

IRELAND 2040: CULTURAL IDENTITY

SUSAN BUTLER, LIAM COWLEY, SEÁN HARVEY,
SAMUEL JACKSON, SHANNAN KINCAID, MARTIN
MCKIERNAN, SARAH MCLAUGHLIN, KYLE MOUTRAY,
ARLENE WALSH-WALLACE, RACHEL WATTERS

Introduction

The creation of an overarching cultural identity that is representative of the population of Ireland and Northern Ireland has been a contentious issue for generations. It has seemed an impossible task to cultivate an identity with which all individuals across the island would be able to identify and celebrate as their own. This paper proposes that cultural identity on the island of Ireland in 2040 should be informed by both individual and collective factors; the collective factors being commitments to fairness, inclusivity, freedom of cultural expression and active engagement in civic life throughout the island.

We do not propose to set parameters as to what individual cultural identity should look like in 2040. Cultural identity forms a key part of an individual's self-conception. It can be based upon several intersecting factors including nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social grouping based on shared characteristics, heritage or customs. Rather than being prescriptive about individual cultural identity, we have provided recommendations as to how the challenges of concurrent and sometimes clashing cultural identities can be addressed in the coming decades.

In this paper, we offer a vision for 2040 that we hope can foster a sense of belonging and an inclusive approach to cultural identity across the island of Ireland. This vision has three core pillars:

1. We envision that everyone¹ on the island of Ireland will have **freedom of cultural expression**, meaning that everyone will have the right to articulate and celebrate their cultural identity as part of an open, integrated and inclusive society. To address complex scenarios where forms of cultural expression by differing identity groups impinge upon each other, we propose a concept of cultural accountability to balance competing interests, uphold the human rights of all parties and promote positive inter-cultural expression.

¹ The authors refer to 'everyone' rather than 'all citizens' because the recommendations within this paper are inclusive of persons who are resident on the island of Ireland but hold neither Irish nor British citizenship.

IRELAND 2040: CULTURAL IDENTITY

2. We envision that everyone on the island of Ireland will enjoy **equality of opportunity**. Constructing a sense of cultural identity which embraces all persons regardless of their social or economic backgrounds demands that we promote policies which allow everyone to feel capable of overcoming the barriers and challenges they may face, particularly in education and employment.
3. We envision that the Ireland of 2040 will be a society in which **civic engagement** is fostered with the aim of empowering individuals at all levels within the political, social and economic spheres. Everyone on the island of Ireland should have the ability to voice their thoughts and ideas on the institutions and policies which shape their lives. Inclusivity of thought can be fostered through increased civic engagement and protection of freedom of speech.

We envision that everyone on the island of Ireland will have freedom of cultural expression.

- 1.1 Having the ability to express one's cultural identity allows an individual to feel that they matter and develop a sense of belonging to the wider world. It provides affirmation that their life, their language, their community history and experience is worthy of music, literature, art or festivals. It is vital that we champion freedom of cultural expression to allow individuals and groups to represent themselves: celebrating freedom of cultural expression provides an opportunity for all strata of society to articulate their values and heritage. The challenge of upholding freedom of cultural expression is multi-layered: we wish to encourage a diverse range of cultural expression so that individuals and communities can see themselves represented, but we must also address the necessary limits of freedom of cultural expression.
- 1.2 We propose that freedom of cultural expression should operate as a qualified right, akin to the qualified rights under European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Qualified rights require a balance between the rights of the individual and the rights of other persons or the wider public interest². State interference with qualified rights is only permissible if that interference seeks to achieve a legitimate aim, is in response to a pressing social need and is proportionate. It is our recommendation that in 2040 the Irish and Northern Irish governments should intervene to limit freedom of cultural expression where permissible and proportionate to the interests of public safety, to ensure that groups are not given carte blanche to weaponise their cultural expression to oppress or incite violence or hate towards another group.

Placing necessary limits on the right to freedom of cultural expression allows for the protection of the wider public interest of creating an inclusive society which embraces all individuals who call Ireland or Northern Ireland home.

² E.g. the right to freedom of assembly and association contained in Article 11 of the ECHR balances the right of the individual against restrictions which are “necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others”.

It would be antithetical to our inclusive vision of 2040 Ireland to allow freedom of cultural expression to be construed in such a way as to allow white supremacists to hold rallies inciting violence and hatred towards people of colour within our communities.

The ideologies of groups which promote racism and bigotry are, by definition, opposed to the inclusive society we wish to see. We propose that all forms of cultural expression which promote violence and hatred towards other groups should be considered through this lens and restricted by state parties including the PSNI and An Garda Síochána where necessary and proportionate to protect the wider public interests of inclusivity and non-violence.

- 1.3 We propose that in addition to proportionate government intervention where necessary in the interests of public safety, the protection of rights and the promotion of inclusivity, the exercise of freedom of cultural expression should be influenced by the concept of cultural accountability. The principles of cultural accountability are as follows:
 - a Insofar as possible, individuals and groups should exercise their right to cultural expression with due regard to protection of the environment e.g. using reusable steel beacons and carbon neutral willow bark bonfires in place of wood pallet bonfires on the Eleventh Night.
 - b Individuals and groups should strive to celebrate and articulate their cultural expression in a manner which promotes positive exchanges and mutual understanding among all communities, as opposed to an offensive manner which has the effect of entrenching divisions or encouraging discrimination against marginalised groups. Xenophobic graffiti would be an example of the latter.
 - c Patronage of cultural expression should not be used as a means of allowing one group to dominate any or all others. The awarding of funding for arts and culture by government ministers and local government should have regard to the promotion of positive intra-cultural expression and must not be used as a means of promoting one cultural background to the exclusion of others.

IRELAND 2040: CULTURAL IDENTITY

- 1.4 In light of the principles of cultural accountability, we would like to see the following:
 - a Public consultations on the definition of hate speech by the Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality and the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee, with a view to providing community-based solutions to hate speech incidents where possible.
 - b The use of restorative justice to mediate between parties where a hate crime or sectarian incident has taken place, to promote social cohesion and prevent reoffending.
 - c Increased use of civic forums to address contentious issues in relation to parading in Northern Ireland and consider ways to build trust between communities and the Parades Commission.
- 1.5 We wish to see the promotion of new forms of positive intra-cultural expression as the island of Ireland boasts an increasingly diverse population. We offer the following proposals to encourage positive intra-cultural expression through the creation of new initiatives:
 - a The establishment of an all-island awards body to recognise positive cultural expression in all its forms;
 - b The reservation of arts funding for film and art projects focusing on the theme cultural identity;
 - c The expansion of Culture Night to a week-long festival, with significant collaboration between participating towns and cities; and
 - d The creation of individual arts projects promoting engagement with culture from all over the island including a rotating community-based broadcast channel, the creation of an all-island culture app to promote events, and a slice-of-life podcast in the style of *This American Life*.
- 1.6 We believe that positive intra-cultural expression can also be employed in relation to traditional elements of Irish and Northern Irish culture as a means of facilitating social integration and improved community relations throughout the island. We propose the following:

IRELAND 2040: CULTURAL IDENTITY

- 1.6 a The promotion of cross-community youth engagement in sport through a summer camp model, based upon the GAA Cúl and Ulster Rugby summer camps, to attract the participation of young people from community backgrounds not usually associated with rugby or GAA respectively. We recognise that sport can provide unique opportunities for positive intra-cultural expression through the creation of a common bond.
- b The continued engagement of migrant communities through sport and cultural festivals. A 2017 short film produced for the Guardian depicts Ballyhaunis, a town where migrant children are encouraged to play Gaelic football as a way of making friends in the community. We would like to see this trend continue between now and 2040, in addition to an expansion of community festivals like Belfast Mela, which celebrates the integration of minority community into the city through and an eclectic mix of art, music and food.
- c An expansion of the Community Festivals Fund model across the island, to promote a diverse array of community festivals ranging from fleadh, marching bands, Irish dancing festivals and Orange order parades. The Community Festivals Fund, introduced in Northern Ireland in 2006, has the aim of enhancing the population's quality of life through participation in culture, to promote equality and to tackle poverty and social exclusion. It is particularly important to focus on fostering inclusion through community festivals, especially in Northern Ireland where the Protestant Unionist Loyalist Community may soon become a minority demographic for the first time in its history.
- d An inclusive, cross-community approach to language and providing space for everyone to engage with language in an depoliticised setting if they so wish. To promote engagement with the languages native to the island, Irish and Ulster-Scots, we should understand these languages as one aspect of a multicultural society. By 2040, we would like to see further support for the Líofoa campaign which seeks to increase the number of fluent Irish speakers through language classes and Gaeltacht course bursaries, and a full implementation of the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture strategy for 2015-2035 which aims to foster a wider understanding of Ulster-Scots that will contribute towards building a strong and shared community.

IRELAND 2040: CULTURAL IDENTITY

- 1.6 e The creation of cultural events specifically aimed at empowering migrant communities to express themselves in their native languages, as well as the dominant languages of English and Irish. We propose the creation of migrant community fleadh supported by local councils, where poetry, music and dance can be performed in a variety of languages to provide migrants to Ireland and Northern Ireland the opportunity to share the culture of their homeland with neighbours in their new communities. We believe that this will promote integration and provide new Irish and Northern Irish that they are welcome and they belong.

We envision that everyone on the island of Ireland will enjoy equality of opportunity.

- 2.1 In 2040, we wish to see an Ireland and Northern Ireland in which everyone will enjoy equality of opportunity. We aspire to create an inclusive and welcoming society which fully recognises the variety of challenges and obstacles faced by individuals by virtue of their cultural identity. In order to eliminate existing barriers to equality of opportunity by 2040, it is necessary to implement effective policy to reduce systemic social inequality across the island.
- 2.2 Our vision for equal opportunity in Ireland proposes significant cultural shifts in access to education and gender equality.
 - a In 2040, we wish to see a political structure which hears and represents a diverse range of voices, both in the institutions of government and in policy decisions.
 - b In 2017, class and social background wield a significant influence on access to quality education from primary to tertiary level. By 2040 we wish to see an education model in which an individual's ability to access education suited to their needs and skills is not determined by their socioeconomic status. We recommend a significant increase in government spending on education across the Island, which currently falls below the OECD average and is considerably lower than that of our European counterparts with superior education systems, such as Finland and Germany. An increase in spending in education should be focused in part on investment in the education of underrepresented groups, with the specific aim of improving access to and graduation rates from third-level institutions.
 - c In 2040, we aspire to see a society committed to eliminating gender inequality in the social, political, economic and cultural spheres. At present, the pay gap between men and women is approximately 20% in the Republic of Ireland and 33% in Northern Ireland.
- 2.3 In order to reduce inequality of opportunity by 2040, we propose the following strategies:

IRELAND 2040: CULTURAL IDENTITY

- 2.3a Ireland and Northern Ireland should seek to develop **an identity of inclusion**. This requires a recognition of the increasing diversity of nationality, religion, and culture across the island, which will develop further as migration to the island increases in the foreseeable future. We aspire to live a society in which no single cultural identity has any right of dominance over another. The identity of the island will not be one solely focused on what it has traditionally meant to be Irish, but instead a recognition of who we are, where we have come from, and the values we share as a people.
- b It is essential that the institutions of government reflect of the diversity of the population they serve. Efforts to increase the participation of minority groups in political institutions will ensure that future policy and legislation will be reflective of the diversity of needs within our society.
- 2.4 An identity of inclusion will be fostered by improving equality of **access to education**. The ability to receive an education which responds to a student's individual needs is crucial to the creation of a strong sense of belonging and equality of opportunity. We propose the following recommendations to realise equality of educational opportunity for all:
- a An expansion of the DEIS system to provide greater supports to students from disadvantaged areas of the country;
- b A reversal of several cuts made to education during the recession, including an increase in the number of guidance counsellors at secondary level, and increased funding in special needs education across the island;
- c The establishment of paid apprenticeship programmes allowing individuals to earn an income while learning a trade relevant to the needs of the economy in 2040;
- d Continuance and expansion of financial supports for third-level students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, including student grants and loans;
- e A tuition fee-free third-level education model, comparable to that of Denmark, based on the recognition of education as a public good;
- f An expansion of Back to Education schemes for adults, allowing them to gain qualifications without facing significant financial strain; and
- g A major re-evaluation and reform of the patronage of our schools, including an expansion of secular and integrated educational facilities across the island.

- 2.5 We desire further recognition of the importance of **gender equality** across the island of Ireland in 2040. Repeal of the constitutional recognition of the special place of the woman in the home, in Article 41.2 of Bunreacht na hÉireann could serve as a catalyst for significant progress in this regard. In 2040, we aspire to live on an island in which gender is no longer a significant barrier to opportunity, leadership roles and earning power. Policies by which to realise this aim include:
- a The establishment of a Ministry for Gender Equality within the Irish and Northern Irish cabinets;
 - b The continued use of gender quotas in election candidate nominations until gender parity is achieved in the membership of the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly;
 - c The introduction of financial incentives for businesses to achieve gender parity in executive and board of director positions; and
 - d The introduction of 18 months shared parental leave following the birth of a child and provision of majority state-funded childcare, comparable to the Swedish state childcare model.
- 2.6 In 2040, we hope to see an island of Ireland which has become tolerant, affirming and inclusive of all members of the LGBTQ+ community. Highly significant progress was made in Ireland with the introduction of civil marriage equality by public vote in 2015. The campaign for civil marriage equality in Northern Ireland continues to amass public support and it is very likely that same-sex civil marriage will be legal across the island within the next decade, if not sooner. The right to marry a partner of the same sex is one of a number of issues that LGBTQ+ rights advocates have endeavoured to raise awareness of: homophobic hate crime, lack of access to healthcare for transgender people and discrimination against LGBTQ+ couples continue to present barriers to equality of opportunity. We recommend that sex and relationships education at secondary level should specifically address the needs and concerns of LGBTQ+ students. At present, the majority of secondary level schools throughout the island fail to provide LGBTQ+ inclusive sex and relationship education, to the detriment of students' health and wellbeing. By 2040, this omission should be rectified.

We envision that the Ireland of 2040 will be a society in which civic engagement is fostered with the aim of empowering individuals at all levels within the political, social and economic spheres.

- 3.1 An identity of inclusion on the island of Ireland in 2040 will be strengthened by promoting the role of civic engagement. The concept focuses on the engagement of individuals in political and non-political actions within the community, such as volunteering, group or community activism, and electoral participation. Our vision to foster civic engagement in 2040 focuses on increasing youth engagement and strengthening community pride across the island of Ireland.
- 3.2 At present, approximately 63.8% and 50% of individuals between the ages of 18 – 25 complete some form of community volunteering or service per week in Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively. We would like to see these numbers increase by 2040, so that the overwhelming majority of young people on the island of Ireland are positively engaged in service to their community. We aspire to see greater diversity in youth-political organisations, to ensure that the wide variety of issues facing the youth of Ireland and Northern Ireland can be recognised and addressed.
- 3.3 We wish to empower young people across the island of Ireland to make change within their communities by **fostering a sense of civic duty** within them. We believe that this will motivate young people to remain in Ireland and Northern Ireland and invest their skills here, tackling some of the factors which drive youth emigration and rural decline. We offer the following recommendations to promote civic duty:
 - a An expansion of and increased investment in programmes which foster civic engagement across the island of Ireland, such as the NI Youth Forum, Dáil na nÓg and the European Youth Parliament.
 - b The introduction of outreach programmes to encourage a diverse membership in youth organisations, with a particular focus on engaging underrepresented and minority groups.
 - c The introduction of civic education at primary level, including the implementation of a variety of volunteer projects and partnerships with primary schools.

- 3.3 d The creation of an open dialogue between young people and legislators, to ensure their concerns are heard. Young people should feel empowered to address public representatives on the topics affecting them, such as drug and alcohol abuse, mental health and homelessness. This dialogue, coupled with a sense of civic duty and increased engagement, will ensure that young people feel empowered to drive change in 2040 and beyond.
- 3.4 We wish to live in an Ireland and Northern Ireland which foster a strong sense of **pride and belonging** across communities. Instilling community pride across the island of Ireland will require the following:
- a Greater investment in community and voluntary initiatives across the island such as Tidy Towns and local councils. Recruitment drives will be essential to ensure that individuals are made aware of the variety of volunteering opportunities that exist within their area.
 - b An expansion of the use of discussion fora across the island, in order to allow citizens to exercise their role in the democratic process by voicing concerns and ideas to elected representatives on a regular basis. An expansion of the Citizens Assembly model across the island is desirable: Citizens Assemblies should be formed not only to discuss constitutional reform, but also to consider cross-border initiatives and community-based solutions to contentious issues around cultural expression.
 - c An improved voter registration process across the island, which empowers individuals to register to vote in upcoming elections or referenda.
- 3.5 By harnessing the knowledge, skills and values of a diverse people, it will be possible to create positive change in communities across the island of Ireland. We aspire to live in a society which recognises the value and importance of active civic participation across our villages, towns, and cities, ensuring that every individual, regardless of their background, feels empowered to unlock their full potential to drive that positive change.

Conclusion

Our vision for the island of Ireland in 2040 will require the creation of a new understanding of cultural identity, one which is inclusive of every individual who calls Ireland and Northern Ireland home. In order to foster this sense of belonging, it will be essential to re-examine the elements which traditionally define our culture, whilst also taking into consideration the increasing diversity of culture which exists across the island in 2017.

We aspire to live in an island where cultural accountability underlies our understanding of freedom of expression. When mediating between conflicting or contentious cultural expression, we will uphold the human rights of all parties, condemn expression which incites hate or violence against other groups and nurture positive intra-cultural expression between communities from all corners of the island.

In order to further develop an identity of inclusion across the island, we aspire to remove the barriers and obstacles many individuals face in our society when accessing a multitude of opportunities. We wish to ensure that a person's individual identity has no influence on the opportunities available to them across the island of Ireland, be it in the world of education, employment, or politics.

We also aspire to give individuals a greater sense of belonging by instilling a sense of civic duty from an early age. This will ensure that there is a sense of pride in our communities amongst the people who live there, creating a sense of belonging to something greater than their individual cultural identity.

In essence, our vision for the cultural identity of the island of Ireland in 2040 is one which is focused on inclusion and active civic participation. We aspire to see an Ireland and Northern Ireland in which several cultural identities can live harmoniously by practicing the principles of cultural accountability, furthered by an increased effort to create an environment in which everyone is empowered and encouraged to participate actively in society and can avail of the many wonderful opportunities which our island provides.