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SPECIAL ISSUE: *Mapping an Altered Landscape: Cultural Policy and Management in Ireland*

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It's great to be here. A previous speaker spoke about being intimidated by the quality of speakers, well you should stand here as a former County Manager – we've been rebranded since the beginning of the month – it's our first public address as the newly branded 'Chief Executive' of Mayo County Council.

Just before I start, I should explain, my background is as an architect and for those of you who don't know architects, there are two things you should probably bear in mind [...]

Firstly – all architects have a God complex. We know how to do everything better than every-one else and [...] secondly – we have a generous streak: we are very happy to share that knowledge with the rest of humanity at every available opportunity – so just bear that in mind.

I've been asked to talk a little bit about current cultural structures and how they are responding to change, particularly, from a local government perspective. I should say that, when we talk about this back at base, we talk about 'Culture' in the broader sense – culture as being inclusive of not just the arts and the creative arts but also the other things that influence and shape life in a particular place and at a given time. They would include everything from food, fashion and football at the moment before you even get into the area of horse-racing, religion and language and a whole lot of other concerns. Our understanding of culture is in that context and our interaction with our citizens and with our communities is also framed by that context. There is a view that the role of local authorities is to make, shape and bend places and to empower communities. And it is a view to which I, by and large, subscribe. To do that effectively we need trust and we need flexibility.

The changes that local authorities are going through – Clare talked about jobs, investment and enterprise – are extensive and challenging. There are four fundamental changes happening at the moment. Firstly we are moving away from our traditional role as utility providers. You will all be aware of Irish Water and the debate that's going on around that. Local Authorities are still involved as agents in delivering the water service but we are moving out of that space. We are also moving to new organisational structures. Town councils, as you will be aware, have been phased out and are being merged into new municipal districts, which brings changes and challenges to the traditional funding streams, particularly in respect of local arts programmes and local cultural centres. We are moving into the area of community development, and programmes like the LEADER programme will, if current government policy is followed through, be delivered much more closely through local authorities and there are considerable opportunities there. We are also moving into the jobs and enterprise space. County Enterprise Boards have been incorporated into local authorities under the banner of Local Enterprise Units. Many local authorities, including Mayo have also set up dedicated Local Investment and Enterprise Support Units.

That is just background to where we come from in our view on Arts and Culture. The 'making of place' and the 'making of vibrant community' are as much about the arts, creativity and

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quality of life as it is about utilities or the metrics of service delivery. Clare talked about accountability and people have talked about silos. We have a huge problem with over-prescription and over-stratification in a vertical sense in this country. No public servant has any issue with accounting for the proper use of public money – what goes in at the top has to come out at the bottom. But when the accounting and the reporting and the structures inhibit the way in which that public money is used then, we as a society do have a problem. We need much more integration and collaboration and we need the flexibility to do that at the coal-face. We think that local authorities are very well placed to be part of delivering a new way of doing business and delivering services.

There are many examples which point to what might happen if we were given the flexibility to be more creative in service delivery. Our current system is very risk averse and while there are rewards for success, there is little tolerance for the failures that are a necessary component of any innovative and creative system.

There are examples of successful integrated and collaborative service delivery, place making and community development out there and I am just going to run through a couple of examples. They come from Mayo, because that is the place that I know but there are many examples from all over the country that would equally illustrate the point.

- **Westport Town** – When you get twenty years of an integrated approach to arts, culture and with supportive thinking integrated into local government in a place like Westport, you end up with a fantastic town. It has taken twenty, if not thirty, years of hard work for Westport to reach its current state.
- **Belmullet Integrated Services Centre** – Where you get an integrated approach between agencies you end up with centres like Áras Inis Gluaire in Belmullet. Here the arts centre, community development centre, library, County Council offices, courts service, Údarás and employment centre all work out of the same place – a beautiful custom-built piece of modern architecture – with enormous synergies and benefits for the local community.

Other key projects which have resulted from an established integrated collaborative approach with strong local authority leadership include:

- **The Great Western Greenway** – The reuse of an old railway line with the approval, for no recompense, of one hundred and forty individual landowners. The greenway has become a framework not just for tourism but for cultural development and artistic expression.
- **Mayo Music Generation** – A collaborative effort between the arts, library service, educational sector and the new Employment Training Board. I would like to acknowledge the work of our Arts Officer Anne McCarthy on this and many other projects, we are very lucky to have someone of her calibre work with us in Mayo.
- **Mayo 5000** – A celebration of 5000 years of rural culture back in 1993. You may not know all of the projects which it sparked such as the North Mayo Sculpture Trail. But you will all know Riverdance, the genesis of which was the Mayo 5000 concert held as part of those Mayo 5000 celebrations. It was the first time that the key players including Jean Butler and Michael Flatley, all appeared together on the same programme and it sparked the idea/project when you ask them.
- **Spirit of Place** – A project which is ongoing at the moment. We are doing an installation Downpatrick Head, a signature discovery point, which is part tourism, part cultural

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expression and part artistic installation. The three aspects working together will reinforce the message on all three fronts.

Just to finish – my parting thought would be, that as we are going through these changes, the public service are given the flexibility and the freedom to develop synergies, to work collaboratively and to have a holistic vision for our places and our communities. In my view Local Authorities are a key part of delivering on this transformation agenda and should be charged with the responsibility to lead and given the flexibility to deliver.

If I could finish with just one last point, it is this, and I think that it is something that we need to do some work on. There is no good reason, in my view, that the Per Cent for Art scheme should not continue to be operated by Irish Water. Irish Water are not a private sector enterprise: they have been given control of a very considerable public resource, several billions of asset which was put there with a lot of local contribution, many hundreds of millions when you add it up. The asset is being transferred and there is absolutely no reason that the Per Cent for Art scheme should not be continued to be operated. In fact I would argue that the scheme should be extended and should be operated by all utility providers as part of a developed national policy on corporate social responsibility.

Peter Hynes was educated at Coláiste Éinde in Galway and studied Architecture at University College Dublin, and the University of Virginia, graduating in 1981. He worked in private practice before joining the Architects Department of Mayo County Council in 1984 and as head of the Department from 1989 he worked on a range of public buildings, urban designs, and arts and community based projects throughout Mayo. In 2001 he became Director of Services and Westport Town Manager where he was responsible for Housing and for the management of Council Services in the Mayo West region which included Belmullet and Westport Electoral Areas and for the Town Council of Westport. He was appointed Mayo County Manager in May 2010 – a role which became Chief Executive in 2014. He has worked consistently to support Enterprise and Investment in a drive to make a county which he describes as "Sustainable, Inclusive, Prosperous and Proud". He has invested considerable energy in connecting with the extended Mayo global Diaspora and promoting Mayo as a base for Enterprise and Investment.