the case of the articles authored by Cahill (2007), by Pintér (2010) and by Chríost (2012). According to the literature focusing on the historical aspects of the Irish language policies, it is history, more than any other variable, that stands out to explain variance in the policy’s success or failure. Cahill (2007) and Pintér (2010), for example, focus their analyses on issues of language in Ireland at the time of British rule and on nationalistic 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland.

As for the connection between history and language revitalization, Cahill argues that ‘this revival is deeply rooted in experiences of Irish nationalist identity and an

understanding of the British repression of the language as a tactic of colonial rule' (2007, p. 124). Cahill also suggests that 'it is important to acknowledge the role of British policy towards Irish Gaelic in order to understand the role of the language in the formation of Irish identity' (2007, p. 114).

In his research, Cahill stresses the association between politics and the Irish language. To illustrate this, Cahill contributes with a historical analysis of the Irish language from the time of British rule in Ireland. The details provided by his research, with examples of ways in which Britain oppressed the Irish language for imperialist purposes, are crucial for identifying possible reasons as to why the Irish language has continuously declined. Concerning this, Cahill argues that,

For more than six centuries, British policy in Ireland has aimed at the destruction of the Irish Gaelic language. British repression of Gaelic continued into the contemporary period, where 'until recently, the practice of the British State in Northern Ireland towards the use of the Irish language was at best simply negative and at worst actively hostile'. By and large, from 1366 through the late nineteenth century British colonial rulers 'argued precisely for the extermination of the Irish language as part of a larger political project' (2007, p. 114-115).

Cahill also points out significant landmarks concerning the Irish language, such as the creation of Conradh na Gaeilge (the Gaelic League) by Douglas Hyde, as an outset of Irish language policy and revival.

However, one should read the results of Cahill's research with caution. Since his research only delivers negative insights concerning the impact of British politics on Irish language development, his conclusions should be viewed with attention as they may reflect a biased view of the subject. It is critical to evaluate to what extent the Irish language has been affected by British repression.

With a similar approach, Pintér (2010) undertakes a historical analysis of the Irish language, but from the standpoint of religious clashes between Protestant and Catholic communities. His paper also highlights the correlation between language and nationalism. According to Pintér, 'the Irish language movement gaining new momentum in the 1970's and spreading over both the northern and the southern states of Ireland is primarily associated with the Catholic population' (2010, p. 6). Another feature underlined by Pintér is the influence that cultural and creative manifestations, such as literacy, has had on the revival of the Irish language. According to Pintér, 'Yeatsian cultural nationalists advocated a return to Ireland's Gaelic tradition, to the energies of the

‘source’. They suggested that a rediscovery of the riches of old Gaelic literature ‘would generate a sense of national self-worth and of organic unity’ (2010, p. 8).

Like Cahill, Pintér underscores the Gaelic League, created in 1893, as a bold language revitalization initiative which sought to ‘De-Anglicize’ Ireland (2010). In the midst of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, ‘they set out to restore the daily use of Irish for a population which only 0.8 per cent was a monoglot Irish speaker’ (Pintér, 2010, p. 10).

An important contribution made by Pintér is an analysis of both positive and negative outcomes of the initiatives of the Gaelic League. Her analysis, however, is limited to the history and the historical literature about 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland. It does not bring any light into future or contemporary developments beyond that specific timeframe. For this reason, it is imperative that her research be used in conjunction with other academic perspectives.

### **3.4 Comparative studies**

Ireland is not alone in the attempt to revitalize a minority language. According to UNESCO ‘it is estimated that, if nothing is done, half of 6000 plus languages spoken today will disappear by the end of this century’ (UNESCO, 2016). Regions such as the Catalan and Basque, in Spain, as well as Quebec, in Canada, share nationalistic manifestations with regards to language, and boast a pursuit for recognition and policy formulation (Thomson, 1995; Ferrer, 2000). More close to home, there are cases related to language promotion policies in Wales and Scotland (Sutherland, 2000; Jones and Martin-Jones, 2004). Comparative studies provide a very useful perspective with which to understand national problems. As Dogan and Pelassy affirm, ‘we compare to evaluate more objectively our situation as individuals, a community, or a nation’ (1984, p. 3). With respect to language policy, comparative analyses allow one to look at the Irish case in a different perspective.

Norman Berdichevsky makes such a comparative study. In his research, Berdichevsky uses Hebrew, Irish and Norwegian as examples for comparison in national language problems and policies. After giving a brief historical overview of each case, Berdichevsky points out differences and similarities between the situations of the three languages. According to the researcher, ‘the most serious efforts have been made for more than three generations now to imitate Israel’s success in adapting a national language to help meet the needs of a modern society and forge a link with the ancient past’

(Berdichevsky, 2002, p. 17). The study also focus on national identity, as ‘the vision of national destiny that produced the modern states of Israel, Ireland and Norway all floundered over the question of their ‘proper’ national language’ (Berdichevsky, 2002, p. 17).

This study suggests Hebrew as a language revival success story and describes the variables which may have contributed to this success. In Berdichevsky’s words, ‘Israel has succeeded in ‘reviving’ an ancient language by linking it to its historic past, a goal sought, but not as well achieved, by national movements in Ireland and Norway’ (2002, p. 18). Further, Berdichevsky suggests that the Hebrew case has become a ‘role model’ for other minority languages such as the Irish language and in Israel’s case, ‘played a major role in establishing a sense of national unity and identity for millions of immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds’ (2002, p. 21).

The author relates the Irish experience in a pessimistic manner. He highlights the negative effect on the language of the tourist flow to the Gaeltacht regions (this view is also shared by Moriarty, 2013), the maintenance of the Irish language television for a negligible audience at a high cost and the idea that the Irish language might not be, today, ‘an essential ingredient for Irish identity or of any practical importance for a career’ (Berdichevsky, 2002, p. 18). For him, ‘it’s use is primarily symbolic and ceremonial’ (Berdichevsky, 2002, p. 18) and ‘although almost all Irish would like to see the language preserved, there are few today who foresee any possibility of it’s being more than a fond memory’ (Berdichevsky, 2002, p. 18).

Besides outlining the history of the Hebrew case, this study also describes the situation of the two Norwegian languages, specifically the challenges face by Nynorsk and the implications derived from too many government policies and reforms. Despite the success experienced by the Hebrew language, Berdichevsky highlights the danger of globalization on culture and language, arguing that all minority languages, including Hebrew, ‘are facing a challenge to maintain the sense of national identity in a global world dominated by English. The hard facts of life support an approach to learning languages that values practical benefits of communication, travel and career’ (2002, p. 21).

This research features useful and key observations regarding three languages, whose governments were, similarly, ‘convinced to make enormous efforts and sacrifices to become ‘a nation once again’, each with its own ‘historic national language’ (Berdichevsky, 2002, p. 21). Although brief, the paper provides insights as to how the

three cases worked differently or similarly to reverse colonial damage caused to their language and how each case is able to show different lessons that can be taken into consideration for language policy. This study, however, is based solely on bibliographical analysis and doesn't present any evidence based on *in loco* observations or on hard data to support the stated arguments.

In a comparative essay on language diversity and policy within the United Kingdom, Margaret Suntherland presents a contemporary analysis of three Celtic languages: Welsh, Scottish and Irish Gaelic. Suntherland focuses on these three languages because they have been the subject of revival policies and initiatives, unlike other minority languages such as Manx and Cornish. For Suntherland, 'while speakers of these languages may not feel a bond of common nationality, they do have in common a strong interest in the survival of their own Celtic language' (2000, p. 199).

The research undertaken by Suntherland employs historical analysis to demonstrate why the Celtic languages are endangered today in the United Kingdom, affirming that all three languages went through 'periods of time when the Celtic language was regarded as a mark of political subversion, or socially denigrated as the inferior tongue of barbarous sections of the population' (Suntherland, 2000, p. 199). Regardless of this, Wales, for example, has responded to recent revival initiatives, showing that about 22% of the population is now speaking Welsh. More importantly, Suntherland expresses similar concerns to those of Carnie (1995) with respect to how to measure knowledge and ability to speak a language.

Like Berdichevsky, Suntherland also shows a concern over the dominance of the English language today, in times of globalization. According to Suntherland, 'as communication between countries becomes more effective, and some languages become very widely used – English is an obvious example – languages spoken by relatively small numbers of people are likely to fall into disuse, even if there are no political pressures' (Suntherland, 2000, p. 200). In light of this, Suntherland cites Watson, who believes that 'unless action is taken to preserve some of the smaller languages through language policies that courage their use in schools and communities...80% of the world's languages could disappear during the next century' (Suntherland, 2000, p. 200). Based on the Welsh case of language revival policies and on other initiatives, Suntherland considers that there is 'evidence of enthusiasm at grass roots level for the maintenance of this diversity' (2000, p. 200).

This study also compares the different existing policies for the specific cases of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. More specifically with respect to Northern Ireland, Suntherland argues that initiatives have been mostly linked to religion. For him, ‘there has been what could be described as a *laissez-faire* approach, decisions about the teaching of Irish have been made rather by Catholic Church education authorities’ (Suntherland, 2000, p. 207). In conclusion, Suntherland reflects on what sparks language policies and the quest for keeping minority languages alive. Some of the determinants for this include appreciation for the language and international incentives for cultural diversity, access to literature written in the minority language and national identity. The study also concludes that since imposed policies have shown signs of failure, such as the case of the Republic of Ireland, languages should be the subject of individual choice to be made by those who wish to maintain it. As argued by Suntherland, ‘the survival of minority languages would appear best left to individuals and to voluntary associations, rather than determined by central government’ (2000, p. 208).

A possible drawback of this research is that the comparison is limited to languages that share the same Celtic origin and the same historical backgrounds. As other examples outside the United Kingdom are not explored, language revival success cases are not adequately considered.

### **3.5 Policy analyses**

Part of the literature on the Irish language focuses primarily on the study of the language revival policy-making and implementation. An example of this literature is an essay written by Philip McDermott (2011). Like several authors already mentioned, McDermott includes in his research paper a succinct examination of the history of the Irish language, presenting information from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. His focus, however, is on policy.

To illustrate the current setting of the Irish language, McDermott uses a cultural product, an Irish short film by director Daniel O’Hara called *Yu Ming is Ainm Dom*, to represent the contradiction between the public recognition of the Irish language, as it is the first official language of the country, and the reality found in most Irish territory, with the exception of small Gaeltacht regions, where the Irish language is rarely spoken. A major factor for this, highlighted in this study, are effects from British rule. According to McDermott,

These processes which attempted to Anglicise Ireland had parallels with many other colonial societies of the time. (...) Through official policies such as these, legacies were left for future generations which undermined aspects of their own national identities. (...) In this regard many within the dominated society come to view the colonizer's culture as a means of empowerment and opportunity, while their own heritage, including language, is viewed as backward, inferior or a barrier to societal and economic progress. (2011, p. 26)

Like Pintér (2010), McDermott mentions the 'De-Anglicization' inclinations of the new government after the establishment of the free state, with the language as a central tool. According to McDermott, the government sought to 'ensure that independent Ireland would become Irish-speaking again' (2011, p. 27). However, McDermott affirms that according to census figures of the time only about 0.5 million of the population spoke Irish, which represented a major challenge. To overcome this problem, the government at the time launched a Government Policy centered on three focal points: 'pressure, preferment and projection' (McDermott, 2011, p. 27). As McDermott explained it, 'the language policy introduced at the formation of the state with the themes of pressure, preferment and projection primarily relied on solidifying the role of the language within the civic administration of the state. Pointed out as another sign of bad policy implementation, this information highlights the difference in the Irish historical context of the language from other countries, in which during the nationalist movements in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, 'the number of native Irish speakers was continuing to decline, yet ironically the symbolic and to a degree the cultural status of the language was enhanced' (McDermott, 2011, p. 26). Despite the success of the policy with respect to language recognition, it was not able to promote the daily individual use of Irish Gaelic among the population. For McDermott, 'the overall success of the government's language policy is highly debatable, having at best succeeded in raising the numbers of Irish speakers in a primarily institutionalized setting, but having failed to increase the use of Irish on an everyday social basis' (2011, p. 26).

McDermott's paper is one of the very few available to include contemporary studies of the policies designed for Irish language revival. In its time of publication in 2011, the government 20 year strategy had already been launched, which made it possible for the researcher to comment on its early stages. The study shows evidence that minority languages have been getting increasing attention within Europe and at a global level. According to McDermott 'throughout the 1990's, the recognition of minority languages

has become a prominent feature in many European states, perhaps influenced by a growing uneasiness at the pervading authority of English at all levels of European society (2011, p. 29). This reflects the similar views on the impact of globalization on cultural diversity held by Suntherland (2000) and Berdichevsky (2002).

Concerning the most recent government 20 year strategy for the Irish language, McDermott highlights that reversing effects generated by past policies remains a challenge. For him, 'the government strategy is now focusing on promoting the use of Irish in civil society, business and economy in addition to traditional areas such as education' (McDermott, 2011, p. 30) in which the 'ambitious aim to raise the number of daily speakers of Irish from 75,000 to 250,000 by 2030' (McDermott, 2011, p. 30). McDermott argues that the policy of language promotion in Ireland should not only focus on consolidating national identity, but should also concentrate in supporting Irish Gaelic as a 'living community language' (2011, p. 30).

This study constitutes a solid contribution to the literature on the Irish language for three reasons. First, it describes historical events, but with a policy orientation. Second, not only is it a recent publication, but it dedicates a section of its analysis to the contemporary context. Third, it brings into perspective both the situation in the Republic of Ireland and that in Northern Ireland. The only flaw worth mentioning pertains to the fact that it is more descriptive than analytic, basing most of its information on bibliographic data. In this sense, this study lacks more in-depth analysis which methods such as interviewing and participant observation could supply.

### **3.6 Rural Ireland and the Gaeltacht**

Finally, another relevant theme of the literature on the Irish language concerns rural Ireland, since the Gaeltacht regions are located among rural isolated areas, mostly along the western seaboard of the country. Two authors stand out in addressing the subject. These are Reg Hindley (1990) and Hugh Brody (1973).

On his study regarding the death of the Irish language (1990), Reg Hindley, a geographer, did an extensive research and fieldwork in the Gaeltacht regions. Hindley describes the background history of the Irish language and revival policies, mentioning pertinent historical characteristics from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Hindley dedicates chapters for each of the Irish provinces, that is, Ulster, Connacht, Munster and Leinster, where he carefully describes his observations in the Irish speaking regions. Hindley uses

official maps of Ireland and the Gaeltacht to illustrate the language situation throughout the years, and he also creates his own maps for each of the Gaeltacht regions with detailed and more precise information on language usage at the time of study. Hindley presents 30 maps of which 19 are ‘devoted to the present official Gaeltacht, county by county’. Six of these highlight the author’s categorization of the different district subdivisions according to their real Irish strength or weakness’ (1990, p. xvi). According to him,

The language is dying at specific places among specific communities which the official Gaeltacht boundaries hardly help to pinpoint and which are hidden in the generalized and averaged data produced for the official Gaeltacht (1990, p. xvi).

Another aspect of this study worth mentioning is that Hindley is a non-Irish researcher and thus, transmits his point of view as an outsider, a fact that has prompted debate between communities, the academia and the state in Ireland.

This study is relevant in that it provides the reader with a precise mapping of the Irish language use and detailed accounts of the authors’ observations in the Gaeltacht regions. However, a weakness of the study is that the author is less effective in establishing causal relationships that might explain language decline. The book appears to center more on *how* rather than *why* the language is dying. Hindley does dedicate a chapter on the causes of language decline. Although he mentions the economic weakness of the Gaeltacht, emigration and small number of population as factors, he doesn’t go any further than this vague statement. He also mentions social psychology and marriage, family and parents as factors, but again, doesn’t go beyond the verification that families are not passing down the Irish language to their children and that the Irish language and speakers have suffered stigmas (1990).

On the other hand, Hugh Brody, in his book *Inishkilane* (1973), does not focus specifically on the Gaeltacht regions, but on the rural isolated areas in the west of Ireland. Brody carried out participant observation throughout these areas and used a fictional narrative to illustrate situations and his findings. The book includes a historical background, observations on family life, on community cooperation, on seasonal aspects of traditional communities, on the symbolisms of the bar, shop and church in these regions, as well as new entrepreneurial characteristics. The author found that several changes in the traditional rural life has effected the communities of these regions. These changes include increasing patterns of emigration, more intensely of young women,

gender imbalances, with a predominance of adult men, and age imbalance with increasingly less children. In addition, the isolation of homes, increasing loneliness and decline of community have had an impact on girls, who have become strongly inclined against marrying local farmers, and the youth (1973). In this regard, Brody observes a, ‘breakdown of the communities, the devaluation of the traditional mores, the weakening hold of the older conceptions over the minds of young people in particular’ (1973, p. 2). Furthermore, according to Brody,

The changes in farming practice, re-evaluation of rural life, inter-family and interpersonal relations, the consciousness of the young – indeed the entire fabric of a social and economic system as well as the mentalities within it – draw an account of Ireland into far more general issues (1973, p. 3).

Brody also mentions growth of demoralization among the communities in these regions, in which he explains that, ‘to be demoralized is, for such people, to lose belief in the social advantages or moral worth of their own society’ (1973, p. 16), in which they, ‘feel that their society does not function for them’ (1973, p. 16)

A noteworthy flaw of Brody’s work is the fact that it was published 44 years ago. It is possible that changes since then affecting the rural areas studied may have occurred in aspects such as economic and social development, both for better or for worse. Another limitation, as far as the present research is concerned, is that his study does not focus on Gaeltacht regions, specifically, but on the rural isolated areas of the west of Ireland in general.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The study of the Irish language and government policies formulated for language promotion and revitalization have been largely based on bibliographical material and statistics. In general, the literature available on the subject falls into the five categories of linguist studies, historical accounts, comparative investigations, policy analyses and rural Ireland.

Most of the literature reviewed rarely featured qualitative research methods, with interviews and participant observations, which could produce a more in-depth understanding of the subject. Furthermore, few works concentrated on the contemporary scene.

This research project seeks to contribute to the existing literature on the topic by undertaking an ethnographic type research, comprising of fieldwork with observation and interviews. This will shed light into problems plaguing language promotion and revitalization policies in Ireland by approaching the subject with a more in-depth perspective. Combining bibliographic, documentary and data collection with an ethnography method will pave the way for a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between government policy and the population.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Research overview**

The present study employed qualitative, ethnographical methods to analyze Ireland's most recent language policy and to evaluate the extent to which this policy has been well received by the Irish population. Prior research on the subject has mostly focused on linguistic studies and historical analyses of Irish language policies, such as those carried out by Carnie (1995), Pintér (2010) and Cahill (2007). Literature on the most recent language policy in Ireland, the government's 20-year strategy, is scarce. Existing literature is based either on government-produced information or on statistics, such as those made available by the Irish Census.

The research presented here, however, adopted a people-centered approach, carrying out in site observation of Irish speaking areas, and conducting interviews with members of Irish-speaking communities. Participant observation of communities made it possible to verify the actual dynamics of community member usage of the Irish language, in family, social and work settings. On the other hand, the interviews allowed community members to relate their points of views on what the government's recent policy meant to them in practice.

### **4.2 Research design**

Ethnography was the primary method of investigation employed in the present study. This methodology stood out as a reliable means to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the relation between policy and population, securing information on the impact of the Irish language policy currently in place on the Irish speaking population, six years after its implementation. Although other sources of data were available, such as the Irish Census, there were serious limitations to the use of aggregate data in the present study. Carnie notes (1995), for example, that Census numbers concerning the Irish language may be highly misleading, as questions posed to the population by Census questionnaires do not propose a clear meaning of what it is to be an Irish speaker. Ethnographic research, on the other hand, allows for a more detailed analysis of the current situation of the Irish language policy, through participant observation and semi-structured interviewing.

To Reeves *et al.* ‘ethnography is the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities’ (2008, p. 512). Its main objective is ‘to provide rich, holistic insights into people’s views and actions, as well as the nature (that is, sights, sounds) of the location they inhabit, through the collection of detailed observations and interviews’ (Reeves *et al.*, 2008, p. 512). Ethnographic research includes ‘in-depth interviews and documentary data such as minutes of meetings, diaries, and photographs’ (Reeves *et al.*, 2008, p. 513) in which the ‘participants or situations are sampled on an opportunistic or purposive basis’ (Reeves *et al.*, 2008, p. 513). This is precisely what the present study aimed at by conducting participant observation and interviews with the population in the Gaeltacht regions in Ireland.

The ethnographic approach undertaken in the present study focused on observing the population living in the Gaeltacht areas in order to acquire insights as to how the recent government 20 year strategy for the Irish language has affected Irish speaking populations across the Republic of Ireland. Mainstream ethnographic methods chosen for this study included participant observation, interviews, note taking (use of a diary) and photography.

For the purposes of ethnographic observations and interviews, visits were made to at least one town or village in each of the Irish counties that comprise Gaeltacht regions. The counties were Waterford, Cork, Kerry, Meath, Mayo, Galway and Donegal.

The entire fieldwork had to be completed within two months. Due to such time restrictions, the fieldwork was organized with efficiency in mind, in order to achieve the most collection of data during the periods of time spent in each research location. In addition to time restraints, other limitations affected this part of the research, such as logistics.

Transportation turned out to be the main influence in the choice of the specific places visited, since most of the Gaeltacht regions are located in rural or isolated areas and, sometimes, in sites where public transportation is limited or nonexistent. In some cases, such as in counties Waterford, Cork and Kerry, the visits were planned beforehand, whereas in counties Galway, Mayo, Donegal and Meath, the trips occurred in a more spontaneous manner, especially as information regarding accommodation, public transportation or ferries were, at times, challenging to obtain in advance on the internet.

Observation activities were conducted as systematically and objectively as possible. In this sense, the research sought to adhere to Kluckhoh's definition of participant observation. For him, 'participant observation is conscious and systematic sharing, in so far as circumstances permit, in the life-activities and, on occasion, in the interests and affects of a group of persons' (Kluckhoh, 1940, p. 331). In our case, observation activities were made to fit the circumstances that imposed limitations to the fieldwork.

Participant observation, as undertaken in the present research, also sought to follow the guidelines of the flâneur method. The word 'flâneur', from the flâneur method, derives from the French word 'stroller'. This concept, developed by Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire in the beginning of the 20th century, has, according to Lauster, 'gained unquestioned cognitive status (...) in contemporary cultural theory' (2007, p.139). For Lauster,

The position from which all these observations are made seems to be that of a strolling spectator, someone who collects mental notes taken on leisurely city walks and publishes them (...) (2007, p. 140).

With regard to interviews, semi-structured interviews were chosen as an additional approach to acquiring more in-depth understanding of the relation of the population with the language and with the government's language policies. Snowball and purposive sampling methods were used to define the interviewing process. According to the *Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods*, snowball sampling is 'a form of non-probability sampling in which the researcher begins by identifying an individual perceived to be an appropriate respondent' (Jupp, 2006, p. 281) who then is 'asked to identify another potential respondent' (Jupp, 2006, p. 281). This procedure is repeated until enough data has been gathered. Purposive sampling, on the other hand, is defined as 'a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria' (Jupp, 2006, p. 244). These criteria may include 'specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research' (Jupp, 2006, p. 244).

Purposive and snowball sampling are non-probability sampling techniques, which means that neither of them, 'employ the rules of probability theory' (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 151), nor do they 'claim representativeness' (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 151). This downside

of the two sampling methods is also expressed by Bryman, for whom, ‘the problem with snowball sampling is that it is very unlikely that the sample will be representative of the population’ (2004, p. 102). However, the snowball sampling method can be an advantage, according to Sarantakos, ‘when the target population is unknown, or when it is difficult to approach the respondents in any other way’ (1998, p. 154). Additionally, the non-probability sampling techniques used in this research are also practical for qualitative type research. As indicated by Bryman, ‘when the researcher needs to focus upon or to reflect relationships between people, tracing connections may be a better approach than conventional probability sampling’ (2004, p. 102). The purposive and snowball sampling methods, therefore, were chosen for this study in light of these advantages.

The choice of semi-structured interviews in this research provided the flexibility to vary pre-defined questions on the theme of study. It also allowed the researcher, as Bryman emphasizes, to have ‘latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies’ (2004, p. 113). The key objective of conducting the qualitative aspect of the research is, as noted by Berg, to seek ‘answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings’ (2001, p. 6).

Interview participants were of Irish nationality or permanent residents of the Republic of Ireland, 18 years of age or older, who spoke Irish. All participant observations and interviews took place from late September to November after formal ethical approval. The interview questions were designed around ten previously formulated questions, which had been drafted in order to prepare for potential turns in the actual interviews. However, all interviews were semi-structured, allowing the necessary flexibility to follow whatever direction the actual answers would take. A consent form was handed to, and signed by, the interviewees who agreed to take part in the study. The interviews were recorded with the participants’ permission and later transcribed. The names of the interviewees will not be divulged at any time of this research, to ensure anonymity of the participants.

Interviews were conducted on three occasions, by means of purposive and snowball sampling, with locals from Dingle (County Kerry), Spiddal (County Galway) and Glencolmcille (County Donegal).

The actual analysis of the interviews conducted during the fieldwork incorporated principles of the narrative analysis methodology. According to Kristin Esterberg,

qualitative data, such as those derived from interviews ‘are typically full of narratives and stories’ (2002, p. 181). Esterberg explains that,

The method for analyzing these kinds of stories is called *narrative analysis*. Drawing on the same kind of techniques for interpretation and analysis of texts that literary scholars use, narrative analysis encourages social researchers to pay attention to the language used to describe experiences and to focus on the structure of stories. Rather than viewing language that people use as unimportant, narrative analysis assumes that language conveys meaning and that how a story is told is as important as what is said (2002, p. 181).

To Riessman, ‘narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself’ (2002, p. 218). According to her,

The purpose is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. The methodological approach examines the informant’s story and analyzes how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on. (...) Analysis in narrative studies opens up the forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers. (2002, p. 218).

It was with this set of qualitative methods that the present research sought to capture the view members of Irish speaking communities hold about their government’s recent language policy. Rather than seeking precise correlations and causal relationships, this study sought to understand how the government’s policies has affected everyday life at Gaeltacht communities and how these communities have reacted to the government’s policies.

Because of its reliance on qualitative research methods, in general, and ethnography, in particular, this study makes no claim to generalizable conclusions or the conclusive testing of hypothesis. Neither does it make any claims of thorough replicability. Its validity, however, is based on the rich inside information that participant observation and face-to-face encounters generate. Emphasis, therefore, was placed on trustworthiness and authenticity, which according to Bryman, are the ‘two primary criteria for assessing qualitative study’ (2004, p. 273).

### **4.3 Ethical considerations**

According to Walliman, there are two main aspects to be considered in research in relation to ethics. First, ‘the individual values of the researcher relating to honesty and

frankness and personal integrity' (Walliman, 2011 p. 43), and second, 'the researcher's treatment of other people involved in the research, relating to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and courtesy' (Walliman, 2011, p. 43). Sarantakos also adds 'physical and mental harm to respondents', 'plagiarism and fabrication or concealment of findings' as other relevant ethical issues to be taken into consideration (2013, p. 16). These issues have all been properly addressed in the present research.

With respect to ethics, the researcher sought an honest understanding, use and analysis of all information acquired during the research. During the course of the ethnographical fieldwork, in addition to guaranteeing confidentiality to participants, the researcher made sure that the questions asked throughout the interviews didn't cause the participants any emotional harm. If, at any time during the interview, the participant seemed to become upset or if the question seemed to be a delicate subject for the participant, the researcher directed him or her to the next question.

The researcher also ensured that the participants were aware of all information, enabling them to make informed decisions regarding participation. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research and were asked if they were in accordance with the use of note taking and tape recording during the interviews. In terms of safety measures, for both the researcher and the participants, the location of the interviews were carefully chosen and, in all occasions, the researcher was accompanied to and from the interviews by a familiar person, who was also present during all visits. The researcher also provided participants with proof of identification, as well as contact details of her academic supervisor.

## 5 FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

To meet the proposed objectives of this study, ethnographical fieldwork was carried out in the Gaeltacht regions of Ireland during a two-month period. The fieldwork involved participant observation and interviews. All seven Gaeltacht counties were visited, encompassing a total of twelve places, which ranged from towns, villages to islands.

This chapter describes the observations and findings derived from the research undertaken in each location. These descriptions have been organized in the exact sequence in which each different location was visited. This was done in order to follow as closely as possible the chronology of fieldwork activities. Organized in this fashion, the descriptions not only highlighted the key findings of the fieldwork, they helped contextualize community issues which the 20 Year strategy was designed to address. The descriptions also illustrated how the research unfolded in each of the specific regions.

The map below depicts locations visited during the fieldwork.



Figure 1: Map of Ireland – places visited  
(Source: <http://www.udaras.ie/en/an-ghaeilge-an-ghaeltacht/an-ghaeltacht/>)

## 5.2 County Waterford

### 5.2.1 Ring (An Rinn)

Ring, in county Waterford, was the first town (village) I visited in the Gaeltacht area. Since there is no public transportation going to Ring and the weather at the end of September was still favorable, I decided to use a bicycle as a means of transportation. I planned to go on a day with a sunny forecast and I booked in advance to rent bikes for the day in the city of Dungarvan. Because of the difficulty in arranging transportation, I decided to limit the visit to Ring to a day trip. The cycle from Dungarvan to Ring was about 10km each way. I was the only one cycling both on the way to Ring and in the village itself. Everybody else seemed to use cars as main transportation.

As soon as I left Dungarvan, the area became very rural. I could see farms and scattered houses on the way and it didn't take very long for me to spot the 'an Ghaeltacht' road sign.



Figure 2: An Ghaeltacht sign on the way to Ring  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

After passing the sign, every other road sign I saw was in Irish. I kept going until I came to a junction on the road for Ring, on the left, and Ardmore, on the right.



Figure 3: Junction – Ring and Ardmore  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

As soon as I arrived in Ring, I passed by schools and saw school children engaged in outdoor activities with their teachers. The literature reviewed had left me with the impression that the Gaeltacht would have more elders than youngsters but I saw people of all ages and, during lunch, I also saw a lot of teenagers.

I stopped cycling when I spotted what looked like the center of the village: a small supermarket/convenience store and a small cafe. The supermarket/convenience store was of a famous chain, but all of its signs were in Irish. I got a snack and a cup of coffee there and noticed that the posters, messages and ads put up by the locals on the wall were mostly in English. The few people who bought something while I was there also communicated in English with the staff.

After coffee, I got back on the bike to have a look around the village. There were not many businesses there. I didn't see any gas stations, pharmacies, or even a church. However, I did see a post office, a few pubs, an art gallery and a small crystal factory/gift shop. There was also a small park for children close to where the café and convenience store were. All signs, even of businesses, were all in Irish. This made me feel like I was, in fact, somewhere different from the rest of Ireland.



Figure 4: Pub in Ring  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

I passed by the beach, where there were two mothers walking with their small children. All of them spoke in English with each other. While I was cycling, I tried to listen carefully to conversations every time someone passed by me. However, all of the conversations that I heard were in English.

I headed back to the café for lunch and it was full of people, especially teenagers. It seemed as though they had finished class, or were on a break, as all of them were wearing their school uniforms and came in groups. They were all speaking in English, although I got the impression that, at certain times, they would mix English with some Irish words. I only heard Irish spoken when a group of elders addressed the waitress to pay their bill. Although the name of the café was in Irish, the signs put up by the staff and the menu were in English.

I really felt out of place in Ring. Not only at the café and convenience store, but also cycling around the village. I was the only one there on that day riding bikes and sightseeing in the village. Locals would stare at me each step of the way adding to a sense of the unfamiliar. Teenagers, in particular, were extremely curious. I cycled a bit more before heading back and saw an Irish summer school and also some sea farms.

## 5.3 County Cork

### 5.3.1 Cape Clear Island (Cléire)



Figure 5: Arriving in Cape Clear Island  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

The visit to Cape Clear Island was a fieldtrip that I planned in advance. Originally, the plan was to go to Dingle, in county Kerry, as the second visit for observations. However, because of the tourist character of that town and, since it was still early October, I was not able to find accommodation there. Instead, I decided to go to Cape Clear Island for the weekend (2 nights), even though there was a forecast for stormy weather for the area. I booked in advance to stay at a Bed and Breakfast (B&B). My trip there went according to the bus and ferry timetables. I took the bus from Cork city to Skibereen, then another bus to Baltimore, where I would be taking the ferry. Overall, the bus trip from Cork city to Baltimore took about 3 hours.

The ferry was small and there were not many people on board, maybe a total of 10 passengers, including locals and tourists. The crew was comprised of 3 to 4 men. They seemed to be simple people and to be doing that job for some time. Although it was cold, I stayed on the ferry's deck to look at the view and to take pictures. I went inside only for one moment and saw some ads for restaurants in the island, as well as other signs with information, which were all in English. The ferry ride took about 35 - 40 minutes.



Figure 6: Cape Clear Island ferry  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

When I got there, I took a minivan that was waiting for possible passengers from the ferry. This minivan functions as a shuttle/bus in the island. Some of the passengers who came with me were locals, who seemed to have gone grocery shopping on the mainland and were coming home. I got out at our B&B, along with an Irish couple around their 30's who were visiting as tourists. All of us were kindly welcomed by the owner of the B&B, a woman in her 60's, who offered to prepare us tea, coffee and scones. I left my bags in my room, then, I came out to the living room to a table which the B&B owner had set up for both me and the couple that arrived with me. While we had our coffee and snack, I chatted with the couple, who told us they were from Dublin and were touring around some places in Ireland. They asked me what had brought me to Cape Clear and when I mentioned the Irish language, they told me about their experiences with it. The woman told me about the difficulty she had studying Irish in school and how she dreaded having to take the Irish exam to get into the university. On the other hand, the man told me that he did speak Irish but that he did not use it. He said, 'learning the Irish language today is a bit like learning Latin'.

When we finished our coffee, the B&B owner warned us to head early back to the center of the island (where we arrived by ferry) if we wanted dinner because the only place to do so, the only pub in the island, would close in a few hours. It was also starting to get dark. I quickly got ready and walked towards the pub. On the way, I saw a group

of young boys in their 20's. This was a very uncomfortable moment because they all stared at me while I passed by. I got to the pub and it was quite full, with some few tourists like me, but mostly with locals. I could tell who the tourists were because they had travelled in the ferry with me. I sat at a small table for two close to the bar. Except for the tourists that were there, there were only men in the pub. The dinner menu was very simple with few options. While my partner left to order the food, I stayed at the table to observe the setting. Next to me was a group of 5 or 6 young boys around their 20's. The whole time my partner was at the bar making the order, they remained staring at me. While I had dinner, and the whole time I was at the pub, I could not hear anyone speaking in Irish. There were locals of all ages there, but all of them were speaking English. One thing I noticed during the weekend that I was there was that there was a disproportionate number of men in the island. I saw very few women or girls. The same goes for children, as I saw very few children there.

When I was done with dinner, I went by myself to the bar to order a drink, believing it to be the norm to drink something at Irish pubs. When I went to the counter to order, an old Irish man, in his 60's, who was next to me, started a conversation. I took the occasion to ask if he spoke Irish and he replied 'yes'. According to him, Irish was his first language and he only learned English later on when he went to school. When I mentioned that I had not yet heard anyone speaking Irish in the island he replied, 'no, no one does, it's gone'. I asked if this was the case even at home and he answered 'yes', that with the media, especially for young people, it was gone. He did not seem very comfortable talking about this and changed the subject to talk about his family. We talked a little bit and then I went back to my table. I walked back to the B&B when it was already dark. The roads in the island are narrow and there was not a lot of lighting on the streets, which made it difficult for us to walk safely, and to be seen by the drivers in the cars that were passing by.

The next day I got up early to have a better look at the island, especially since I had heard the weather would be getting worse. I had breakfast along with two other couples who were also touring the island. The living room, where the tables were and where I ate, was full of shelves filled with antique tea cups and plates. The walls were filled with pictures of a boy and a girl, who seemed to be the children of the B&B owner. On one wall, there were pictures of a little red haired girl and a big poster featuring the same girl in an advertisement for tourism in Ireland. Then I saw other pictures of her, but

now older. There was one picture of her graduating from secondary school, then another of her graduating from the university. There was also a framed newspaper article about her, in which it read that she was the first person from Cape Clear Island to graduate in Medicine. From the article, we saw that she studied in Scotland. On the other wall, there were pictures of a young boy. There were also other pictures of this boy, but now older and on the ferryboat, the same I came in to the island. There was also a framed newspaper article about his wedding, mentioning that he was from the ferry crew and it had a picture of the couple on the day of their wedding on the ferryboat. Also, in the hallways of the accommodation there were posters and pictures of the island. In the hallway leading up to my room there was a long family tree with the owners' last name.



Figure 7: Abandoned house in Cape Clear Island  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

I left to go for a walk and explore the island. There were not any bike rentals or tours in Cape Clear, so getting to know the island was only possible on foot. Cape Clear is hilly and most of the roads are paved, although I passed by a few that were not. The locals use cars to get around, however I noticed that almost all of them had either very old cars or cars with missing parts. I walked in one path that led to a ruin, but I could not visit it because after a certain point it was considered trespassing and it was prohibited to continue. I then returned to take another longer path. I passed by houses along the way, many of which were abandoned. During all of the time I was walking in the island I saw very few locals walking, or even cars passing. In certain places, the island itself seemed

abandoned, like a ghost town. Along the path, I came across the Irish summer school, which looked new and well maintained and even had a field for Gaelic sports. I saw two other schools, a smaller one which seemed to be for little kids and another, a little bit bigger, which did not seem to be in very good condition. The sports fields, for example, seemed to have been abandoned. Grass was growing wild in the courtyards and the playgrounds were deteriorated. I also passed by a church. I went close to the door to see if the information for mass was in Irish, but everything on the wall was in English, with the exception of one sign, which was bilingual. On another wall there was a frame with old pictures of the church in black and white of what looked like its opening, maybe in the 1940's or 50's. In all of the pictures, the signs in the church were in Irish. Afterwards, I came across the island's heritage center, however I was not able to visit it because it only works in the summer time and it had already closed. I also saw some signs along the way of a goat cheese farm, but all of the signs were in English. I also noticed that, in general, the road signs in the island were either in English or were bilingual, which was different from what I had observed in Ring. With the exception of the 'an Gaeltacht' sign, it felt like I was in any other Irish village.

The road took me back to the center of the island. Besides the pub that I had dinner the day before, there was also a small tourist office, a small public library, which was in a container, what looked like some administrative buildings/houses and there was also a restaurant that doubled as a small supermarket. Since it was the only option for lunch in the island, I went to this restaurant, and I saw that most of the other tourists were there as well. Although it was small, the restaurant was very good and even had daily vegetarian options. All of the tables there were occupied and it was very busy. I noticed, after a while, that there was a woman having lunch there who was speaking in French to her little girl. At first, I thought she was a tourist, but then I saw that she knew the staff and spoke to them in English like she knew them. On the walls, there were old pictures in black and white of a couple, which I imagined were the family of the owner.



Figure 8: School in Cape Clear Island  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

In addition to food at the restaurant and groceries at the small supermarket, there was also a shelf with Irish products for sale and many books about Cape Clear, especially poems, by an American author that lived there. I browsed the products, then, made my way to the counter to pay for lunch. I took the opportunity to talk to the owner and asked him if he spoke Irish. He answered ‘yes’ right away. When I told him that I had not heard Irish in the island, he said, ‘look around the restaurant, you don’t see locals, only tourists, that’s why it will be hard for you to hear it’. I mentioned to him that I had spoken to a man the night before at the pub who said otherwise, that the language was gone. He disagreed. He told me that it was definitely not the case and that many people in the island were still using Irish daily. I asked him if he spoke at home and he replied ‘yes’. He told me that he spoke Irish at home and that his wife (who was the woman at the restaurant I saw earlier) was French, so his daughter spoke 3 languages, Irish, English and French. According to him, Irish was spoken daily in his home. He seemed very happy that we were interested in knowing about this and he even mentioned that sometimes they had had a few foreign tourists going to Cape Clear who spoke Irish. He mentioned an example of a Russian linguist. He also encouraged me to contact Conradh na Gaeilge (the Gaelic League) for more information on learning the Irish language. I noticed, while I was talking, that there were colorful handwritten posters with basic Irish phrases on the wall, behind the counter, which seemed to have been made by a child at school. He seemed

happy to have talked to me and even said ‘go raibh maith agat’ when I was on my way out.

I headed back to the B&B because I wanted to spend the afternoon taking notes. Since the internet there did not work in the rooms and only in the living room, I took my computer and notebook to work there. When I was in the living room, the B&B owner, her husband and her son passed a few times near the spot where I was working. At all times they would speak to each other only in English. I also noticed that the TV programs they were watching and radio programs they were listening were all in English. Later, I decided to head early to the pub for dinner. I got there and I ordered the same I had had the previous day because the menu had not changed. This time, there were more locals than tourists and the pub was not as full. During all of the time I was there I did not hear anyone speaking in Irish. I had dinner and decided to get to the accommodation early.

The next day I planned to take the ferry early in the morning, since the B&B owner had told me the weather would be getting even worse. Most of the tourists had already left the island, so there were very few people in the ferry. An interesting thing I noticed is that after I arrived in Baltimore and all the passengers had left, I heard the crew speaking to each other in Irish. This was the only time I heard Irish during the trip.

## 5.4 County Kerry

### 5.4.1 Dingle (An Daingean)



Figure 9: Dingle  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

Although it was difficult to find accommodation in Dingle in October, I was able to book a B&B to spend a night there, during the weekend. All of the options, however, were expensive in comparison to the other places I had visited. The accommodation I chose was not in the center of town, but was within walking distance from the center. I took the bus from Cork, which made various stops along the way until I got there, meaning that it came out to a couple of hours of traveling. I arrived there still in the morning and went straight to the accommodation where I met the owner, a 30-year-old man. There were also a few other guests arriving at the same time I did. Some were foreign tourists, mainly from the United States, others were there to attend a wedding that evening.

The B&B owner greeted each one of us individually and gave some information about the stay and breakfast. He seemed to be used to the amount of tourists there because he spent a lot of his time giving out tips, maps and suggestions for Dingle town and Dingle Peninsula. I asked him if he spoke Irish and he told me 'yes'. He then asked me why I was interested in the language and I told him about my research. He told me he would not have any problem talking to me about it and we scheduled to talk the following day after breakfast, as most of the guests would have left and he would have more free time to talk to me.

I went to the town center right away because I knew I only had one day to explore the area. I looked for a place to have lunch, however, a lot of places were full of tourists or were closed due to a funeral that was being held that day. I walked quite a bit and went further up a hill until I spotted a small bakery which also sold lunch and sandwiches. Although I was having a late lunch, the bakery was still quite full and I was not able to hear the locals and what language they were using among themselves. After lunch, I returned to the accommodation only to get my camera, then, I came back to town to have a better look.

The town was very busy. Out of all of the places I visited, this was the busiest, along with the Aran Islands. There were many tourists out on the streets shopping for crafts and souvenirs, in the bars and restaurants, having ice cream at a well-known ice cream shop in the area and also going on tours to see the famous dolphin of the town, Fungie. The tourist office was full and it was difficult to walk around the town without bumping into people. Dingle looked like any other Irish small town, however it had a lot of economic activity, with many shops open and restaurants, including award-winning

ones. I went to the pier to look at the landscape and, there, I saw locals going for a walk, as well as many fishing boats and some fishermen. This was perhaps the most non-touristic oriented activity I saw while I was there. I only heard people speaking English there.



Figure 10: Fishing boat in Dingle  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

I headed back to the town center to browse the shops. I looked at the signs in the town and they all seemed to be either in English or bilingual. Also, most businesses had English names and signs. Although it is recognized as part of the Gaeltacht, Dingle did not feel like an Irish-speaking region. It was also very difficult to see regular daily life there, because of the amount of tourists present. It felt a little like being in Disneyland.

Later, as it started to get dark, I decided to find a place for an early dinner. It was also starting to rain. I went looking in various restaurants but all of them were either full or very expensive. I chose one which, although was also full, had a table available and was not as costly. Despite the fact that it was an Irish restaurant, it seemed to have developed a menu with the tourists in mind because the food served was mostly international, with American, Indian and Chinese dishes. It was very busy and loud at the restaurant and it was difficult to see and hear the locals who were working there. However, the times that I did hear them, they were all speaking English.

Although the restaurant had announced they would have traditional Irish music a little later, I decided to go to a pub to observe a different setting. Just as I had trouble

finding a restaurant, I also had trouble finding a pub, since they were all crowded. I came across a famous pub, suggested by tourist guides as a must see, but there were people outside waiting to go in. While I was walking I also saw many people on the streets dressed up, going in the direction of the wedding and also groups of people in bachelor or bachelorette parties. At one point, I also saw the funeral car passing by with many locals following behind.

After a bit of a search, I found a pub which was starting to play traditional music and which had some seats available at the bar. After I arrived, the pub quickly became crowded with tourists. Almost all of the tourists I saw were American. They were very excited to be having the possibility of watching traditional Irish music performed. The only locals there seemed to be the pub staff and the music group. I tried listening to locals at the bar although it was very loud, but the little that I heard was only in English. After a few songs, I headed back to the accommodation. I walked carefully back because the B&B was a few minutes away from the center of town and it was dark. There were no lights, making it difficult for cars to see me. Also, there were no sidewalks.

The next day, I had breakfast in the morning together with the other guests that were there. After everyone had gone, I stayed near the kitchen where I was able to chat with the B&B owner about the Irish language. We talked a bit, then, I left to catch the bus at the center of Dingle town.

## **5.5 County Galway**

### **5.5.1 Spiddal (An Spidéal)**

As opposed to the other Irish speaking regions, Connemara, and more specifically Spiddal and the Aran Islands are easier to access by transportation, departing from Galway city. Both regions, and most especially the Aran Islands, are known and visited by national and international tourists. For this reason, it was possible to find daily buses from Galway city to these regions. The accommodation chosen was a B&B, which allowed for the possibility of speaking with the owners or managers. Two days were set aside for observations in Spiddal and an additional day was included, later on, to extend the fieldtrip to the Aran Islands.

I arrived in Spiddal in the afternoon and as soon as the bus stopped at the town center it was possible to see that it was a larger town, compared to other Irish speaking

areas, such as Ring or Cape Clear. It was, however, smaller than Dingle. In the town center, I could see pubs, restaurants, pharmacies, butchers, small supermarkets, a church, fast-food chains, cafés, a gas station, as well as a tourist office. There was also a lot of movement of cars and of people of all ages around town.

The tourist office was the first place I visited when I arrived, since I needed information on how to get to the booked accommodation. In the tourist office, there was only one man, around his 60's. After giving me directions, this man mentioned that the owners of the B&B also did some work for the tourist office and that he was well acquainted with them. He offered to give them a call. In this moment, for the first time, during the fieldwork, I witnessed someone speaking Irish, in a natural and fluent manner. He spoke on the phone very casually, with no fear of making mistakes or of sounding rude to strangers. After the phone call, and after I mentioned to him the purpose of my visit to the Gaeltacht regions, he kindly gave me information on good areas to visit, stated his personal views regarding the language in Spiddal and even mentioned the Government's 20 year strategy. According to him, although Irish is still spoken daily in Spiddal, it is suffering in great part because the younger population is not interested in communicating in Irish. An important note is that the government policy was positively mentioned by this man, as a policy that he was aware and even proud of. In the middle of this exchange, another elderly man arrived in the tourist office. He turned out to be one of the owners of our accommodation, more precisely the husband, and he offered me a ride to its location. They both spoke to each other naturally, in Irish.

Upon my arrival in the B&B, I was greeted by the wife of the elderly man who managed the place. This B&B did not look at all like a formal B&B or hostel. There were children playing (their grandchildren) and toys were scattered around the house. It looked more like a cozy stay at a grandparents' house. I was the only guest in the house, possibly because of the time of year I chose to go there.

Over a welcoming cup a coffee, this woman talked a bit about the town and life in Spiddal, as well as about her life living there. She spoke with great care about a Catalonian man who lived and spent the rest of his life in Spiddal and was very close to her family. This man, who was an artisan, was the founder of the craft village of Spiddal, one of the main attractions for tourists today. She also mentioned the Irish language radio (Radió na Gaeltachta) and TV station (TG4), which are located in Connemara. She was very proud that one of her sons worked for TG4.

After chatting, this woman returned to her job in the kitchen and watching over her granddaughter. I noticed here that, at all times, only Irish was spoken, whether it was an exchange between husband and wife or between grandmother and grandchildren. Minutes later, a woman in her 30's, who seemed to be the mother of the grandchild, came into the house and also spoke to the family only in Irish.

I took the day to visit the craft village and to go on a walk on the beach. The craft village shops were mostly closed by the time I arrived, since tourism in October starts to die down and the artists start to close their shops earlier.



Figure 11: Craft village in Spiddal  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

Luckily, I found one shop open, which sold crafts, souvenirs and paintings. There was also a sign advertising art classes for kids. Almost all things that were for sale there had Irish words or phrases written on them. One detail that caught my attention was that all items were bright and colorful, different from most art and craft we have found in Ireland, which usually use earth like colors, such as grey, brown, green and blue, that reflect life in Ireland.



Figure 12: Crafts from craft village in Spiddal  
(Photo taken by the author)

As I browsed the shop with my partner and travel companion, I made some comments in Portuguese, our native language, about my impressions of the crafts. To my surprise, the artist, who heard us speaking, approached us in Portuguese. She explained to us that she was Brazilian and that a few years ago when she was living in London she married an Irish man, who was from Connemara, and that they later decided to make a permanent move to Connemara, with their children. She has been working on her art and giving classes in the craft village for the last couple of years. When asked about her impressions of living in the region, she mentioned that she was very happy to live there, as it is a good place to raise a family, it is calm and safe.

She also highlighted the community spirit prevalent in the region. According to her, the community there is very close knit. She explained that ‘when something happens in Brazil, when somebody dies or is killed, he or she just becomes part of a statistic. But here the entire community mourns and gives support to one another. For example, a couple of weeks ago one of the elders here got very sick and had to be hospitalized and the entire community got together to raise money to help the family and also gave a lot of emotional support’. She considered this sense of community in the area as one of the most striking qualities of the Connemara region. I asked her if she had learned to speak Irish and she mentioned that she had made an effort to learn as much as she could, but that she was not fluent. Her efforts were motivated by the fact that her children attend

school in the region and she wanted to be able to help them with school work. Another reason was that she wanted to ‘give back to the community’. She explained that sometimes people have an understanding that foreigners contribute negatively to the Irish language in Irish speaking regions, since they do not have the ability to speak it and, thus, resort to English. ‘I didn’t want people to see me this way and I wanted to, somehow, give back to the community that welcomed me. This is why most of the art that I make here are in Irish’.

Afterwards, I headed for a walk at the beach, where I saw people passing by in groups, going for a run or walking their dogs. Along the stroll, I passed by different people of all ages, most of whom were communicating with each other in Irish, although English was still heard.

After the walk, as the day turned to evening, I went back to the main street in the town center to look for a place where I could have dinner and I decided to go to a fast food chain. There, although the staff did not speak Irish to the costumers, I could hear, during our meal, families conversing in Irish. I also saw people that came in or left with takeout food greeting people they knew in the Irish language. Again, here I could also hear English, but Spiddal, so far, had been noticeably different from what I had experienced in the previous regions.

In my second day in Spiddal I decided to observe and explore a bit more of the town. Before doing so, I had breakfast at the accommodation. I was kindly greeted by the owner of the B&B who, whilst getting things ready, was listening to the Irish radio, Radió na Gaeltachta. This was something I noticed clearly on all three days I was there. Both she and her husband were always either listening to Radió na Gaeltachta or watching TG4, only rarely tuning to RTE for specific programs. In this specific morning, their grandson, of about 4 years of age, was there. This little boy passed by my table several times after I finished eating, as he followed his grandma in and out of the kitchen. Although he could not yet properly speak, the woman talked naturally to her grandson at all times in Irish. And he would listen and understand. ‘This boy wants to be outdoors all the time’, she told me. After turning and speaking to him she told me, ‘I’m asking if he wants to go to the beach today with his grandfather, the word in Irish is *trá*, you know?’

After breakfast, I made my way to the craft village to have a look at it again while all shops were open. The shops featured arts and crafts, traditional Irish baskets, porcelain, photography, jewelry, Irish language products and a café. The café was particularly busy

with people that looked like tourists or were from out of town. This was not surprising, because the artist I met the day before told me about the café and that it had won awards for its food. I then went into the Irish products shop, which was filled with a variety of things in Irish. There were books, for both children and adults, games, such as scrabble, t-shirts with Irish phrases, CD's and souvenirs.



Figure 13: Basket making at the craft village in Spiddal  
(Photo taken by the author)

When I finished browsing the craft village, I went back to the town center to observe a bit more. I first decided to go to the tourist office. I wanted to talk to the man I had previously met the day before to ask for some recommendations regarding the Aran Islands and other Gaeltacht regions. A few minutes after I got there and we started talking, a man of about the same age as the tourist office representative walked in and they spoke to each other only in Irish. The conversation between them started to sound more and more like an argument and when the tourist officer stopped to ask me, ‘is there anymore I can do for you?’, I knew it was my cue to leave.

After leaving the tourist office, I met with my partner to have a look around the town center. Most businesses in town had Irish names and some had bilingual signs. The road signs were completely in Irish. I passed by a public library which had all signs in both English and Irish and even a church which had a welcome sign outside in Irish. Something intriguing that I came across was a sign at a bridge whose translation to English had been crossed out in red (see fig. 14).



Figure 14: Vandalized sign in Spiddal  
(Photo taken by the author)

I strolled through the beach again and once more I heard several people speaking in Irish and others talking to each other in English. I had dinner, later on, once again at the fast food chain and, like the day before, I heard families speaking to each other in Irish. This time, I saw two little boys, of about 6 years of age, who were having a very exciting conversation with one another in Irish. This was spellbinding because here Irish was spoken beyond school doors. After my meal, I went to the pub across the street to observe in a different setting. When I arrived at the pub I heard a group of people, of about 30 years of age, at a table talking to each other in Irish. However, as soon as I settled in a table close by and other tourists walked in, they quickly shifted to English and I did not hear Irish again for the rest of my time there.

### 5.5.2 Inishmore (Inis Mór), Aran Islands

My hosts at the accommodation in Spiddal had mentioned the possibility that I could get the bus to go the Aran Islands right in front of the B&B, if I called beforehand to let them know. This way, I would not have to go through the trouble of going back to Galway city. I did as they suggested and, in the morning, I took the bus (a double-decker tour bus), which arrived with plenty of tourists.

Since I had planned a day trip and I would not have time to see more than one island, I had to choose between going to Inishmore (Inis Mór), Inishmaan (Inis Meain) or

Inisheer (Inis Oírr). I decided to visit the largest one, Inishmore. I was in doubt about visiting the Aran Islands, since I knew it attracted many tourists and, therefore, might not provide reliable ethnographic information. However, I was informed by the tourist officer that it was worth going, even though there might be a lot of tourists there.

Arriving in Rossaveal (Ros an Mhíl), a small village in Connemara where the ferries depart from, I saw that there were other tour buses already there and also people that came on their own, by car. There was a surprising large number of tourists for the time of the year, especially since the weather was bad on the day I chose to go there. Both the tourist officer and my hosts at the B&B told me that there had been investments on tourism for the Aran Islands and that they had acquired newer, bigger and better ferries. The ferries looked new and were indeed very big in comparison to the ferry I took to Cape Clear Island. Although there were about three or four of them, all of the passengers were able to fit into just one.



Figure 15: Aran Islands ferry  
(Photo taken by the author)

The trip from Rossaveal to Inishmore took about 40 minutes. Inside the ferry it felt very crowded, but despite the bad weather the trip went well and the ferry crew (all young men) sold tea, coffee and snacks to passengers.

Upon arrival at the island and as soon as I stepped out of the ferry, I could spot many bike rentals, tour vans and carriages at the disposal of the tourists. It seemed like

they were already expecting all of us. All of the locals working on these services appeared to be older men (around their 50-60's).

I decided to go to the tourist office first to get some information and suggestions on the best ways to see the island. As there were many people arriving on the island, I had to wait in line to speak to a tourist officer. Just ahead of me was a young boy, who seemed to be Irish, maybe 18 to 20 years old. In his turn, he immediately and very eagerly spoke to the lady at the tourist office in Irish, although he seemed not to be fluent, as he made a few pauses while he was asking questions. The tourist officer responded to the boy in Irish. After the exchange, the boy, who was by himself, rented a bike and took off. I don't know if the boy's motive for going to the Aran Islands was to practice his Irish, for merely tourism, or both, but I was taken aback by his positive attitude and effort towards using the knowledge of Irish that he had out of his own will.

After getting some information, I decided to take a tour van, because of the cold wind and rainy weather. I took the tour along with twelve other foreigners. The driver was a local and, along all of the way, he would tell stories, the history and curiosities about the island. On the way, the driver passed by another tour van, stopped alongside the other van and exchanged a quick conversation with the other driver in Irish. The driver then took us to the Dun Aengus (Dún Aonghasa) fort and gave us about two hours to tour around, take pictures or shop for crafts and have coffee. Crafts and Aran sweater shops, the Dun Aengus entrance and the coffee shop were all situated close to one another.



Figure 16 Shops in the Aran Islands  
(Photo taken by the author)

After these two hours to explore freely, we returned to the van, and the driver took us to see a few ruins and the beach, where we sighted seals.

We, then, returned to where we had initiated the tour. There, besides the bike rentals and tourist office, there were also pubs, restaurants, a small supermarket, a fast food chain and the Aran Sweater Market. I decided to browse around the sweater market first. Most of the staff working there were young boys and girls. When they were not helping or speaking to tourists, I could hear some of them speaking to each other in Irish, although some spoke in English. Later, I went to a pub close by for a cup of coffee. As most of the tourists finished touring around the island at around the same time, the pub was full of groups of people from all over the world. Because of the noise and agitation inside the pub it was very hard to hear or pay attention to the locals working there. However, like the sweater market, the people working behind the counters were mostly young boys and girls.



Figure 17: Aran Sweaters in the Aran Islands  
(Photo taken by the author)

When I was done, I headed to the pier to wait for the ferry. This time, in the ferry, I sat close to the window and two young boys, around their 20's, sat beside me. They seemed to be acquainted with the crew, because they spent the entire trip talking to them. All of their conversation, from the time I sat in the ferry until we arrived back in Rossaveal, took place only in Irish. When the crew needed to give assistance to passengers, due to turbulence caused by the weather that had worsened, they would turn

to English, but upon returning to their friends, they would immediately shift back to Irish. Most impressive here and in Spiddal was the amount of young people I saw who were making use of Irish in their daily lives, something I hadn't seen in the previous Gaeltacht regions visited.

## **5.6 County Mayo**

### **5.6.1 Belmullet (An Béal Mhuirthead)**

Due to limited transportation, getting to the Gaeltacht in county Mayo was challenging. I had to make many bus connections to be able to get there. Because the bus departing from Ballina goes there only once a day, arriving in the evening, I had to book an accommodation for two nights. I chose and booked a room at a B&B on the same day I traveled there.

Since it was already dark when I arrived, I was not sure which way to go to get to the B&B. Perhaps because I looked lost or like a tourist, a man who was leaving a fast food restaurant with his son offered to help me with directions. After trying to explain the directions to me, he offered and insisted to give me a ride. He said it was on the way to his house and would be no trouble. On the way, he told me that he was French and that he married an Irish woman years ago. He mentioned that his father had bought land there and that he always liked the region when he visited. When he got married, he made the permanent move to Belmullet. His son, who was wearing a soccer uniform, was about 8 years old, and chatted about his school and his interests in sports. He asked me what had brought me to Belmullet and was surprised to find I was just visiting there.

When I got to the B&B, I met the owner, a nice lady in her late 40's. After I dropped my bags, she offered to take me to town so I could find a place to have dinner. There were several options, from fast food to costlier restaurants, such as the one at the town hotel. I chose to go somewhere in between, a Chinese restaurant. Something that caught my attention was how the B&B owner, and others, thought it was strange that I was in town. During the ride to the restaurant she was curious and asked if I was visiting family in Belmullet. I told her 'no' and that I just wanted to get to know the town. Even the young Irish girl working at the counter at the Chinese restaurant was curious and asked me where I was from.

The next day I got up early and had breakfast at the accommodation. There seemed to be only one other guest there, an Irish person. I left early so I could explore the town. Belmullet seemed to be very rural and agriculture appeared to be the main economic activity of the area. When I was walking towards the town center I saw farms and also a few tractors passing by. Although very rural, Belmullet was bigger than Spiddal. There were several supermarkets and convenience stores of well known name brands, there were many shops and businesses such as restaurants, fast food places, barbers, cafés and pubs. There was also a tourist office, but it was closed during the days I was there.

Although the road signs were in Irish, or bilingual, it did not really feel like I was in a Gaeltacht area. This was because the businesses in town did not have Irish names and I could not hear anyone speaking in Irish.



Figure 18: Road sign in Belmullet  
(Photo taken by the author)

I went for a walk at the beach and around town, during which I only heard locals, of all ages, speaking in English. After the walk, I stopped at a café for a cup of coffee and to observe the place. In the café, there were families with children, couples and friends having coffee. I felt a little uncomfortable because everyone there would look at me with curiosity from time to time, even the staff. During my time there, I only heard one man, maybe in his late 20's, speaking in Irish over the phone. I was sitting by the window,

where I had a view of the town center and as I looked out the window I saw the French man I had met the day before and his son. This time he was with his wife, in the car, picking up food to take home. They spotted me right away, they waved, and seemed really happy to see me.

After coffee, I walked around the town center and also had a look at the supermarket. There, all of the ads put up by the locals at the window were in English. The locals I saw and heard there only spoke in English.

Afterwards, I headed to a fast food restaurant to have an early dinner. Although the restaurant had an Irish name, the staff did not speak in Irish to each other and the signs, as well as the menus, were all in English. I was the only one eating in. When I was done, I walked around the town a bit more to take pictures and then returned early to the B&B to rest, since I would take the bus early in the morning. Arriving there, the owner greeted me at the door to ask how my day went. I took advantage of the moment to ask her about the Irish language. When I asked if she spoke the language, she replied 'no'. According to her, no one in her family speaks it, although her children would have some knowledge of it because they learned it in school. I asked her about the town and she told me that she did not think most of the people in town spoke Irish either. She also said that there might be more Irish speakers towards the coast, although she was not sure. However, according to her, in Belmullet there definitely would not be many people speaking Irish.

#### 5.6.2 Achill Island (Acaill)

My initial plan was to go to Achill right after visiting Belmullet. My plan had to be changed along the way because buses to Achill were very limited. I, then, decided to head to Donegal to undertake the necessary visits there and head to Achill on the way back to Galway, where I would get transportation back home. Even when I came back from my trip to Donegal, it was difficult to get access to Achill without a car. There is only one bus, which departs from Westport, and the bus hours made it difficult for me to get there. Because of this, I missed the bus, coming from Donegal, and had to stay one night in Sligo, so that I could catch the next bus for Westport in the morning. In Westport, I had to wait a few hours to get the bus for Achill, which would only arrive there in the evening. Strangely, the bus to return from Achill to Westport, on the following day, would leave in the morning. This meant that I was only able to stay one night; in fact, only a few hours. Therefore, I did not have much time for observations.

I had made a reservation at a B&B the day before, while I was at Sligo. I told the owner I would be arriving by bus, and since she knew the bus would arrive in the evening she offered to pick me up at the bus stop. Getting there, I met the B&B owner, who drove me to the accommodation so I could leave my things. Afterwards, she offered to drive me back to town so I could choose a place to have dinner. As it was dark, it was difficult to observe the town more carefully, but it seemed to be a small place. My host told me that there were only two options for dinner in town, which were two different pubs that also served food. She mentioned that they might be closing early because of the time of the year but that they would surely have no problem serving me. These two pubs also had accommodations upstairs. I chose to go to the one that was closest to the B&B, since I would walk back afterwards in the dark.



Figure 19: Achill Island bridge  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

I thought I might be the only one there, but there were a few locals and guests who were staying at their accommodation there. The owners, a couple around their 60's, were really surprised by my presence there, as a foreign tourist, and were very curious. While I was ordering, the owner asked me where I was from and what had brought me to Ireland and Achill. He also mentioned that they do not get many tourists there, in Achill, especially at this time of year. During our meal, everyone there seemed very curious about me. During the entire time I was there I did not hear anyone speaking in Irish, nor did the pub have decorations or signs in Irish, or even traditional music (I was there on a

Friday night). There was no music playing and, except for a television set that was on, the pub was very quiet.

After dinner, I went to the counter to pay the owner and I took the opportunity to ask if he spoke Irish. He answered 'yes'. I asked him if he used it at home with his family or daily while working in the pub and he answered 'no'. He told me that he was fluent in the language but he did not use it. When I asked him why, he turned to a small group that was having beer at the bar and asked them something in Irish. They all responded, 'ah...well, we are all just really lazy, that's why'. One of them said, 'I don't really know why we don't speak it but I think it's probably because it's quicker to use English'. After that, the owner insisted in taking me back to the B&B and we chatted a bit along the way.

Once in the B&B, I noticed that the owner was still awake in the living room downstairs. I approached her to ask her if she spoke Irish. She answered 'yes' and explained that she was fluent in Irish, but only because she really enjoyed studying and learning it when she was in school. According to her, the experience her husband and her son had was extremely different and that none of them were able to speak it today. When I asked her about the island, she told me that although parts of it are considered Gaeltacht, no one speaks Irish there anymore. 'You just won't hear it around here anymore', she said. I asked if this was in all of the island or in certain places and she answered that unfortunately this reality stood for the entire island today. She mentioned that she thought this was a pity and that she had heard a lot of the debate on whether Irish should still be compulsory throughout Ireland today, but she expressed that in her view it should remain. According to her, the country would lose a lot if Irish was not taught in schools.

In the morning, after breakfast, her husband drove me to the bus stop so I could catch the bus back. The bus stop was in front of the only supermarket in the area, close to the bridge that connects the island. I could see a souvenir shop and a sign of a tourist office, but I couldn't see any other businesses.

## **5.7 County Donegal**

### **5.7.1 Carrick (An Charraig)**

I took the bus from Belmullet back to Ballina and from there I took another bus to go to Sligo to be able to go to county Donegal, since there were no direct options. After a few hours of traveling, I arrived in Donegal around lunch time. As soon as I got to

Donegal town I went straight to the tourist office, so that I could plan out where I would be going and how. I sat to speak to the only tourist officer there, a woman around her 60's. I told her that I wanted to visit Irish speaking regions in county Donegal and explained that I was doing research for my thesis. She told me right away that she knew the best places for me to go to and took out a few maps to explain to me. She recommended that I go first to Carrick, and spend a day or two there, and then go to Glencolmcille. According to her, some areas in Donegal aren't speaking Irish anymore, although they are considered part of the Gaeltacht, but that these regions still definitely are. She explained that there is a mini bus that leaves Donegal town once or twice a day and that it goes to these villages, so I wouldn't have a problem getting there. She also mentioned that she knew two people who she thought could help me with my research in Glencolmcille. One was a manager of the folk village and the other was an official of the Irish language school. At that moment, she called both of them and told them who I was and that I would be going to Glencolmcille in a day or two to speak to them. She even put me on the phone with one of them to speak and say hello. The tourist officer gave me pamphlets with the information I needed about the regions and the places to be visited, and also wrote down the names and telephone numbers of the people I would be meeting. I thanked her and left quickly to have lunch as the mini bus would be leaving in a few minutes.

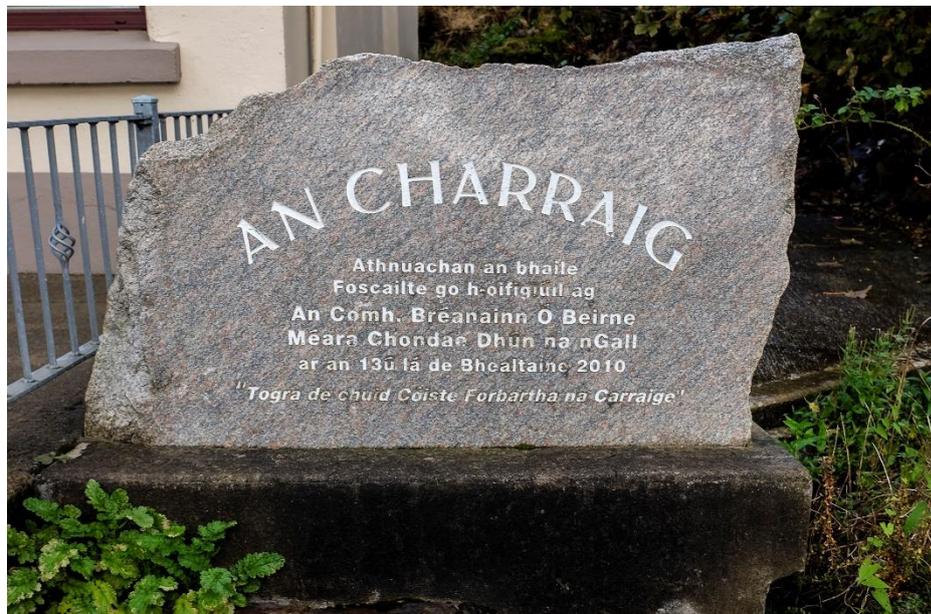


Figure 20: Sign in Carrick  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

I got in the bus and I seemed to be the only tourist there. There weren't many passengers and all of them seemed to be locals, mostly elders. As the bus left Donegal town, the landscape became more rural, but it was different from other regions that I visited. There seemed to be more hills, mountains and rocks. The bus would stop in different small villages along the way. I got off when the bus stopped in the middle of the village of Carrick.

The tourist officer in Donegal had handwritten to me a small list with accommodation options that she knew of in Carrick and Glencolmcille. She told me, however, that she didn't know if they were all still open, since summer was already over, but that maybe at least one would still be operating. To top that off, I went without booking anything, which meant that there was a possibility of finding no rooms available. I realized the bus had stopped right in front of the accommodation option the tourist officer had given me. It worked as a pub on the bottom floor and as a B&B/self-catering (depending on whether you wanted to pay for breakfast or not) on the floors above it. I went in the pub and asked a woman, the only bartender there, if there were any rooms available. She answered positively and I decided to book one night, with breakfast included, and add an additional night later if I thought I needed more time there. There were mostly elderly men in the pub.

I left my things in the accommodation and went out to have a look at the village and take some pictures. The village was very small, so the walk was quite short. Besides the accommodation I was in, there seemed to be another self-catering in the village, but it appeared to be already closed due to the end of the summer season. There were very few shops. There were two small local supermarkets/convenience stores, a church, a post office and a café. Although the café was open, it looked empty, with none or very few costumers. In front of one of the supermarkets, there were two old gas pumps. Besides the pub, where my accommodation was, there was another smaller pub across the street. I saw a Chinese food take out, which was closed for staff holidays, and there was also a food truck that sold burgers. It opened only in the evening and was very busy on the days that I was there. The road signs in the village were mostly in Irish and in the entrance of the village, there was a carved stone with the village name in Irish, with what seemed to be a welcome message, also in Irish. Near the entrance there was a barn that had a sign indicating it sold local crafts, but it was closed the days that I was there.

I went in one of the supermarkets to buy instant meals for dinner and there I didn't see any signs in Irish. At the counter, when I went to pay, I had a quick conversation with the woman there, and noticed that her English accent was very different from those of other regions I visited. It reminded me of the Northern Ireland accent. I then went to the other supermarket to have a look and also buy some fruit. The staff there were also women. After paying, I went to look at the window to see the signs and flyers put up by locals. Most of them were in English, although there were some very few bilingual. In both supermarkets and while I was walking around the village I did not hear anyone speaking Irish. Afterwards, I went back to the accommodation to plan what I would be doing the next day. From the window in my room I could see that there was great movement of cars in the village and that the local supermarket was quite busy throughout the day. I also saw a few tractors passing by frequently.

In Carrick, tourism to the Slieve League cliffs, which are just a few kilometers away, is much promoted and it seems to be an important economic activity for the area. I had seen on the internet that there was a local couple who rented bikes for tourists who wanted to explore the region and the Slieve League cliffs. However, not only was the weather unfavorable, but after contacting them I found out that the bike rentals were only available during the summer season. After much search on the internet, I found out that there was a small business that did tours to Slieve League departing from Carrick, on demand. This tour was done by mini bus and worked as a kind of shuttle service, which would take me to the cliffs and then back to the accommodation. I then decided to add an extra night in Carrick to go to the cliffs early in the morning the next day.

I got up early and went downstairs for breakfast. Besides me, there were also two other couples and a young woman having breakfast. The breakfast tables were separate from the rest of the pub. I also noticed that there were locals arriving at the pub while I was there. Afterwards, I got my things and went out to the front of the accommodation to wait for the mini bus to go to Slieve League. The driver, a man in his 60's, arrived at the scheduled time. I was the only passenger in the bus tour. On the way to the cliffs, I spoke to the driver and asked if he spoke Irish and if it was still spoken in the area. He told me that he did speak Irish fluently, but that unfortunately people did not speak it anymore around the area. I asked why and he said that he thought it was because the young people did not want to use it. He mentioned that he did not use it at home either, but that his wife

was from the UK, so she did not know any Irish and that made it difficult to speak it at home.

We passed a café and craft shop close to the cliffs and then reached a gate. Once we got there, an old man who was standing outside, opened the gate for us and we started to approach the cliffs. The driver stopped along the way for me to take pictures of the scenery and told me stories about the area. Along the way and wherever we stopped, I saw a lot of sheep moving freely around the land. The driver told me that the land which we were in and where the cliffs are located were owned by various local farmers, including himself. He told me that he himself has some sheep there and that they paint the back of the sheep with different colors to identify which sheep belong to whom. He also mentioned that that was the reason there was a gate earlier on. I then got back on the bus and he took me to the beginning of the trail leading to the cliffs. There was a parking lot there with a few other tourists who had come on their own by car. There was also another mini bus from the same tour business as ours. Our driver introduced me to the other mini bus driver, also a man around his 60's, who, he told us, was his cousin. They both gave me some information about the cliffs.

Despite the bad weather, as it was very windy and rainy, there were more tourists than I had expected going up the cliffs. The walk up was very rocky and, as I made my way up, the windier it got. I had to be careful since, because of the rain, the path was slippery. I only went up to a certain point, where I was able to take a couple of good pictures, then, I made my way back down. I spent perhaps 40 to 60 minutes at the cliffs. At the parking lot, I met the bus driver who was waiting for me and we headed back. On the way back, I asked the driver if it would be possible to make a quick stop at the café I had seen on the way. He told me he would drop me off there and pick me up in 30 minutes, during which time he would go home for a break. At the café there were a few other tourists. I ordered coffee and a snack, then, I went to look around the craft shop. For sale, there were a few books written in Irish, maps and guides of the area, as well as traditional Irish souvenirs such as knitted sweaters, scarfs and objects with Celtic and Irish symbols. At one of the displays, I saw some handmade tweed scarfs, hats and clothing for sale from a local business. There was a business card next to the items, which mentioned that the business was from Kilcar, a village I remembered was right next to Carrick, where I was staying. The card also mentioned that visits were possible for shopping and to see the weaving process. I took the card with me, in case I might decide to pay that business a

visit. I bought a few souvenirs, then I headed to meet the driver, who took me back to my accommodation in Carrick.

#### 5.7.2 Kilcar (Cill Charthaigh)

When I arrived back from Slieve League, I immediately checked the timetable for the mini bus I took from Donegal town to Carrick because I remembered it passed by Kilcar on the way. I thought that, depending on the bus hours, I would be able to make a quick trip to Kilcar. This village was close to Carrick but not close enough for me to go on foot. After checking the bus timetable, I realized that I would be able to arrange a two-hour visit to Kilcar, taking the mini bus there and coming back to Carrick. Besides my interest in visiting the handmade tweed factory, I thought it would be a good opportunity to see another Gaeltacht village in county Donegal.

I got on the mini bus and the driver was the same fellow from the day before. Once again, there were mostly elders in the bus. The trip from Carrick to Kilcar was very quick, taking, perhaps, 10 minutes. The bus dropped me off in front of a small supermarket in the village. The first thing I did when I got there was ask where the factory was. There was only a young boy working at the counter of the supermarket. He told me that the factory was just straight ahead, I couldn't miss it. While walking towards it, I observed and took pictures of the village. It was just as small as Carrick, but there seemed to be less movement of cars and people there. It was more silent and calmer. I saw a few pubs, some of which had very old gas pumps in front of them. Besides the small supermarket where I went for information, there was also another small supermarket/convenience store along the way, which was of a known brand, and a post office. These seemed to be the only businesses in the village, in addition to the factory.



Figure 21: Hand weaving at factory in Kilcar  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

The factory was indeed very easy to find, located very close from where the bus had dropped me off. There were many cars at the parking lot when I arrived. The factory seemed to be next to a small commercial building with a coffee shop, library, tourist office and also a small Irish summer school, which was closed at the time I was there. When I was making my way to the factory, an American woman around her 60's was leaving the premises and she spoke very highly of the place and their products to me. She told me she worked as a journalist and that every time she was in Ireland, she always tried to pay a visit to the factory. I walked in and found a woman, in her 60's, behind a counter. This woman welcomed me and told me I was free to browse around the shop or to go upstairs to see the men at work in the weaving room, while they were still in their working hours. I took a couple of minutes to browse the products first. They ranged from scarves to hats, cushions, blankets, shawls, vests, and yarn. All items were inspired on traditional Irish apparel. While I looked around, the woman who had welcomed me went into the room next door to work on the final touches of a blanket. Afterwards, I hurried upstairs to the weaving room, as the working hours of the employees would be ending shortly. The factory was very simple and had a small staff. I passed by a young girl who was ironing the clothing, on my way upstairs, then I went in the weaving room. Like other rooms in the factory, this room had a bilingual sign at the door. When I walked in, I saw three men working. Two of them were in their 60's and one was younger, perhaps his late 30's.

They all worked individually on wooden looms, creating different designs, patterns and colors. Everything was done manually and they worked under much noise created by the machines. Each one of them took their time to show me how the process worked and on what creation they were working on. They looked very happy to explain their work to me. It seemed like they felt proud of the work they were doing. One of the 60 year old men had a picture of a baby glued to the loom he was working on. The baby was laying on a blue blanket in the photo. I asked him if it was his grandson. He told me ‘yes’ and that he had made that blanket in the picture himself, especially for his grandson. He told me he was sad that his son would be moving to Boston soon with his wife, and so he wouldn’t be able to see his grandson as frequently.



Figure 22: Wooden sign - ‘tá cúpla focal agam’  
(Photo taken by the author)

After I saw the weaving room, the men told me I could go to the room downstairs to see the wool and the machines with which they made the yarn. I took some pictures, then I thanked them for their time and I headed back to the main area downstairs, where I had first looked at the products. I chose some products to take with me. The woman who had been there when I walked in came to help me with my purchases. While I was paying, I noticed that there were welcome signs on the main door in Irish. There was also a small wooden sign from Foras na Gaeilge, the institution responsible for the promotion of Irish throughout Ireland, written ‘tá cúpla focal agam’ (I know/have some Irish words). I remember I had seen one of these on the window of the Irish summer school in Cape

Clear, however reading ‘tá gaeilge agam’ (I know/have Irish). I asked the woman about the Irish language in the village of Kilcar and she said it was not spoken anymore and that I wouldn’t hear it daily. She told me that she did speak Irish fluently and that a lot of people there did as well, but they just did not use it. She told me a few words in Irish to show me that she was a speaker and, then, she said that the factory was recognized as bilingual, so the staff would greet and help customers in the Irish language if they wish to.

I thanked the woman at the factory, then, I made my way towards the bus stop, since I did not have a lot of time. On the way, I stopped at one of the small supermarkets to get a cup of coffee from a machine. There were a few locals there, but I did not hear anyone speaking Irish during the time that I was there, nor while I waited for the bus at the stop. I got the bus at the scheduled time and once again I met the same young driver and a few elderly passengers. On the way back to Carrick I noticed, this time, that just before the entrance to the village, there was a school and there was also a building with the sign of Údarás na Gaeltachta (Gaeltacht Authority), which is the institution responsible for the development of the Irish speaking regions. When I arrived back in the village, I saw a lot of students in their uniform waiting for their parents to pick them up or waiting at the stop for the next bus. There were many children, most of whom looked around their preteen or teen years. I did not hear any of them speaking Irish. I stopped at the supermarket to buy an instant dinner and spoke to a woman in her 30’s working at the counter. I asked her if she spoke Irish. She told me ‘no’, that actually she was never very good at it and was not able to speak it. She said, ‘to tell you the truth, my little daughter speaks better than I do’. Her daughter, who was in a school uniform, was beside her at the counter and must have been around seven years old. She continued that she thought the schools were teaching Irish in a different and better way nowadays, that it was different from when she learned it. She thought her daughter, through school, had acquired better grammar and speaking competencies. After that exchange, I headed for the accommodation so that I could plan out what I would be doing the following day.

### 5.7.3 Glencolmcille (Gleann Cholm Cille)

I planned to get the regular public transportation from Carrick to Glencolmcille. The tourist officer had previously given me the bus timetables, so that I would be able to organize my trip as I went along. I took the regular bus because, according to the

timetable, the minibus would not go as far as Glencolmcille. I had to be careful not to miss the bus, however, since it only went there once a day. I got up early in the morning to get my things and get ready to go. This time, I did not pay for breakfast and used the kitchen to prepare an instant breakfast meal. I got on the bus at the stop on time. There were very few people on the bus. Besides me, there were, maybe, two or three people. The further the bus went, the more isolated and rural it became, with brown and green sceneries filled with mountains and sheep along the way. The trip took about 15 minutes from Carrick to Glencolmcille.

This bus stopped at the entrance of the village, next to a convenience store. During the bus ride, I had taken a look at the accommodation list for Glencolmcille which the tourist officer in Donegal had given me. She had written as first option a hostel, which she recommended, but she also listed two other accommodations, in case the first one did not work out. I decided to check the hostel first. I went quickly in the convenience store, where there was a woman and a man in their 60's, to ask for directions. They told me that I should just keep going straight, following the road, but that they were not sure the hostel would still be open because of the time of year. They told me they actually did not know if any of the accommodations were still open. As suggested, I made my way to the main road of the village. My first impression was that it was very quiet. I did not see people on the streets or a lot of businesses open. There was not a lot of movement of cars either. It did not look like it was abandoned, but it did seem like there was little life there. Also, the season had already caused the village and the businesses to die down. Most of the houses seemed to be scattered throughout the village, rather than close to the main street, with a good distance between each house. Glencolmcille was surrounded by mountains. I passed by a small supermarket, which was open and was the only one I saw while I was there, and I also saw a small tourist office, which was closed. I walked a little bit more until I saw a road sign with the name of the hostel the tourist officer in Donegal had given me, indicating that I should take the road on the right.

I took that road and kept walking, dragging my bags on a road that gradually became less and less paved. In addition, this road was going up a hill. At a certain point, I saw another sign with the hostel name on it and thought I had finally arrived. I was wrong. As I got closer to the sign, I saw it indicated one or two kilometers more, so I kept going. After a long walk, I finally arrived at the hostel, which, from far away, it was possible to see that it was very different from traditional homes in Ireland. Its architecture

was contemporary and young looking. I noticed that there was no one around and no cars in the parking lot, but I assumed it was due to the fact that we were already in October. When I got to the door, I saw a sign which said the owner would be right back and, indicating his contact number to call. My cellphone was not working during the trips to Galway, Mayo and Donegal, so after some thought, I decided to ask someone close by to make the call for me, if possible. I decided to look for someone who could help me with the call. There were no close neighbors, since most of the houses in Glencolmcille were scattered. So, I took a trail which was supposed to lead to the beach and folk village. The trail was longer than I had expected but, I finally spotted the folk village. The folk village was made up of several thatched, traditional rural houses, which included a museum, a café and a craft shop. I went in the café first, but the woman working there told me she did not have a phone. She suggested that I try the craft shop. There, I explained to the woman at the counter what happened and she was kind enough to let me use her telephone. I tried calling once, but had no answer. I waited a couple of minutes to call again and on the second try I was able to contact the hostel owner. He told me that he was in Dublin to see family and would only be back in a few days and apologized for not being able to help. I asked the woman at the counter if there was any other accommodation available in the village. She asked around the rest of the staff and contacted a B&B. The owner spoke to me on the phone and gave me the good news that he still had rooms available. He asked that I wait in front of the folk village and he would pick me up by car.

The B&B owner met me in no time in front of the folk village. He was around his 30's. He asked me where I was from and why I had decided to visit Glencolmcille. I told him about my research on the Irish language. According to him, Irish is not much spoken in the village anymore. He told me, 'you will hear a lot of Irish in the summertime, when the students are here. But after summer, it's pretty much gone'. He mentioned that the locals do not communicate with each other as much in Irish anymore, although they have the ability to speak the language, and that he thought the young people were not interested in Irish.

As it turned out, the B&B was in a much better location, close to the center of the village, near the beach, the folk village, the Irish language school, pubs and restaurants. It was, in fact, more of a guesthouse than a B&B and there were surprisingly quite a few tourists there, despite the season. Most of these tourists were young, although there were families, and a few of them seemed to be from United States.

I left my things in the room and immediately got my camera to head out. I knew I did not have a lot of time to explore the village because I had to get the bus, which only came once a day, early in the morning the next day. Because of the tight schedule, I headed straight to the Irish language school and the folk village to try to speak and conduct interviews, if possible, with the key people the tourist officer in Donegal had made arrangements for me to talk to. I went first to the Irish language school, but it was closest. The official I was supposed to talk to was not there. However, I spoke to a teacher who gave him a call. During the call, she only spoke in Irish. When she was done, she told me that he would be coming to the school to meet me in approximately an hour. Since it was already lunch time, I told her I would be going to the café at the folk village for a quick lunch and would come back to the school to meet him in an hour. I moved towards the folk village which was just a few steps away. The folk village seemed to be the one place in Glencolmcille with the most people. There were quite a few tourists there, most of whom came to visit by car. I had a glance at the craft shop, where I saw traditional Irish products, such as knitted sweaters, scarves, a few products from the factory I visited the day before and many products with Celtic symbols. There was a book and game section, with books such as *The Little Prince* in Irish and games such as Scrabble and Monopoly in Irish for sale. After browsing, I went to the café. There were other customers there, although I was not sure if they were tourists or locals. The café did not have a big menu and most of the food offered was traditional, with desserts such as apple pie and tea brack, for example. Possibly because of tourism, most of the signs there were in English. While I was having lunch, a man, around his late 50's or early 60's, approached me and asked me my name. He introduced himself and told me he was an official at the school. He told me that he would be heading there and would be waiting for me, but that I did not have to hurry. I finished my meal, then, I went back to the school.

Although I did not take a tour of the school, from the outside and from what I could see at the reception, it looked like a well-structured school. It resembled language schools abroad like *Instituto Cervantes* or *Alliance Française*. No classes were being held while I was there and I only saw the staff of the school. The official's room was right at the reception area and, as I walked into the school, he waved for me to step into his office. I told him about myself and explained my study. He was very curious and asked more details about my research. He was also curious about my nationality and why I had specifically chosen to study in Ireland. During the interview, we must have been

interrupted at least four times. He seemed to be a busy person, with people walking into his office to consult information from time to time. All of the people that interrupted our interview to talk to him, addressed him in Irish.

The official told me a little bit about the story and founding of the school. According to him the school functions from Easter until the end of October, and they receive students of many different nationalities, who for various different reasons want to learn Irish. He told me there is a tradition at the school, in which whenever there is a new student from a nationality which they never had enrolled before, the school claps when they come in. However, he told me he would not be clapping for me since this year they had a student from Brazil for the very first time during the summer. The official also talked about the village of Glencolmcille, about his view regarding the Irish language, and about his work in teaching and promoting it. He emphasized very much that the school focuses on teaching based on fun. Before we finished, he gave me some materials which he thought might be useful for me and my research, including a sample of the language book the school developed for teaching Irish.

After I thanked him and left, I went straight to the folk village, since I knew I would not much time remaining to speak to the manager there. Once there, I asked the staff to speak to the person the tourist office had indicated and mentioned that I had previously spoken to her on the phone. After a couple of minutes, the manager came out of the office to talk to me. She was a woman in her 40's. She told me she was usually very busy but she remembered she had spoken to me over the phone and said she would think of a way to squeeze in some minutes to chat with me. She thought for a moment, then, she suggested that I have a look at the museum of the folk village first. There, I would be able to learn the story of the museum, of the village, and about the culture and traditions of the area. She gave me a free pass and also a remote control to pause or change the volume whenever I thought necessary during the videos projected. She told me that while I was in the museum, she would get some work done and then she would meet me for coffee and chat in their coffee shop. She also gave me their flyers, a map of the village of Glencolmcille and some sheets with information about the folk village.

I headed to the museum area, where there were about seven thatched cottages, one close to the other. Besides me, there were maybe two other families visiting the museum. Each cottage housed different objects and information, as well as videos. The first one focused on the story of both the folk village and Glencolmcille, while the other cottages

featured objects and stories about schools in the area, about pubs, and about fishing and fishermen. Some cottages reproduced traditional rural homes. Inside these cottages, one could see traditional beds and knitted blankets, handmade baskets and crosses, spinning wheels, as well as other daily objects used in rural Ireland years ago. All of the signs in the museum were bilingual.



Figure 23: Folk village in Glencolmcille  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

After I had visited the museum and taken pictures, I headed back to the manager's office, so that we could have a chat. At this time, there were 30 to 35 minutes left before closing, so there were not many tourists remaining in the premises. The manager and I went to the café and she herself prepared coffee and slices of tea brack for us. I decided not to conduct a formal interview, since we were having a very informal and friendly conversation and I did not think it recording would be appropriate. She talked about her views on the Irish language, although she told me she had not really thought about the subject before. She actually thanked me a few times for bringing it up and prompting her to reflect on things. While we had coffee, she told me that she was fluent in Irish, but that she did not speak it daily and that indeed I would not hear it much in Glencolmcille unless it were during the summertime. She told me she thought she was not speaking it because today we are always in such a hurry and it is just quicker to speak English. According to her, it would take a little bit more time to speak Irish to someone as sometimes you or the other person might not be fluent and you would need to listen carefully or speak slowly

at times. Also, there might be a difficulty due to different accents. She mentioned, then, the importance and impact the Irish language school had in Glencolmcille. In her opinion, the school was actually helping keep the language alive there because the students were so eager to learn and to speak Irish as much as they could, that they would speak to everybody in the village in Irish. Because these students are learning, the locals do not feel so much pressure to speak perfectly. Therefore, in the summertime, when the students are around, Irish will be heard everywhere, whereas in the winter it starts to die down. At a certain point, she reflected on my question as to why people were not speaking Irish anymore and she told me, 'I think that it is not the language that is disappearing, it's the people'.

I also asked her if the folk village, or the region, received any kind of support from governmental institutions. She told me that, from time to time, they did receive some sort of support for the folk village, which was very helpful but was limited. She gave an example that a few years ago an institution offered to create a logo for them, which, she mentioned, was great to increase visibility for tourists. She also mentioned how helpful the 'Wild Atlantic Way' had been, referring to the tourist campaign created by Fáilte Ireland for tourism along the west coast of Ireland from Cork all the way to Donegal. According to her, the 'Wild Atlantic Way' has definitely put Glencolmcille on the map and has helped tourism in the region considerably. At the end of our conversation over coffee, I asked her about her thoughts on the future of the language. She told me that she thought it would be an incredible shame if the language died because it is so connected to the Irish history and culture, but she could not imagine what lied ahead for the language and if it will see improvement or not.

Leaving the folk village, I had a final look around the village. As the houses, commerce and things in general are spread out in Glencolmcille, it is difficult to see the entire village in one day. However, I went for a quick walk by the beach and then returned to the main road, where most of the businesses were located. As it was getting dark, I decided to look for a place to eat. The B&B owner had told me that the pub close by was not such a good option at the time of the year that I was there, but that they were having a poker night there, in case I was interested. He recommended a food truck which sold burgers as well as fish and chips, also close by, but he was not sure if it would be open.

Glencolmcille is very rural and one can see small farms and animals around the village. Next to our accommodation was a small fire station, with its sign in Irish. As I

walked, I saw that the road signs and businesses were mostly in Irish. Only a few were bilingual. The food truck that the B&B owner had suggested was closed and I saw a sign there that said it only opened some days of the week. I kept walking and I saw that the café, which also sold takeout food, and the small supermarket were open. All of the other businesses were closed. There was also a small gas station, with two gas pumps, but with no convenience store. I decided to go to the café and was the only one there. The young woman who was working there told us that they were out of most of the options on the menu, but that she would be able to make me burgers or fish and chips. I decided to stay in and eat there, although it was just me, then went for a quick walk further down the road before heading back to the B&B.



Figure 24: Houses in Glencolmcille  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

When I got back at the accommodation, I spent some time planning where I would go next. I thought of going to Gweedore, a small village in Donegal, which was recommend by some of the people I had met in my trips. I did some searching and I was able to find transportation to get there, however all of the accommodations I found available were a few kilometers away from the village, making it very difficult for someone like me, on foot, to get around. Thus, I decided to go back to county Mayo, instead, to try visit Achill Island briefly before going home. The next day, I got up early for a quick breakfast, so that I could catch the bus at the stop on time. I had breakfast along with five other guests who were also leaving on the same day as me. Although I

said it was not necessary, the B&B owner insisted in taking me to the stop by car. From there, I made my journey back to county Mayo.

## **5.8 County Meath**

### **5.8.1 Rathcarran (Ráth Chairn)**

Meath was the last county that I visited. It was difficult to find information on transportation to Rathcarran or Gibbstown, the two Gaeltacht villages located in Meath. I did find transportation for Trim and Navan, two larger towns in that county, but they were both 10 to 12 km away from the villages. Since I was travelling there at the end of October, the weather would not be favorable for cycling. The only possibility I had of visiting the region was by car. Thus, I rented a car for the weekend, with the intention of staying one night in county Meath. This was the only fieldtrip I made using this means of transportation.

I got the car early in the morning and made my way towards Meath from Cork. I made a few stops along the way and the ride took about 4 hours. I decided to go straight to one of the villages, Rathcarran, because I was worried I might have difficulties finding them. I followed the indications of the google maps GPS from my phone and it showed me the way to the village very accurately. I noticed, as soon as I approached county Meath, that it was eminently rural. Most of the roads were very narrow and I could see farms everywhere. Driving around Meath felt a bit like going through mazes and my trip was only successful because I had the help of the google maps GPS. It seemed like the county was comprised of many small rural villages, one next to the other, rather than towns or cities.

I knew I had arrived when I spotted the ‘an Ghaeltacht’ sign. As soon as I got to Rathcarran I saw a large school, which I believed to be the secondary school. I was amazed by its size. Although other regions I visited had secondary schools as well, this one seemed bigger. It seemed also new or well maintained. In one of the roads I took I also saw a small primary school. The village looked rural and I could see farms in any direction I looked. The village was very small, perhaps one of the smallest places I visited, along with Gibbstown.

I drove back to an area that looked like the center of the village, since it featured a small shop and café and a pub. There, I saw a sign for a festival or party and I also saw

road signs indicating the existence of a public library and a park nearby. All of these signs were in Irish. One interesting fact to highlight is that, like the bridge sign in Spiddal, the public library sign also had the English translation crossed out in black.



Figure 25: Sign in Rathcarran  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)



Figure 26: Vandalized sign in Rathcarran  
(Photo taken by Sérgio Cavalcanti)

I decided to drive by the park to have a look. The park was very small and looked more like a square, with one bench and a stone with an Irish word or phrase written on it.

It looked well maintained. On the same road that led to the park I saw a church and the public library, and there were also several small houses.



Figure 27: Pub, shop and café in Rathcarran  
(Photo taken by the author)

The village was very quiet and had little movement of people or cars. I decided to go back to the small shop and café for a cup of coffee and see if I would be able to talk to someone. The parking lot at the shop and café was the most agitated place I came across, although there still weren't many cars or people. I got out of the car and observed that all of the signs in the village were strictly in Irish. Even makeshift signs put up by locals, such as one advertising a musical performance, were written only in Irish. Both the shop and pub also had Irish names. I made my way to the shop and, arriving there, I saw only one young boy working. He appeared to be 18 or 19 years old. I asked him for a cup of coffee and, while I waited, I browsed around the shop. It was a small convenience store, but also sold a lot of Irish products. For sale, I saw some books in Irish, handmade greeting cards in Irish, t-shirts with Irish words or phrases, board games in Irish, such as Monopoly, and small paintings. Curiously, I noticed that the handwritten signs showing store prices were written in both Irish and English.



Figure 28: Bilingual sign at the shop in Rathcarran  
(Photo taken by the author)

I was the only customer in the shop. I sat in the café area and talked to the young boy while he made my coffee. He was very eager to talk to me and seemed to be very curious. He asked my name, where I was from, why I was in Ireland and if I was enjoying it. At first, I thought the boy was foreign because he spoke with a strong accent, different from other Irish people I had spoken to. He also had difficulty speaking English. He told me he was from Rathcarran and had always lived there.

When I asked if he spoke Irish, he said very enthusiastically ‘yes’. I then asked if the language was still alive in the village, he answered right away that it was. Proudly he said, ‘we are the only Irish speaking region in all of Leinster, you know’. I asked him about Gibbstown, if it wasn’t also Irish speaking and he answered that it was not, that it was a ‘failed attempt’ as a Gaeltacht area. He asked me about my impressions of Ireland and the places that I had been to and I told him I enjoyed visiting Connemara very much, which was a region I had recently been to. He told me very enthusiastically that his grandfather was from Connemara. ‘You know, years ago the government returned land to a few families from Connemara here in Rathcarran, my grandfather was one of them’, he told me. He explained to me that the village started out small, but that it had grown a lot since then. He was really pleased to say that the population of the village had grown significantly and that they now had a park, a church and a pub, for example. I asked him

if he had finished school and he told me he did and that he was thinking of studying at the university in Galway.

While I had coffee, I also noticed that everything in the café area was in Irish. The kitchen had a glass wall which had ‘an cistin’ written on it, the bathroom doors featured the words ‘fir’ and ‘mná’, there was an exit sign which read ‘sli amach’ and a sign on the exit door forbidding smoking which read ‘cosc ar thobac anseo’. Even the decorations on the walls had Irish words on them.

After coffee, when I went to the counter to pay, the boy gave me some recommendations for a traditional festival that would be taking place in the region, since I was there on Halloween weekend. He also gave me suggestions of places to visit. At times, however, some recommendations were difficult to understand since he could not find all the words to express himself in English. After paying and thanking him, I got back in the car to make my way to Gibbstown.

#### 5.8.2 Gibbstown (Baile Ghib)

I initially had not planned on going to Gibbstown, as I thought observing one village in Meath would be enough. However, I was very intrigued when the boy at the café in Rathcarran mentioned that Gibbstown was a failed attempt as a Gaeltacht, and I decided to see it for myself. It was not very far away and, in a couple of minutes, I was there.

Gibbstown seemed to be just as small as Rathcarran, or maybe smaller. Differently from Rathcarran, I could not tell where the village began or ended and where its center was. Nor could google maps properly tell me. It was also very rural. I did not see any businesses, pubs, cafés, parks or schools, only houses and farms. I only saw one small supermarket/convenience store in the middle of the village.

I stopped at the convenience store to have a look and maybe talk to the employee. Although I saw some signs advertising fruit and vegetables which were both in Irish and English, when I asked the employee about the Irish language she told me it was not really heard in the village. According to her, people did not really speak Irish there and she, herself, did not know how to speak it. I asked if there were any pubs or cafés in the village and she replied ‘no’. She continued to tell me that the village was not a place people came to have a drink. It was more a place where people passed by and maybe stopped to get

something at the convenience store. She told me that if people wanted to go to pubs, they usually went to villages or towns close by.

Since there were no accommodations available in any of the two villages, I looked for a place to stay in the surrounding area. But since it was Halloween weekend, I had trouble finding a place that was available. I ended up finding a B&B in Kells and stayed the night there, returning home the next day.

## 6 ANALYSIS

Despite its official recognition as Gaeltacht, or Irish speaking regions, the findings of this research have shown that the seven counties visited, namely Waterford, Cork, Kerry, Galway, Mayo, Donegal and Meath, are not at all alike. Although there are similarities between them, such as culture, geographic location, since these areas are mostly located along the western seaboard, rural landscapes and an agricultural-based economy, they are far from homogenous or one big Gaeltacht community. The differences between them go beyond linguistic characteristics or dialects. There are geographic, economic and social differences which shape each region in very distinct ways. In each of the places visited, different characteristics were found. Some of them were villages, some towns and others islands. The population in each region varied, sometimes to a great extent. An example is Dingle, with a population of 1,965 (Central Statistics Office, 2011) in contrast to Cape Clear Island with a population of 124 (Central Statistics Office, 2011). Furthermore, some places base their economy on tourism. Again, Dingle stands out as an example alongside the Aran Islands.

In terms of policy implications, this means that each region has unique needs and that there cannot be one fit solution for all of them as a community. This was not entirely overlooked by the Government 20 Year Strategy. The last and longest section of the policy document concerns the areas for action. One of the nine listed areas for action is devoted to the Gaeltacht. Apparently by taking into account the differences between the seven Gaeltacht counties, the document mentions the initiative of community-based language planning. According to the policy document, ‘the development of a comprehensive language planning system at community level in the Gaeltacht is central to the strategy that will be put in place to ensure that Irish survives as the community language in the Gaeltacht’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 19). Moreover, this ‘language planning process will be instigated whereby a language plan will be prepared at community level for each Gaeltacht district. These plans will integrate the approach in relation to linguistic issues, education, physical planning and social and community development’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 20).

It was only in 2016, however, six years after the launch of the original policy document, that the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, together with Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge published the Language Planning Guidelines (Ireland,

2016). According to such guidelines, one of the benefits of the language planning process is that, ‘the public, through the community organisations, will be given an opportunity to play a central role in the language planning process on a local basis according to their own wishes and to their own specific context’ (2016, p. 6). According to this document, the communities will be given two years to prepare a plan and the implementation of the plans will take an additional seven years (Ireland, 2016).

Out of the seven counties visited, only two appeared to be using the Irish language as a principal means of communication in their daily lives. These counties were Galway and Meath. In Galway, specifically in Spiddal and the Aran Islands, the places visited, it is still possible to hear the community speaking Irish in the home or outside of it, in daily affairs. In these places, Irish was heard from community members of different ages, from kids to young adults and elders. The presence of the Irish television (TG4) and the Irish radio (Radió na Gaeltachta), which are both based in Connemara, seems to have had an economic impact on the community, providing jobs for the Irish speaking population. More importantly, it appears to have appealed emotionally to the Irish speaking community in Connemara, as members feel they are represented or recognized through this public service. This view was expressed by the B&B owner interviewed in Dingle when asked about what he thought the Gaeltacht community needed or wanted. According to this interviewee,

‘They want...they want a media where they can...have their national language communicated. Or...sorry, they want to be communicated to in their national language. (...) And it’s a great service, as well. I know lots of my friends...they have jobs in these places, you know? It’s good employment and it promotes...job opportunities for people who do know the language...and who are willing...who want to use it. So I think, yea, that’s a good thing.’

During the interview with the B&B owner in Spiddal, close to where the TG4 and Radió na Gaeltachta studios are located, the relevance of these media outlets to the Gaeltacht community were also expressed. This interviewee, who was in her 60’s, recalls the impact, in her view, that the radio and television has had on the Irish speaking population since their establishment:

‘When we were growing up here we didn’t...we couldn’t understand the Donegal dialect. Or we couldn’t understand the Kerry dialect until we got our own radio...and all three dialects are on the radio...the Radió na Gaeltachta. And it’s based back here in Connemara. We started maybe 20...30 years ago demanding a radio...uh...it was opened

actually in 72. So that goes back to 40 years ago...uh...we campaigned to have our own radio. And so, eventually, we got it...and it was opened on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April of 1972. But uh...then we kept going as a community and...uh...all those Irish people all over demanding the television. So we got the television about 21 years ago and then...we have both. It really has kept the language alive. Uh...we got to understand the Donegal Gaelic, we got to understand the Kerry Gaelic and vice-versa, they got to understand us. So, it was nearly three different languages. But now it's kind of rolled into one, now we can understand all three. That's how it was...Donegal and Kerry and our own. So it made a big difference.'

In addition, when speaking to the B&B owner and her husband in Spiddal, the couple mentioned with great pride that one of their sons worked for TG4. On the day of the interview, the B&B owner also mentioned her daughter, who is now working as an Irish teacher at a local school. It became apparent from the conversations and interview that it was important for her that her children had educational and professional opportunities. During the days of observations there, it was also possible to notice that this couple, who only spoke Irish in the home, preferred to watch TG4 and listen to Radió na Gaeltachta, only changing to RTE for specific programs.

Another institution in county Galway which appear to have contributed to the recognition of the minority group and language is the university. Although other counties visited, such as Waterford and Cork, also have universities or colleges, the tertiary education in Galway offers courses at the undergraduate, master's and PhD levels taught in Irish. Notwithstanding the predominance of English in most courses taught, the National University of Ireland Galway does offer courses such as commerce, translation, communication and education in Irish (NUI Galway, 2016). Like the television channel and the radio, the university represents yet another institution where the language is publicly and officially recognized, and it also contributes to the possibility of educational and economic enhancement of Irish speakers. With regards to public recognition and linguistic autonomy, Patten asserts that, 'language enjoys public recognition when it is possible to access public services and/or conduct public business in that language' (2001, p. 692). There are two possible problems which may emerge from public recognition and linguistic autonomy. The first, 'is the problem of which languages should be recognized and in which domains of public language use' (Patten, 2001, p. 692) and the second, 'whether it is permissible for the state to restrict an individual's linguistic autonomy in either of these contexts' (Patten, 2001, p. 692). Furthermore, to Paulston, language policy and planning is, 'consistently dealing with language policies for linguistic minorities' (1997, p. 77), in which 'even the absence of explicit policy (...) is in itself an act of

language policy' (1997, p. 77). From what I gathered from this study's findings, these issues are very pertinent for the Irish language today.

The importance of public recognition has been highlighted by Carnie (1995) and McDermott (2011), both of whom have stressed the Irish language's acknowledgment as first official language of Ireland and as an official language of the European Union. They have also mentioned the fact that, unlike other minority languages, the Irish Gaelic has economic and public support, and doesn't lack resources such as dictionaries. However, both authors hint that despite all these efforts, the daily use of Irish as a household language persists in a decline. In Carnie's study on the failure of the Irish language policies, one of the claims that he makes is that the language is, 'at its most critical stage in history and may very well not survive more than another generation or two' (1995, p. 99). The findings of this study demonstrate that this statement or prediction turned out not to be true. Although the language is still facing decline, and it is indeed at a critical stage, two decades after his study, Irish is still spoken, at least in Galway and Meath. It is also present in contemporary settings such as language mobile apps, with the example of Duolingo, which has reached 2.3 million Irish language learners (The Irish Times, 2016a), fashion blogs, such as Gaeilge le Glam (Gaeilge le Glam, 2016) and even a bilingual pop group called Seo Linn (Seo Linn, 2016). In this sense, it is possible that past policies as well as the the most recent policy have failed in many ways, but might have at least helped to maintain a small number of Irish speakers in certain Gaeltacht areas. The 2011 census showed that there was a 7% increase on people who have declared the ability to speak Irish, with 1.77 million people responding positively (2012, Gaelport). Of the total population living in Gaeltacht areas, 68.5% confirmed having the ability to speak Irish, with 24% responding that they use it daily, which corresponds to a 2.9% increase in comparison to the 2006 census (2012, Gaelport). However, one must be skeptical about census results related to the Irish language, as authors such as Carnie (1995) and Suntherland (2000) have indicated, since they could be highly misleading, as questions posed to the population by census questionnaires do not necessarily propose a clear meaning of what it is to be an Irish speaker. I must also point out that there was no radio or tv broadcasting in Gaeltacht regions at the time Carnie concluded his study. However, the Irish language TV station (TG4) was launched not much later (Watson, 1996) and, as the findings show, it has had a noticeable impact on Irish speakers.

County Galway, and Connemara specifically, also attracts tourism. Spiddal, for example, as observed in the findings, attracts visitors to their craft village, due both to the local crafts they sell as well as the café, which according to the Brazilian artist in the craft village, is well known and has won several awards. The Aran Islands is even more tourist-oriented than Spiddal, especially known for the Dún Aonghasa fort and for the Aran sweaters. Galway is also, like Cork, Kerry, Mayo and Donegal, part of the Wild Atlantic Way tourism campaign from Fáilte Ireland. Although this type of economic activity may have positive effects on development for these regions, Reg Hindley, for example, suggests it may impose negative consequences on the language (Hindley, 1990). As he describes in the preface of his book,

One has inevitably mixed feelings in advising the reader to hasten to visit these last outposts of a dying language while they are still there and while there are plenty of old people still able to talk about the Irish speaking life which is now being lost. It is sad, but talking to them in English will emphasize the inadequacy of their Irish and talking to them even in fluent 'school-Irish' (...) will do much the same, despite the best of intentions' (1990, p. xv)

With regards to tourism along the western seaboard and the Gaeltacht, Susan Nietzsche mentions that,

'For decades, the Irish Tourist Board (Fáilte Ireland) has successfully used the traditional images of the West to attract (overseas) tourists. The emphasis traditionally lies on its unspoilt nature, its spectacular coastline, and its (Gaelic) cultural heritage. The West is even presented as the most 'Irish' of all parts of the country.' (2013, p. 124)

This promoted image campaigned by the tourist board with regards to the western seaboard of Ireland is illustrated in the 2002 Irish short film 'Tubberware', that sets around a story of a fictional Gaeltacht village in Connemara which, after tourism campaigns, sees itself flooded by tourists specially to see 'real Irish people' (IFI Player, 2002). The village, in the film, sees itself gradually effected and modified by the tourist flow (IFI Player, 2002).

In Meath, Rathcarran village also stood out as an Irish speaking site where the Irish language was still the primary choice of communication. All official road signs as well as handwritten signs found in the village were written in Irish. In the café and shop, where observations were carried out, bilingual handwritten signs of food prices were found, as well as many Irish language products such as books, t-shirts, games and greeting

cards. During the fieldwork, I had a conversation with a young boy from the village who worked in the café. This boy informed me that not only he spoke Irish, but the entire village did as well. He explained that the village started out small, but that it has grown over the years, with an increase of population, the establishment of schools and social spaces such as a park, a church and a pub. Beyond the findings regarding the village, the conversation with the young boy was most intriguing, since the young people's lack of interest in the Irish language was mentioned by several individuals in the Gaeltacht regions visited as one of the main reasons for the decline in language use.

The places visited in Galway and in Meath, specifically in Rathcarran, shared some common characteristics or patterns. First, these places are, to some extent, historically connected. The people who live there today were community members of Connemara, in Galway, who were given land by the State. This was explained to me by the boy working in the café and shop of the village, who explained that he was the grandson of one of those people that received land. This boy talked very proudly of this history and of Rathcarran's relation to Connemara. He also mentioned Galway right away as his first choice for university, which he planned to attend in the near future.

In both regions, most of the official signs were strictly in Irish, while handwritten signs varied from Irish to bilingual. Coincidentally, it was in these two regions, specifically Spiddal and Rathcarran, where vandalized official road signs were spotted. These road signs featured an English translation which had been manually crossed off, as a form of protest. This kind of vandalism has also occurred with signs in Londonderry (The Irish News, 2016). It is also illustrated in the short film 'Tubberware' which begins and ends with a man taking out black paint from his car and painting the anglicized or English translation of the name of the Irish town in the Gaeltacht.

A recurring theme in both Galway and Meath was the importance of the sense of community. The Brazilian artist in Spiddal mentioned this as one of the most striking characteristics about living there. This was also emphasized by the B&B owner in Spiddal when asked about the situation of the Irish language today in the town:

'It's good. We're...we have a plan set out now that...uh...it's going to be published shortly...it's a plan...a 20 year plan. That...uh...would be, hopefully, funded and it's been put together by communities...we have a community here in Spiddal, along with the tourist office...and other stuff...uh...local office...uh...to promote...to do work locally and see that things are getting done and put pressure on the council and all that. You know...and uh...so there's two or three communities that have come together now and they have this plan to be launched shortly. But then to be implemented it would cost

money...but I don't know...it hasn't been released yet, so I don't know exactly what their recommendations are but...hopefully it will be good...but we will need money to implement all that.'

She also mentioned an Irish summer school that the community came together to build 50 years ago:

'And uh...we have Irish colleges here in the West Coast of Ireland and thousands of kids come every year in it, particularly the Colaiste College. We actually came together ourselves about 50 years ago and built that with the help of another teacher, who was in the area, Paul O' Healy, he was the...uh...driving force. We came behind him, you know, he was a teacher...he had...uh...he was able to negotiate with the outside world, as it were, and so Colaiste Lurgan was built. And we're known all over the world...Europe now a lot with the singing...and you know, they teach really through singing and dancing and all that...going to the sea, the shores, swimming and cycling and going to the bar. So, it opens up another aspect of the language, that you would never get in a book.'

Another common characteristic found in places visited in Galway and in Meath was the importance of social spaces for the community. These include parks, walks, pubs, cafés and public libraries. Finally, an additional common point found in the places visited in Galway and in Meath was the young people. Not only were there young people present in these places, but they were still using the Irish language, even among themselves. This is an important detail to highlight because in almost all regions visited, the young people's refusal to speak Irish was mentioned by community members as one of the main reasons for the rapid decline of language usage, even in the Gaeltacht. When asked about the situation involving language use by the young generation, the B&B owner in Spiddal talked about the importance of teaching love for the language:

'It's very hard to keep young people speaking between themselves, you know...but they get over it. I think they go through a phase. I've seen it happen in the last 40 years...with young people. Even my own children, when they were teenagers, they were going around speaking English. You just can't stop them. But then, they turn around again...they get over that phase.

(...) [It's] Not exactly a rebel phase...it's what they get down the line in the music and...it's easier for them to explain their music and their...uh...what they listen to and everything. They have more in common in the language...in the English language, than in the Gaelic language when they're talking about music...and a lot of them talk about music and listen music and listen to English lyrics and all that. So...English is very very common in that line, you know, so...it's very hard to keep them away from that. You can't...I think the more you make an issue of it, the more they turn against it. So, you have to teach love for the language, not push it down their throats. Because you try that with teenagers, you're in trouble right away, you know. So, I think...just naturally let them have their space and...keep the language going around them. They won't have an issue with it, I think. I don't know...that's how my gang was anyway.'

A similar view was expressed by the director of the Irish language school in Glencolmcille, who described the school's approach in teaching the language through fun:

'In our Gaeltacht the language was declining very quickly, even though my parents and everyone spoke Gaelic natively, without speaking much English...uh...it was still declining. So, we wanted to see if there was anything we could do to slow down the language decline. So, we started our first program in 1987 with 32 students and it was very popular and everybody said it was really good. Then we did it another year and another year. And then we decided we must either do this full time or forget about it. And uh...we decided to do something about it and we built our school here in 1991 and been here since. So I was a teacher in Dublin in the inner city, with the children from the inner city, and I took a sabbatical or a career break...for one year and then another year and then another year...and then I never went back. So I'm still here. And uh...what we do now is we bring in adult learners of the Irish language from all over the world. So we have about 15 weeks of different programs where people come for one week or two or three and they...uh...from absolute beginner to advanced, so we get people from every country. And the whole psychology as a project was to see if uh...the community here and the rest of the Gaeltacht community...if they saw people from Brazil or Canada or Ireland even learning Irish it might make them think about what was happening to the language. My other degree is psychology. So, that was the approach...see is there anything we could do to change the mindset of the people. (...) We try to tie in an enjoyment. So the classes, the teachers have good fun, there's classes with dancing at night, songs, poetry, pub, all that. So people are learning because they're enjoying it. So a lot of people come to us and when they leave they say to us, 'oh you know I came in for an Irish course, I expected it to be boring...I had the best holiday of my life'. So that's the psychology, you know?

In 2016, as part of one of the many programs of the 1916 centenary celebrations, a music festival was due to take place in north Dublin. According to the bilingual flyer, the festival, called 'Ravelóid', was set to occur in June and promised to be 'the first ever summer festival putting the Irish language & culture at the centre of a dynamic mixture of contemporary & traditional music, comedy, dance, literature, discussions, workshops and more' (see figure. 29). The line-up included music groups such as Delorentos, Seo Linn, The Riptide Movement, Hamsandwich, as well as others. Despite efforts of online marketing and flyer distribution for the festival, in May 2016, the organizers communicated that the event would be postponed and would not happen in the year 2016 since it hadn't sold enough tickets to cover its costs (The Irish Times, 2016b). A few weeks after this communication, the organizers decided to set up a smaller version as an outdoor festival in Dublin free of charge (The Irish Times, 2016c). This event, targeted at the young public, appears to be the kind of initiative the Irish speaking community needs to raise youth 'enjoyment' and 'love for the language', to employ the words of the Glencolmcille Irish language school director.

Despite the finding that the Irish language is still in use in certain Gaeltacht regions, the overall decline in usage is as critical as Carnie (1995) and Hindley (1990) have emphasized. The use of the Irish language is not exclusive here and, as some community members mentioned, the young people prefer English over Irish. On top of that, music, cinema and the media available today are predominantly in English. This concern was expressed by community members in Spiddal, as well as in other regions visited, such as Cape Clear and Glencolmcille.



Figure 29: Ravelóid flyer  
(Scanned copy of original flyer)

In the Gaeltacht regions visited in Waterford, Cork, Kerry, Mayo and Donegal, the Irish language was either scarcely heard or not heard at all. Furthermore, unlike what was observed in Galway and Meath, not all official road signs were strictly in Irish and very rarely were handwritten signs put up by community members in Irish. In Ring, kids and teenagers spotted in the village were not heard speaking Irish. The only time Irish was heard in this village was during an exchange between a small group of elders and a waitress in a café.

Places with substantial flow of tourism present another set of problems as far as Irish language promotion is concerned. Take the case of Dingle. On one hand, tourism is boosted there due to its recognition as an Irish speaking region, while, on the other hand, tourism adversely impacts the language. Because of the significant presence of American tourists in the town during my fieldwork in Dingle, the Irish language was not heard at all during the visit. But the effects of international tourism on the Irish language in the particular case of Dingle are not easy to evaluate. On her study on language ideologies and language landscape in Dingle, Moriarty demonstrates the conflicts that take place between State, community and tourism. According to her,

The language is a useful resource in promoting Dingle as the exotic 'other' and it gets commodified as a product that is for sale through various means, such as language classes, souvenirs, postcards, etc. The landscape appears only marginally as an everyday resource in the LL of Dingle. (...) The reality is that there are no monolingual speakers and the language exists as part of a multilingual speech community. On the other hand, the presence of Irish in the commercial domain has to be seen as a positive development in the Irish language maintenance. For many years the language was a stigmatized resource often labelled as backward and outdated. Perhaps this new found use for the language as a legitimate resource used for fuelling a local economy will boost the language and lead to the use of language in domains from which it has been largely absent' (2014, p. 474-475)

In county Mayo, I visited the town of Belmullet and the Achill Island. Both of these places are identified as Gaeltacht, with Belmullet recognized as the largest Irish speaking town of the county. Despite this recognition, I rarely heard Irish spoken in these regions during my visit. In addition, I was informed by community members I talked to that the Irish language is no longer present there. Like Ring, in Waterford, the places visited in Mayo were predominantly rural and did not have much tourism activity, apart from the Irish summer schools. Besides the mentioning of young people, as one of the reasons for the decline of the language, in Mayo, as well as in Glencolmcille, it was brought up by community members that people weren't speaking the language because they were idle and thought it would be easier and faster to communicate in English.

In county Cork, fieldwork was carried out in Cape Clear Island, about 40 minutes from the mainland. Despite the island's isolation, the language has not survived there. Very little Irish was heard during the days of observations. Whereas one community member confirmed the usage of Irish, another thought the opposite. In the Island, an imbalance in the population was very noticeable. There were very few children to observe and the number of adult men predominated substantially in comparison to that of women.

Also noticeable were the effects of depopulation, with several abandoned homes seen throughout the island. All of these factors certainly contributed to the decline in the usage of the Irish language.

Finally, in county Donegal the three villages of Carrick, Kilcar and Glencolmcille were visited. Although there is a tourist flow to the region due to the Slieve League cliffs, to crafts and to the Irish language school, there is much less tourism there than in Dingle. The villages are situated in rural and mostly coastal areas. Despite official recognition as Gaeltacht, the Irish language did not seem to be much spoken in the regions visited. In Kilcar and Carrick, community members said that the language was gone and in all the villages disinterest on the part of the younger generation was mentioned as a possible reason for the disappearance of the language. In Glencolmcille, where the Irish language school is situated, a different pattern was found. According to community members, the school is what stimulates the maintenance of Irish language use there.

With regards to the future of the language, different visions were shared among the interviewees. However, a significant finding was that the English language is not viewed negatively by Irish speakers. The B&B owner in Spiddal and the school director in Glencolmcille both shared similar views in this respect, especially on bilingualism. In the opinion of the B&B owner in Spiddal:

‘It’s a unique language, it would be very sad...now the English tried to kill it...I don’t know if you...they tried everything. So my parents, they never knew how to write in Irish. They never knew how to read it. They both were under the English law, with the English language in the schools. So, it was kind of funny because my mother and my father had perfect Irish, spoken Irish, but they couldn’t read or write it. They wrote and read in the English language, and not the Irish, because of the system that was there at the time. So they were all English speaking schools in the Gaeltacht...in this area. So, that has been turned around...so if we keep on that road, you know, keep that going...it will survive. And maybe, yes, years go by that uh...it would gain more momentum and people will respect it more. (...) They [kids] will be bilingual...and it’s a good start...I would hate to have a child that couldn’t go to Galway and speak in hospital or in clinics or anything that they needed the English language for. So, you have to go with what’s around you, really. So...but...to keep it alive in the home...as the first language is very important...if you can at all. And then they’ll...English comes naturally from outside...you know...it’s in the air...it’s all around you, you can’t avoid it. And you can’t do without it either when you are living in the real world. You do need to have it. Me and you would not be able to speak with one another now, only for the English language. You have your native language of your own and I have my own native language but we converse in...in the common language, and that’s English. And that goes around most countries.’

When asked about the future of the Irish language, the language school director in Glencolmcille said the following:

‘I think you can tell me better than I can tell you. Because it’s very, very difficult to understand. Why a country...we’re an independent country...uh...one of the only countries in the European Union that doesn’t speak their own language as a first language. Even though in the law and the constitution it’s our first language. So...uh...the standard answer is that our history, being so close to Britain, being colonized, English being such a global language, that it’s inevitable after a few hundred years...that there was going to be a decline. Although, people will give the answer that, well, since the foundation of the State in 1921, that succeeding governments haven’t supported the language sufficiently. But then you can argue against that, because if it’s taught in all the schools, 20% of everyday is teaching Irish. That’s a lot of money, a lot of teacher time. Uh...there are state agents in the Gaeltacht, Údarás na Gaeltachta, which I told you about. There’s a government department for the Gaeltacht, there’s a minister for the Gaeltacht, there’s Irish language tv, there’s Irish language radio, there’s Irish language online newspapers and magazines. So, why don’t they? Because...human nature is the way it is. You know...people don’t...think consciously...about which language they speak. Uh...they just get on with life. And if a dominant language is right there, like English is...everywhere...visible everywhere, then it’s a matter of time until it departs and moves aside. It’s happened everywhere. So...uh...I can never see the Irish language being the dominant language in Ireland but what I can see and what is our objective and mission, and everything I do anyway, is that people understand that they can have two languages. (...) That we can say no...it’s not either or...you can speak a dominant language, like English, but you can also speak your native language, which is Irish.’

When asked about the current situation of the Irish language, the B&B owner in Dingle indicated the following:

‘Well...it’s...it’s...the fact that English is pretty much the first language of this country now...at the moment. Uh...it is, there’s no two ways about it. Uh...I think there’s probably a lot of resentment towards Irish from...uh...a lot of...big parts of the country because it’s forced upon them. It’s obligatory that they have to do it to get into university and stuff like that. So, I think that a lot of people...and when it’s not taught very well...then they struggle...when you struggle with something you’re not going to enjoy it. So, I think...uh...my own point of view, it’s being reflected in schools. They’re moving more towards...uh...speaking the language, as opposed to...uh...learning the poetry or the literature or whatever. So, I think that’s the right way to go about it, because if you can’t speak it then...you’ve no chance, do you? So hopefully there should be...the big emphasis on teaching...it should be...to come out with the ability to speak it. That’s my own opinion.’

However, when questioned about the future of the language, the B&B owner in Dingle shared a more negative perspective:

‘Oh, it’s worse! Worse, it’s getting. Yea...definitely. That’s only my own opinion. Uh...I’d be very fearful for the language. Now...they’ve done some great initiatives and stuff like that, I would say. The Irish tv channel, obviously you have Radió na Gaeltachta...so I think that’s great and everything. But...they seem to be...well they have a lot of sport and stuff like that, on the tv channel in particular. Like...in a pub...uh...in town, you’d have the Irish commentary on and they’d have no interest, they’d have no idea what’s going on. Some people...uh...well they just think they should...uh...it’s very hard for them to...to promote it. Uh...because the tv and the radio are kind of nearly more

focused on the Irish speaking regions, obviously because they're the people that are listening. So, it doesn't really affect it on a national basis, you know? I don't...I can't imagine that there's a massive amount of people listening or watching these programs around the country. That's what I'm trying to say. It's very much a Gaeltacht kind of thing. And there's only seven of those...so...'

There are various issues that come up when analyzing Irish language policies. Some authors list aspects such as historical and colonial influence (Cahill, 2007; Pintér, 2010, Chríost, 2012), others discuss policy failure (Carnie, 1995; McDermott, 2011) and ideologies (Flynn, 2012) and some mention a combination of matters that might have led and continue to lead the language to decline (Berdichevsky,2012; Suntherland, 2002). With respect to the most recent language policy, the Irish 20 Year Strategy, this study has brought to light a number of findings. One of these findings, as Berdichevsky (2002) and Suntherland (2002) have both pointed out, is that minority languages worldwide are progressively becoming threatened by the predominance of the English language as a working language. The impact that English has had on the Irish language in Ireland is not limited to the country's history of colonialism and language imperialism. But today, the Irish language, like other minority languages worldwide, is being increasingly left aside due to the practicality and the wide usage of English. It is possible that this might be one of the motives for the disinterest of the youth of the Gaeltacht regions, which has been a recurring problem mentioned by various community members.

Moreover, each of the seven Gaeltacht regions has different histories, geographic situations, economies, social structures and, more importantly, contrasting conditions with regards to the use of the Irish language. This means that the Gaeltacht is not a uniform, homogeneous, coherent community, but rather each region is unique in its own way. This is in a way acknowledged in the 20 Year Strategy, through the initiative of language planning.

It is noteworthy, however, that the policy document dedicates comparatively few pages to the Gaeltacht. In a way, this oversight contradicts the policy's vision statement which claimed as a major objective the increase in the use of the Irish language as a community language. The policy document treats 'the transmission of Irish as a living language within family and between the generations' as equally important as 'strengthening the position of the language within our education system' which is, in fact, 'a key focus of this Strategy' (Ireland, 2010, p. 3). Thus, the focus on education is flagrant, which makes the current policy resemble past language policies. The difference, as

mentioned by McDermott, is that it, 'is now focusing on promoting the use of Irish in civil society, business and economy in addition to traditional areas such as education' (McDermott, 2011, p. 30).

Of all community members with whom I had the opportunity to speak to in the Gaeltacht regions during the course of the fieldwork, only two members from Spiddal, had heard of the 20 Year Strategy. These two members also mentioned that the community had gotten together to develop a plan. As the purpose of the language planning is to work as a bottom up initiative, with community involvement, it is perplexing that no one from the other communities that I talked to mentioned the language planning process to me.

Another finding suggests possible links between effective language policy implementation and the social situation in these regions. The decline of the Irish language should not be viewed separate from the social context of each of the regions studied. A number of variables appear to have impacted the language, such as history, past policies and education, the social imbalance and problems present in the rural west of Ireland and in the Gaeltacht regions, among others. In fact, language decline seems to be utterly connected to a much larger problem, which is the social situation.

These social problems include age and gender imbalance, depopulation, emigration, isolation and demoralization (Brody, 1973). In his book, *Inishkillane*, Brody uses a fictional narrative to talk about his observations during fieldwork in the rural areas in Ireland, located mostly on the western seaboard of the isle. According to him, 'the changes in farming practice, re-evaluation of rural life, inter-family and inter personal relations, the consciousness of the young – indeed the entire fabric of a social and economic system as well as the mentalities within it – draw an account of Ireland into far more general issues' (1973, p. 3). To Brody, 'to be demoralized is, for such people, to lose belief in the social advantages or moral worth of their own society' (1973, p. 16). In his account, Brody shares a different perspective regarding tourism, which he considers in a positive light. For him, 'what the tourists do, however, is to affirm their esteem for the rural milieu and its ways. By traveling to a remote parish the tourists indicate approval for it' (1973, p. 41).

Despite the lapse of time since the publication of his book, Brody's observations seem to be just as accurate today, presenting problems that were found in the Gaeltacht regions visited during the present research endeavor. Social problems in the isolated rural

areas of the *Gaeltacht* such as gender imbalance and depopulation were observed in the present study, with Cape Clear standing out as one of the most noticeable case. The findings uncovered during the fieldwork show that the problem in the *Gaeltacht* regions is far greater than language. Language is just a small consequence of a deeper problem. Where there is increasingly more emigration, depopulation, social structure imbalances, development and mental health issues predominant, there is little space for concerns with the language. This finding resonates with a phrase that the folk village manager in Glencolmcille mentioned, that ‘it isn’t the language that is disappearing, it’s the people’. Perhaps, until something is done comprehensively about the social situation in some of these areas, the language, even with all the policy support available, may not survive.

In 2015, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and the *Gaeltacht* Affairs published on its website reports produced by the various government departments in Ireland regarding progress on the implementation of the strategy up to 2015. In addition, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and *Gaeltacht* Affairs held an open policy debate, bringing up a discussion paper which addressed not only the progress stated by the department, but also the language planning process and *Gaeltacht* language planning areas, with the aim, ‘to enhance the use of the Irish language in the areas to which they apply in so far as it relates to family, community, educational, social, business and public matters’ (Ireland, 2015).

It remains to be seen if the plan will achieve by 2030 its objectives for the language in the *Gaeltacht*. Without improvement of the social challenges faced by the *Gaeltacht* communities, it will be very unlikely that a language policy in Ireland will succeed. It is necessary that language policy officials work jointly with rural development and social development authorities. And that the problems in these regions be addressed based on their unique situation and needs. As the language plans are foreseen to be implemented in nine years’ time, it remains to be seen in the following years if the language planning process progresses and is, in fact, put into practice.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The academic literature on the Irish language is diverse, ranging from works that focus on linguistics (Carnie, 1995; Cummins, 1978), on history (Cahill, 2007; Pintér, 2010), on policy (McDermott, 2011), to comparative studies (Berdichevsky, 2012; Suntherland, 2002) and studies of rural Ireland and the Gaeltacht (Hindley, 1990). Despite the significant differences with which each of these perspectives approach the Irish language, there is one element that all of them have in common: they all focus on language revitalization initiatives in Ireland, whether to debate, criticize, analyze or compare. This is not surprising since language policies in Ireland, despite decades of efforts, have not been able to increase the daily use of Irish in the country. In fact, for some authors, language policies in Ireland have simply failed (Carnie, 1995). Those more pessimistic among such authors have even suggested that the Irish language is on its way to death (Hindley, 1990).

In 2010, however, the Irish government launched a new policy, the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 (Ireland, 2010). This policy has brought forth a new approach ‘focusing on promoting the use of Irish in civil society, business and economy in addition to traditional areas such as education’ (McDermott, 2011, p. 30) and aiming to ‘increase on an incremental basis the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language’ (Ireland, 2010, p. 3). In light of such recent development, this research sought to analyze and evaluate the recent government strategy, focusing on its impact in the country, more specifically on the Irish speaking regions. A key objective of the present study was to ascertain how this policy has been received by the population of these regions so far, seven years after its launching. To do so, the study relied on ethnographical research methods, involving participant observation and interviews, which were conducted in 12 villages and towns located in the seven Gaeltacht regions.

Notwithstanding the exploratory character of the research, the study revealed a number of significant findings. The research confirmed what comparativists have alerted the international community, namely that dominant languages, such as English, have been increasingly growing in worldwide use, which negatively affects minority languages all around the world, Irish included. One such comparativist, Berdichevsky, has argued that all minority languages ‘are facing a challenge to maintain the sense of national identity in a global world dominated by English’ (2002, p. 21) and further that, ‘the hard facts of

life support an approach to learning languages that values practical benefits of communication, travel and career' (2002, p. 21). Suntherland shares the same point of view and mentions that, 'as communication between countries becomes more effective, and some languages become very widely used – English is an obvious example – languages spoken by relatively small numbers of people are likely to fall into disuse, even if there are no political pressures' (Suntherland, 2000, p. 200). Therefore, declining usage of the Irish language is no longer just a matter of historical or colonial legacies, but is partly the result of a larger worldwide phenomenon faced by all minority languages.

The research also demonstrated that the seven Gaeltacht counties are not homogeneous. Beyond contrasts of linguistic dialects, there are significant differences between each county, in relation to such variables as economy, geography and social structure. While some towns visited relied primarily on a tourist based economy, others were characterized by their reliance on agriculture. Population size also varied to a great extent among the regions visited. Furthermore, the everyday community usage of the Irish language is notably different among the Gaeltacht counties. The evidence of this study, for example, showed that communities in Galway and Meath chose to communicate in Irish on a daily basis, whereas in the remainder of the counties visited there was very little to no usage of the Irish language. This meant that rather than regarding all Gaeltacht regions as one, policy makers should acknowledge these differences for a more efficient strategy. This is important so that the specific needs of each region, regarding the language, are taken into consideration. The community language planning process, as foreseen by the policy, was apparently conceived to approach such differences. During the present research, only in Spiddal did I come across people who were aware of the planning process and mentioned it as an adequate means of community participation in the policy implementation.

More importantly, the research found that a myriad of social problems continues to plague rural isolated areas in the western seaboard of Ireland, where most of the Gaeltacht regions are located. And these adversely affect language preservation in the area. As pointed out by Brody, 'the changes in farming practice, re-evaluation of rural life, inter-family and inter personal relations, the consciousness of the young – indeed the entire fabric of a social and economic system as well as the mentalities within it – draw an account of Ireland into far more general issues' (1973, p.3). This change has brought about imbalances such as of age and gender, depopulation, emigration, isolation and

demoralization (Brody, 1973). These characteristics, described by Brody, were also noticed during the observations conducted as part of the present research. During the study, Cape Clear Island certainly stood out as a Gaeltacht area which embodied Brody's warnings. This finding suggests that language issues in the Gaeltacht are not autonomous problems but, rather, should be viewed as a consequence of more encompassing social problems. This may be why the folk village manager in Glencolmcille mentioned that 'it isn't the language that is disappearing, it's the people'. Unless these social issues are addressed in these regions, language policies will, in all likelihood, continue to face difficulties in increasing community language use, despite efforts.

The Irish language is a multifaceted subject of study whose complexities in the contemporary context cannot be fully apprehended without considering the multiplicity of variables at play, particularly in Gaeltacht communities. The economy and social conditions are as important as linguistics to explain why the usage of a minority language might decline or experience revitalization.

One realization was evident upon conclusion of the fieldwork and the analysis of the findings of the present study: the subject requires further and more extensive research. There is not enough information on the linkages between social problems and language decline, on the role of community and family life in the preservation of Irish as minority language, on the impact of generation gaps on Irish as a spoken language, on the role of broadcast media in disseminating the Irish language, on the impact of the internet and the social media on Irish language use by the youth, among other themes. My own fieldwork experience in the Gaeltacht demonstrated to me the need for longer ethnographical research in the area, which would include more instances of participant observation and a more substantial number of interviews.

As the government strategy for the Irish language is in its initial implementation phases, it is also necessary to follow up on its progress, especially with regards to the community language planning processes proposed for the Gaeltacht regions. According to the language planning guidelines, in its third edition, published in 2016 by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, together with Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge, the Gaeltacht language planning areas will have two years to develop their plans, with an additional seven years for implementation. This means that it will take several years before the entire language planning initiative comes into effect. Research will be essential, therefore, to investigate this process and, along with it, further explore

the outcomes of community and bottom up efforts for the survival and increase of the Irish language.

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