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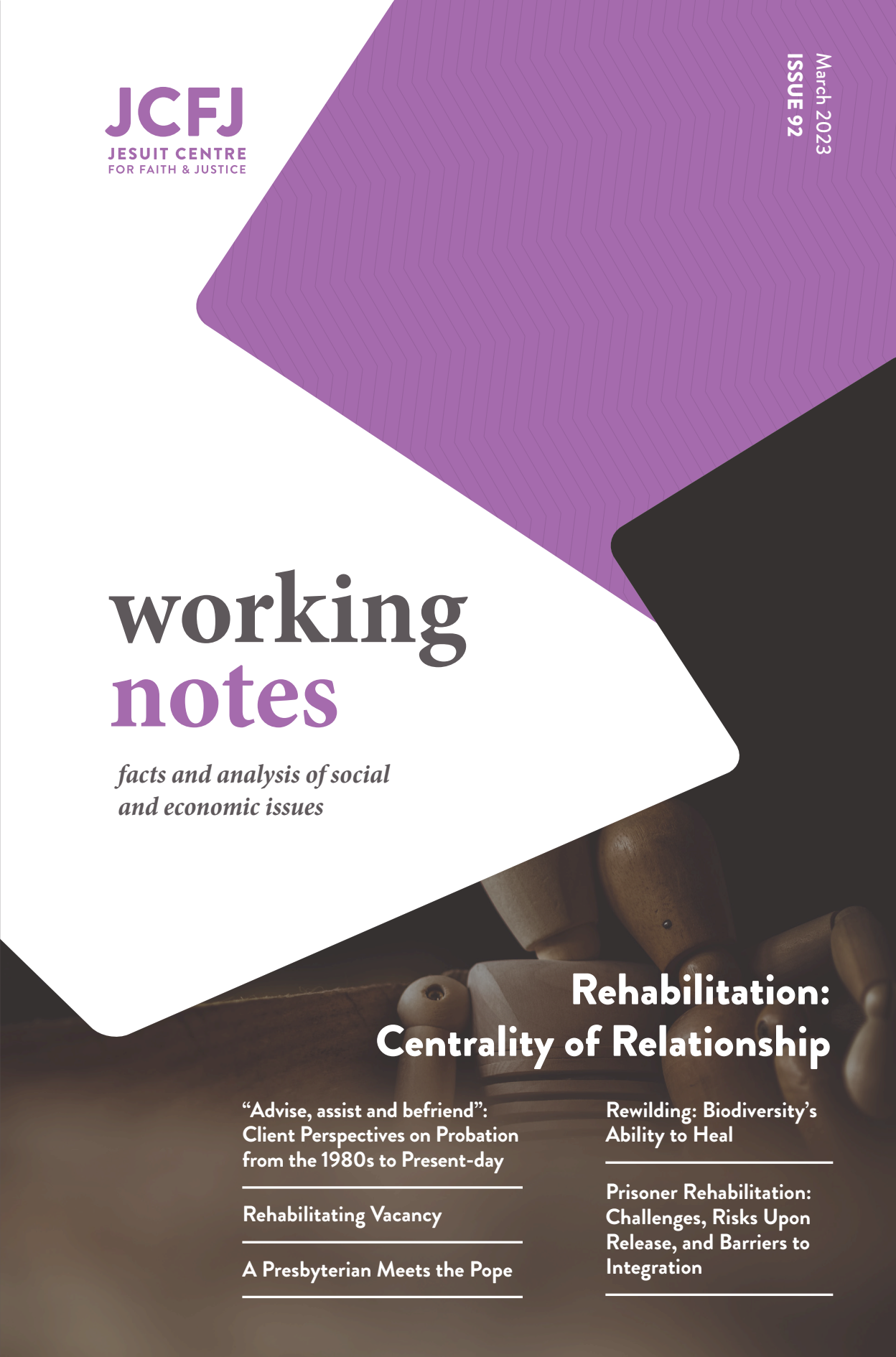

Rehabilitation: Centrality of Relationship

"Advise, assist and befriend": Client Perspectives on Probation from the 1980s to Present-day

Rehabilitating Vacancy

A Presbyterian Meets the Pope

Rewilding: Biodiversity's Ability to Heal

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Editorial

Rehabilitation, in the sense of returning something to its intended purpose or aim, is a creative act. But in many important ways, it differs from the act of creating something on a blank canvas or developing it from scratch. Rehabilitation, like creation, requires a vision or imagination for the environment or person to be restored. Yet, creation from scratch may not consider the centrality of relationship, interconnectedness, and story in the way that a rehabilitative act does.

Each essay in this issue of Working Notes considers the role of rehabilitation and suggests that central to this act is the presence of relationship. The articles run the gamut of rehabilitative acts that are present in our society; addressing rehabilitation of the person, and of our built and natural environments. This issue also contains two firsts for Working Notes: the inclusion of an essay on probation practice, as it is impossible to reflect upon the rehabilitation of people who have been deemed to have offended without considering probation; and a deeply personal theological essay on a journey towards peacemaking and reconciliation.

In the sphere of criminal justice and penal reform, Dr Deirdre Healy of the UCD Sutherland School of Law and Dr Louise Kennefick of the University of Glasgow have collaborated to produce "'Advise, assist and befriend': Client Perspectives on Probation from the 1980s to Present-day." Based on findings from semi-structured interviews with male participants who experienced probation from the 1980s onwards, their essay explores participant perspectives on how the "advise, assist and befriend" philosophy was experienced by those under supervision during a seminal period in the history of the Service. Mapping the trajectory of practice, Healy and Kennefick note that "friendship remained a central feature of probation supervision for many during the 1980s" while, in recent decades, there has been "a shift away from the friendship ideal towards a more collaborative, but ultimately more bounded, professional relationship."

Shifting towards our built environment and housing vacancy, this strand of relationship and interconnection is picked up by Dr Kathleen Stokes of the University of Galway

in the essay, "Rehabilitating Vacancy." Adroitly side-stepping what is often a heated political discourse in the midst of a housing crisis, she argues for a more holistic approach to understanding housing vacancy and its solutions, and then encourages us to reflect on the wider conditions surrounding vacancy's production, persistence, and rehabilitation. Stokes posits that "a single approach cannot be devised to 'solve' vacancy, but that doesn't mean rehabilitation is out of reach." Following a guided tour of housing vacancy, beginning close to our JCFJ offices, the essay also contains photos by my colleague with explanatory notes by the author about some of the most easily recognisable sites of vacancy and rehabilitation in Dublin— O'Devaney Gardens, Stone Villa, North Circular Road and Bridgefoot Street Park.

In a personal essay, entitled "A Presbyterian meets the Pope," Rev. Steve Stockman, a Presbyterian Minister at Fitzroy Church in Belfast, takes us on a journey—at various times moving, humorous and theological—from his youth in Ballymena to the Private Library in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican. Stockman indeed ponders its ludicrousness, "How did a Presbyterian from Ballymena, the Bible Belt of Northern Ireland, end up in a private audience with the Pope? It is quite a journey. It is my journey." He recounts how he and Fr Martin Magill addressed the 2015 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis in Derry together, and spoke about grace— the unconditional love of God—and their firm belief that only by grace could relationships be restored. The simplicity of friendship provided the soil for this work to take root. The challenge of peacemaking and the rehabilitation of relationships is daily work in a post-conflict region and adds weight to Stockman's theological reflection on his journey that the "[t]he work of the Kingdom of God is reconciliation."

Considering our natural environment, my JCFJ colleague Dr Ciara Murphy makes a cogent case for rewilding practice to be greatly expanded as "rewilding is crucial to help shift our relationship with nature from one of domination and control to partnership." In her essay, "Rewilding: Biodiversity's Ability to Heal", she explains why biodiversity is crucial, not just because of its intrinsic value but for "its contribution to ecological functioning and the role it plays in our climate response." Echoing concerns raised in Stokes' essay, Murphy considers how we can change our relationship with biodiversity and how policy should reflect the particular requirements of different sites.

In this issue's closing essay, "Prisoner Rehabilitation: Challenges, Risks Upon Release, and Barriers to Integration," Pauline Conroy, a member of a Prison Visiting Committee, discusses the challenges to rehabilitation within our prisons, the risks for former prisoners upon release, and barriers to integration to society. She asks the reader to reflect upon whether we, as a society, are doing enough to assist people in prison to start and continue on the journey of rehabilitation, saying "a prison system cannot offer rehabilitation but it can offer opportunities for prisoners to rehabilitate themselves." If a prisoner is met with constant barriers upon the completion of a sentence, Conroy suggests that their punishment endures.

I have suggested that rehabilitation is a noble pursuit because it is a creative act and requires vision and imagination. But these insightful essays, taken as a whole illustrate that rehabilitation is an act of hope. It says that no person should be disregarded, that relationships in a post-conflict region can be restored, and that our built and natural environments can be rehabilitated in ways that are just, and create spaces in which both humans and biodiversity can thrive. This should encourage us all to view our worlds a little differently, and to move forward with a renewed hope for the future.

“Advise, assist and befriend”: Client Perspectives on Probation from the 1980s to Present-day

Deirdre Healy

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INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding its English origins, "advise, assist and befriend" has come to epitomise a uniquely Irish brand of penal welfarism which has put rehabilitation and the officer/client relationship at the centre of probation practice. "Advise, assist and befriend" was first introduced into the Irish probation lexicon under the Probation of Offenders Act 1907 which was enacted prior to Ireland's independence from Britain. Section 4 of the Act provides that the probation officer must ensure that the person under supervision abides by the terms of their order and in doing so is required to "advise, assist and befriend" them. Discussion of its role in Irish probation is timely, given that it is fated to become a legal artefact with the enactment of the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill.[1] The Bill modifies the phrase and in so doing, reconceptualises how an officer ought to relate to the person they are supervising in our current time and place. Once enacted, the Bill will erase "advise, assist and befriend" from the statute books, replacing it with the term "supervise, guide and assist", with an additional emphasis on the officer building a positive relationship with the person under supervision, and supporting and monitoring compliance (Head 35 of the Act).

This article is based on findings from semi-structured oral history interviews with 25 male participants who experienced probation from the 1980s to the 2010s. The 25 clients (past and present) were recruited with the assistance of voluntary and community organisations, and through newspaper advertisements. The interviews form part of an ongoing and extensive *Histories of Probation* project which aims to provide a deeper understanding of the past as experienced by probation officers, managers and clients, and as documented in archival records.[2] The project contributes to a wider literature that recognises the need for an historical appreciation of probation practice from the perspective of key stakeholders, with oral histories of probation emerging recently in both Northern Ireland[3] and Scotland.[4]

In addition, this article explores participant perspectives on probation practice philosophies from the 1980s onwards with a particular focus on how the "advise, assist and befriend" philosophy was experienced by those under supervision during a seminal period in the history of the Service. In particular, it considers how probation philosophies evolved over time and whether client perspectives accord with the official narratives of probation history across the decades.

THE 1980s – A FOUNDATION IN FRIENDSHIP

This decade saw many challenges for Irish society, including high unemployment rates, drug addiction, social and economic deprivation, rising crime rates and prison overcrowding.[5] Politicians and policymakers focused their attention on finding pragmatic and cost-effective solutions to pressing criminal justice problems, with the result that there was little scope to advance the rehabilitation agenda. Indeed, accounts of the era note that penal discourses were beginning to question the ideals of penal welfarism and to frame rehabilitation as an "unaffordable luxury."[6] The Probation Service also experienced difficulties during this time,

1. The original heads of the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill were approved by the Government in 2014 but they are still being reviewed as part of a broader penal policy review by the Department of Justice. See Dáil Éireann, 'Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill 2014 – General Scheme'.

2. This project was part-funded by the Fitzpatrick Family Foundation and the Department of Justice. Key publications include: Deirdre Healy and Louise Kennefick, 'Hidden Voices: Practitioner Perspectives on the Early Histories of Probation in Ireland', *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 19, no. 3 (2019): 346–63; Louise Kennefick, Deirdre Healy, and Niamh Wade, '"Helping, Hurting, Holding and Hands Off": Preliminary Findings from an Oral History of Probation Client Experiences of Supervision in Ireland', *Irish Probation Journal* 19 (2022): 38–55; Louise Kennefick, Deirdre Healy, and Niamh Wade, 'Understanding Probation Supervision in Ireland: What Can We Learn From An Historical Approach?', *Probation Quarterly*, no. 22 (2022): 9–11.

3. Nicola Carr and Shadd Maruna, 'Legitimacy through Neutrality: Probation and Conflict in Northern Ireland', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 51, no. 5 (2012): 474–87.

4. Fergus McNeill, 'Supervision in Historical Context: Learning the Lessons of (Oral) History', in *Offender Supervision: New Directions in Theory, Research and Practice*, ed. Fergus McNeill, Peter Raynor, and Chris Trotter (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2010), 492-508.

5. Deirdre Healy, 'The Evolution of Probation Supervision in the Republic of Ireland: Continuity, Challenge and Change.', in *Community Punishment: European Perspectives*, ed. Gwen Robinson and Fergus McNeill (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 136–55.

6. Mary Rogan, 'Rehabilitation, Research and Reform: Prison Policy in Ireland', *Irish Probation Journal* 9, no. 1 (2012): 6–32.

including increasing caseloads, budgetary cuts and recruitment constraints at a time when additional responsibilities were introduced, in particular, the management and supervision of community service orders under the Criminal Justice (Community Service) Act 1983.

Given this backdrop, it is perhaps surprising that a strong commitment to the penal welfarist ideal was evident in client narratives, though some participant accounts also signalled the presence of other factors, like punitiveness and labelling, in their recollections of supervision. Many participants described probation meetings as focused on "talking" and had a clear sense of the therapeutic aims of this approach, which accords with the features of penal welfarism. One described a therapeutic experience when his officer asked a question that changed everything – "what happened to you?" He said his officer was the first authority figure to listen to and believe him – the focus was not just on paperwork. Others, however, had a sense that meetings were designed to enhance client accountability, an aim less evident in official narratives of the time. For instance, when speaking to his probation officer, another participant realised he had to tell the truth as he would otherwise be caught out in lies as the probation officer kept asking the same questions over and over.

Commensurate with penal welfarism, many reported receiving practical help from their officers in the form of arranging entry to treatment programmes addressing areas such as anger management, mentorship, and educational and post-release support. However, one account highlights how the supervisory relationship sometimes impacted how help was perceived by clients, and suggests support was sparse during this period. The participant recalled how young he was during his first supervision order, and how fearful he felt dealing with what he framed as a "strict" and "rigid" supervisory arrangement. There was a sense that what was on offer in terms of help was limited. His experience highlights how offers of help were not always straightforward, nor presented with progressive aims in mind, in that one officer gave him an ultimatum to attend alcohol treatment or be committed to a psychiatric institution. The following quote reflects his bewilderment at this proposal:

> *I can remember another probation officer he got me into, it was called Stanhope Street at the time […] It was for violent alcoholics and I was only about 18/19 […] and like you know I was down as an alcoholic but I wasn't an alcoholic […] they just saw 'alcohol' and that was it like. So like they got me into that place. I had to do a six-week programme or else I had to a three-month stint in Grangegorman […] Grangegorman is a mental institution. […] It was like why would you be sending me to Grangegorman? There's no need. You're sending me to Stanhope Street for a violent offence, why would you be sending me to Grangegorman? […] and even to this day I still tell that story that I was actually offered Grangegorman like […] which they all think was what, are you sure you heard him right? I said I'm fucking sure I heard him right because I asked, I double checked.*

Additionally, our findings show that the officers did not always have the requisite expertise to assist. For instance, another participant felt upset when he told his officer he was having nightmares (the first time he told a professional about this) but the officer lacked the skills to help.

Friendship remained a central feature of probation supervision for many during the 1980s and was characterised by a sense of an officer going above and beyond their remit to help a client. For instance, one participant recounted the strength of the bond with his officer in striking terms. This officer helped him to get a job and stayed in touch with him afterwards:

> *They tried to do their best for you. […] Now the one that stood by me, [NAME], she stood by me through thick and thin, through everything and I was even asked to go to her retirement party, that's how well I got on with her because I done her house up and minded her husband, he was a principal in the school and he didn't judge me.*

> Friendship remained a central feature of probation supervision for many during the 1980s and was characterised by a sense of an officer going above and beyond their remit to help a client.

Our findings add an additional layer to the notion of friendship in probation supervision during this timeframe as many participants recognised that effective probation work required active participation on their part. For example, another participant reflected on how people have to be willing to change for probation to work:

> *And I think you know people have to be really willing to change. […] for somebody to make some or have some kind of impact on you and if you're not willing to change be sympathetic to the fact that that is where you're at.*

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Finally, while most experiences were positive, the majority also described at least one experience of being labelled or misrecognised. For example, the participant quoted earlier in this section recalled how he was labelled on file as an alcoholic, but he did not see himself that way. There was also some evidence of a punitive approach emerging at this time, though accounts varied. Some participants regarded probation as something to be taken seriously and believed that there would be consequences for non-compliance (e.g. missing appointments). However, others felt that being on probation had little impact on their lives as it was not particularly restrictive; attending appointments was all that was required, and they did not feel there was a threat of prison for non-compliance.

THE 1990s – A GROWTH IN PUNITIVENESS

The 1990s in Ireland were marked by waning political support for the penal welfarist ideal. Drug addiction and drug-related crime continued unabated, contributing to a shift in socio-political attitudes towards those who offend. The tolerant attitude evident in previous decades was superseded by a view of such individuals as dangerous, unpredictable and unamenable to rehabilitation.[7] As a result, proponents of the rehabilitative ideology were perceived as "soft on crime,"[8] and penal welfarist sentiment was suppressed in penal discourse.

The Probation Service was chronically under resourced during this time, having missed out on any boon from the record economic growth and prosperity witnessed during the mid-1990s, particularly when compared with the Prison Service, to the point where there were questions about its ability to deliver services effectively.[9] Notwithstanding such challenges, official narratives suggest that rehabilitation was not replaced by punitiveness in the Service but instead co-existed.[10] Probation officers appeared to remain focused on addressing the welfare needs of clients, and some innovations

7. Louise Brangan, 'Pastoral Penality in 1970s Ireland: Addressing the Pains of Imprisonment', *Theoretical Criminology* 25, no. 1 (2021): 44–65.
8. Rogan, 'Rehabilitation, Research, and Reform'.
9. Patrick O'Dea, 'The Probation and Welfare Service: Its Role in Criminal Justice', in *Criminal Justice in Ireland*, ed. Paul O'Mahony (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2002), 635-656.
10. Rogan, 'Rehabilitation, Research, and Reform'; Healy, 'The Evolution of Probation Supervision in the Republic of Ireland: Continuity, Challenge and Change.'

continued during this period, including addiction treatments, hostel accommodation and a treatment programme for those convicted of sexual offences. The community and voluntary sector also retained a prominent role.[11]

Probationer accounts from our study indicate that penal welfarism persisted over and above what was expressed in official narratives, through the enduring themes of advise, assist and befriend. Accounts reveal how probation work was done with what clients perceived as an awareness of social contexts and an understanding of the impact of background and peer group on criminality. Some also pointed to a trust in and even admiration for the skills of their officers. One participant described how some interactions with his officer were difficult and upsetting, though he describes how his officer never made him feel vulnerable on leaving those meetings. There was a depth to the exchanges where he had a clear sense about the purpose of the meeting, and the direction they were heading in together. The significance of this approach for the participant is evident from this quote:

> *[…] I think I suppose for me she was trying to bring me on a journey where she knew I could go and to support me on that journey I think because I came forward looking for support and help rather than avoiding I think she kind of said okay this is a guy who does want to do something and she put that effort in for me and that was important to me you know.*

Arranging treatment and counselling to address criminogenic needs was perceived as a central focus for their officers by many, and most were appreciative of the help. For example, one participant remembered his officer putting in effort to secure treatment over and above what he felt would have been expected of her. And a simpler gesture, like his officer dropping him home after a meeting if he needed a lift, meant the world to another. Sometimes assistance took on a more creative or unusual form. When supervision ended for one participant, his officer asked him to stay in touch by writing letters about how his life was going. He said that he could now appreciate how this activity gave him awareness about his behaviour at the time.

Some described their relationship with their officers as more like a friendship than a formal arrangement, in that there was a sense of familiarity and reciprocity. For instance, one participant recalled that interacting with his officer was like talking to a sister. Another felt that his officer actually cared about him through the ways that he listened to him, gave him time, and assisted him, over and above his relationship with his own family, even. Finally, one particular account stands out for the warmth it evokes in its description of the client/officer relationship. This participant talks about the trust in and admiration for the work his officer did:

> *I felt that somebody was actually listening to me, that I could talk about stuff that was very important for me that I never spoke about before and I could speak and you know not fear it going anywhere else you know and with [NAME], the probation, I've worked with her I've had that especially with [NAME] I've had that you know, every aspect of my life was opened with [NAME] you know. I remember saying one day, I said there was only two people in the world who know me, my wife and [NAME].*

However, experiences of punitive attitudes became more pronounced in this era. Punitivism, understood broadly as a lack of commitment to welfarism,[12] was evident to a greater degree in the 1990s than in any other decade, supporting the official narrative of the time. For instance, some participants from this cohort reported an aggressive attitude in their officers. One account describes an officer asking intrusive questions and 'ordering' him to be on time. This participant also reported that on being five minutes late for a meeting he was threatened with a breach. Participants tended to respond to this supervision style with frustration, leading to resistance and lack of engagement with the officer. At a more cellular level, some clients were sensitive about how the way in which they were treated and

11. Katharina Swirak, 'Unmasking the "criminal Justice Voluntary Sector" in the Republic of Ireland: Towards a Research Agenda', *Irish Probation Journal* 15, no. 1 (2018): 24–46.

12. David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

A more passive punitive attitude emerged from accounts that describe their interaction with officers as "purely bureaucratic" or as if the officer was simply "going through the motions," without providing assistance beyond ensuring compliance.

spoken to reflected how their officer perceived them. One participant reported frustration about frequently being kept waiting for appointments, while another felt that his officer looked down on him. A more passive punitive attitude emerged from accounts that describe their interaction with officers as "purely bureaucratic" or as if the officer was simply "going through the motions," without providing assistance beyond ensuring compliance.

THE 2000s – EMERGING PROFESSIONALISM

By the 2000s, the Celtic Tiger was well underway with criminal justice expenditure increasing, though largely in relation to criminal justice infrastructure rather than rehabilitation services. The consolidation of the Probation Service from 2006, in addition to the recession from about 2007 onwards, form the backdrop of a shift towards managerialism in official narratives of the time and might indicate a reduced commitment to rehabilitative goals. However, official accounts continued to point to the prominence of the penal welfare narrative in probation discourse. By this point, most officers were trained social workers who used social casework techniques in addition to employing clinical judgement. Further, many of the rehabilitation programmes funded by the Service focused on welfarist needs, such as employment, education and substance abuse, rather than criminal cognitions or "criminogenic risk factors."

Themes of advice, assistance and encouragement remained prominent in client perceptions of supervision from this era. For instance, one participant said his officer advocated for him and put out feelers regarding opportunities to save him time and disappointment at being turned down. However, less evident is the deep and authentic sense of friendship underlying the supervisory relationship that was prominent in previous decades. That said, a collaborative approach was still perceived by clients. For example, one participant, along with other life sentence prisoners, requested a groupwork programme which officers helped to introduce. His previous officer also worked collaboratively with him on his release plan. He said that even arguments are respectful – he felt heard and was allowed choices. Another also recalled that if he was running late, he could call his officer to let her know and she wouldn't threaten him with court, which contrasts with some more authoritarian accounts from the previous decade.

At the same time, client accounts from this cohort tended to reflect a more formal approach to supervision, which demonstrates a shift away from the friendship ideal towards a more collaborative, but ultimately more bounded, professional relationship. This experience is encapsulated in the following quote from one participant:

> *[…] every three year and I had a kind of situation where I got one lady who was there a while and then she went on maternity leave so then I got someone else who'd also been there a while but then he took over from her and then he left… then I got another one who I'd been with a while and we'd done a lot of work together and everything seemed to be going good and then he, my report was due for the Parole Board and he left six weeks before but I was saying, the parole was like in four weeks he wasn't going for six so I said we'd worked together for years so I was like you can still do the report and he was like ah no we're going to hand over and I was thinking not very fair I have to work with someone else.*

However, less evident is the deep and authentic sense of friendship underlying the supervisory relationship that was prominent in previous decades.

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Some continued to report a sense of being misrecognised or labelled by their officer. One participant said his first officer looked down on him and judged him straight away, while another said troublemakers were often side-lined by probation.

THE 2010s – EMBEDDING PROFESSIONALISM

In more recent years, an overt punitive narrative has become markedly less evident in Irish criminal justice rhetoric more generally, and in probation policy and practice materials in particular. However, there remain echoes of it with references to risk and responsibilisation,[13] which are perhaps better characterised as the "new rehabilitation" narrative. This approach tends to emphasise accountability, personal responsibility and the prioritisation of victims' needs,[14] reflecting the influence of neoliberal ideals and strategies. Conversely, notable developments in the last decade also include the emergence of a strong desistance narrative, with probation policy signalling the need for rehabilitation to include engagement with families, communities, civil society and the state itself in order to support people on their pathway from crime.[15] A growing commitment to restorative justice strategies is also evident.[16]

Penal welfarist ideals continued to surface from client accounts in recent years, reinforcing its place in the official narratives, though the formal tone that emerged in the previous decade has also become more entrenched. Help was characterised in a more structural sense, rather than a relational one, as demonstrated by this quote from one participant:

> *The most helpful for me personally was just keeping out of trouble, having a structure, having a plan so Monday-Friday between 2-4 I'd have to be here so that was definitely most helpful because it was good structure, it was a good opportunity to see how, I hate to say normal, but how normal working people was living and how much more calmer and better it was than the life that I was living previous to that. So that would have been the most helpful, just as a bit of an eye opener. […] And it wasn't too overwhelming, like 2 hours isn't a lot just to come in and see what they had to offer.*

13. Deirdre Healy, 'The Evolution of Probation Supervision in the Republic of Ireland: Continuity, Challenge and Change.'
14. The Probation Service, 'Annual Report 2012' (Dublin: The Probation Service, 2012).
15. Ioan Durnescu, Margaret Griffin, and John Scott, 'Developing an Irish Offender Supervision Framework: A Whole System Approach.', *Irish Probation Journal* 17 (2020): 24–42.
16. Ian Marder, 'Restorative Justice as the New Default in Irish Criminal Justice', *Irish Probation Journal* 16 (2019): 60–82.

While a more professional approach proved effective for some, others found formality off-putting. For instance, one participant found that meeting his officer sitting behind a desk was intimidating and something he was not used to. In a more extreme example, one participant's account reflects the negative impact of an authoritarian approach. The effect of labelling on his relationship with his mother is particularly striking:

> *Just really the old woman [PO], that's it. She was negative, you know what I mean. She was labelling me. Like my ma was with me and all so she was making my ma fight with me and all. Where me ma wouldn't really be like that. So she was making people act different around her. So that was negative. She changed. She changed me ma's perspective to who her son is. Said like 'He's out robbing cars, you don't have control over him, this that and the other,' you know what I mean. I don't have family so there was no point fighting for family all them years.*

Finally, clients from the last decade used the word "stress" much more frequently than any previous decade. For instance, one participant found being on probation quite stressful as he picked up another charge, was afraid to tell his officer, and feared going back to prison as his life had stabilised.

CONCLUSION

This article has sought to provide a more nuanced picture of penal welfarism in probation practice in Ireland by uncovering the shifting narratives that have characterised the last four decades, from the perspective of probation clients. The experience of receiving advice, assistance and friendship from officers resonated strongly with those who experienced supervision in the 1980s, notwithstanding the challenges facing the country and the Probation Service at the time. Although the 1990s witnessed increasingly punitive attitudes towards those who offend, participants continued to describe probation work as focused on advising, assisting and befriending. However, participant accounts of the 2000s and 2010s support official narratives of probation history by highlighting the entrenchment of a more professionalised approach to supervision. Yet, participants from these cohorts still reported experiencing meaningful connections with their supervisors. Our findings suggest that recent probation history has brought with it greater levels of professionalism as well as clarity around the boundaries of the supervisory relationship. Perhaps inevitably, however, this progress has been achieved at the cost of a more fallible but altogether more heartfelt friendship.

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Rehabilitating Vacancy

Kathleen Stokes

Dr Kathleen Stokes is a postdoctoral researcher in Human Geography at the University of Galway, whose recent publications include “What counts as infrastructural labour? Community action as waste work in South Africa” (2023) and “Taking stock of Dublin’s vacant sites and properties: A review of existing policies and measures” (2021).

INTRODUCTION

Housing vacancy and dereliction are commonplace features of all Irish cities and towns. We have rarely ventured far before we are confronted with an overgrown lot, an empty building, or a boarded-up house. In the backdrop of the country's intensifying crisis of housing access and affordability, their existence generates much outrage and contention. Public opinion seems unanimous that something needs to be done quickly to return vacant and derelict sites back to use. However, what this means and what it entails is no foregone conclusion.

Housing policy is rarely straightforward, and in this case it is no different. Before settling on solutions, it is helpful to reflect on some important questions about the causes of vacancy and dereliction. Do we understand how such spaces come to be abandoned, uninhabited, and in gradual disrepair? What do we expect from these spaces that surround us – who should have access to them, for what uses, and who should be responsible for working towards such ends?

The theme of this edition of *Working Notes* is "Rehabilitation", a term that combines two distinct meanings. First is habilitate, which stems from the Latin *habitare*, meaning to make fit, to inhabit, live, or dwell. The second aspect, re-signifies a return or doing something again. Brought together, rehabilitation has come to mean the return of something or someone to an original or improved state, condition, or life. It has been used to describe all manner of circumstances, from bodily recovery to ruined reputations to the built environment.

Rehabilitation is a helpful term for thinking through how vacancy and dereliction are currently perceived and responded to in Ireland. It suggests a return to some sort of use and signifies a call for living, inhabitation, wellbeing and dwelling without necessarily relying upon fixed or pre-existing norms. Rehabilitating vacancy and dereliction is not a standalone issue or a simple matter of "bringing things back into use." To bring a space "back to life" there is a need to understand what it once was, how a space has come to its current material circumstances, who had a relationship with this space, and what the space might become given ideal circumstances.

In this essay, I want to think critically about how rehabilitating vacant buildings and space in Irish cities is more than a matter of construction. In what follows, I start by outlining how vacancy and dereliction are currently understood and responded to, before arguing for a more holistic approach to understanding their rehabilitation. Ultimately, my contribution moves from focusing solely on material conditions to reflect on the wider conditions surrounding vacancy's production, persistence, and rehabilitation. This perspective, I argue, has the potential to contribute to more socially just approaches, responses and possibilities for vacancy.

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH VACANCY

Before we can think clearly about rehabilitating vacancy, it is vital to understand what it is (and isn't). Much of Ireland's public outrage over vacancy stems from the regular announcement of big numbers like the Census 2022 vacant dwelling figures,[1] or through sharing photos of individual sites or buildings in the press or social media, as with the #derelictIreland hashtag. While multiple datasets and registers capture different dimensions of vacancy and dereliction, current measures of vacancy and dereliction in Ireland only offer partial understandings and are based on different parameters and assumptions. For instance, a national statistic might give you an overarching figure but overlooks the more nuanced geographies of vacancy, and doesn't specify what is habitable or could be returned to use with minimal cost and effort. Conversely, a picture may tell a thousand words, but it will not detail ownership information or the planning histories of a particular vacant site. Quantifying measures also don't explain how vacancy has been produced, how long it has been present, and who or what has been involved in creating and maintaining it.

Part of the challenge here is in the discrepancy between how vacancy and dereliction are ordinarily understood ('I can see it's falling apart', or 'I know no one has lived there for years') and how they are legally defined. Most people identify vacancy and dereliction based on how something looks – whether it is run

1. Central Statistics Office, "Census 2022 and Vacant Dwellings FAQs", accessed 10 October 2022, https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2022/census2022andvacantdwellingsfaq/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20vacant%20dwellings,from%209%25%20to%208%25.

down, in poor condition, or unoccupied. While this is undoubtedly a quick way of spotting buildings and sites in need of attention, it excludes properties that might be vacant or derelict but don't match these subjective aesthetic registers – perhaps not visible from street level or where exteriors are maintained. In some cases, a neighbour might mow the lawn of an adjacent vacant home to avoid it becoming an eyesore. Likewise, vacant units in apartment buildings can be especially difficult for anyone assessing vacancy from the street level.

Vacancy and dereliction are legally defined in precise yet different ways. In 1990, the Derelict Sites Act defined dereliction on the basis of a negative aesthetic quality that detracts from a surrounding area.[2] Meanwhile, the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act in 2015 only defines vacant sites as being over .05 hectares and must consist of residential land that is both suitable for housing where there is a need, or regeneration land that is negatively affecting the surrounding amenities.[3] These definitions are intended to set parameters for what can be included on local authority registers and, consequently, what actions local governments can take to enforce their reuse. However, these prescriptive definitions also exclude and lump together an incredibly diverse set of spaces, processes, and material conditions.

In our research, Cian O'Callaghan and I have argued that distinguishing between different types of vacancy (see figures 1 and 2 below) can help gain more precision in our debates and responses.[4] Vacant units over shops will be vacant for different reasons than large-scale derelict sites, and require distinct kinds of information, resources, and strategies to rehabilitate them. Vacancy and dereliction encompass a wide variety of material conditions, geographies, and processes and must be considered in relation to surrounding socio-economic conditions, infrastructural access, and needs of current inhabitants. For instance, according to GeoDirectory, vacancy

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Figure 1: Nine Types of Vacancy in Dublin

2. Dáil Éireann, "Derelict Sites Act, 1990," Art. 3, http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1990/act/14/section/3/enacted/en/html#sec3.
3. Dáil Éireann, "Urban Regeneration and Housing Act, 2015," Art. 5, https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/33/section/5/enacted/en/html#sec5.
4. Kathleen Stokes and Cian O'Callaghan, Taking stock of Dublin's vacant sites and properties: A review of existing policies and measures. (Dublin: TCD & Dublin Housing Observatory, 2021).

> A single approach cannot be devised to 'solve' vacancy, but that doesn't mean rehabilitation is out of reach. Increasing people's awareness of vacancy and dereliction in their neighbourhoods is leading to increased public discussion over what can be done and who is responsible.

Figure 2: Nine Types of Vacancy in Dublin (cont.)

and dereliction rates are considerably lower in Dublin and surrounds than in more rural counties.[5]

A single approach cannot be devised to 'solve' vacancy, but that doesn't mean rehabilitation is out of reach. Increasing people's awareness of vacancy and dereliction in their neighbourhoods is leading to increased public discussion over what can be done and who is responsible. While useful, this approach often doesn't get to the bottom of why vacancy has become so widespread and so prolonged in different settings, and what specific support and actions are needed to rehabilitate different spaces. Moving from decrying vacancy and dereliction as a general condition to questioning what forms are most prevalent, where, and why, can lead to more locally-informed, specific, and appropriate responses. Already this is beginning to happen with more targeted conversations around the particularities of vacancy in town centres, as with the Heritage Council's Collaborative Town Centre Health Check, which brings together community groups, businesses, representatives, and residents to assess, work towards, and monitor the regeneration of their town centres, including vacant sites. [6]

In recent years, vacancy has risen as a key pillar within current government housing policy, yet the prescribed policy responses have done little to change vacancy rates or public concerns dramatically. Vacancy was a pillar of the 2017 national housing policy *Rebuilding Ireland*, which led to several key developments and policy responses, including interest-free loans for the renovation of vacant units into social housing,[7] and the creation of local authority Vacant Home Officers and vacant sites registers to keep track of vacancy and issue levies on vacant sites.[8] While some areas, such as Waterford, have leveraged the Repair and Lease scheme to increase their available social housing, most of

5. Geodirectory, "GeoDirectory Residential Buildings Report Q2 2022", accessed 10 October 2022, https://www.geodirectory.ie/knowledge-centre/reports-blogs/geodirectory-residential-buildings-report-q2-2022.
6. Heritage Council, "Collaborative Town Centre Health Check," accessed 10 October 2022, https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/projects/town-centre-health-check-programme.
7. See "Vacant Homes Schemes" for a summary of current programmes, accessed 20 January 2023, https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5976a-vacant-homes-schemes/.
8. See Vacant Home Officer Contacts, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, accessed 20 January 2023, https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f59b3-vacant-homes-officer-contacts/.

O'Devaney Gardens

O'Devaney Gardens was once a public housing estate, consisting of 13 four story blocks (circa 270 units) built by Dublin Corporation in the 1950s. The site was demolished for redevelopment in the mid-2000s, and has largely since remained a vacant site since, with only part of the site under construction at the time of writing. The site has had a high profile and contested trajectory, with councillors voting on several occasions to redevelop the site through a public-private partnership (PPP) arrangement.

As of 2019, a developer received approval to build a combination of over 1,000 social, affordable, and market rental units and has subsequently fought for the right to sell to corporate buyers. Delays to construction have also been raised in 2022, leaving elected representatives to question how long the redevelopment will take to complete.

Figure 3: O'Devaney Gardens (Image Rights: Martina Madden)

these developments have had low take-up across the country.[9] Even when market incentives are available, the knowledge, resources, and capabilities needed to reduce vacancy and dereliction don't appear to be coming together.

Despite the limited impact of early schemes, the current government continues to push similar incentive-based policies, including a grant of up to €50,000 to property owners for renovations to long-term vacant properties or self-building on vacant sites.[10] Budget 2023 announced a new 'Vacant Homes Tax,' which has already received critiques for being insufficient, or failing to learn from enforcement challenges and loopholes associated with the existing Vacant Sites and Derelict Sites Levies.[11] Amidst the current round of policy announcements, it is worthwhile taking a step back to consider what is practically needed to bring vacant and derelict sites into a habitable state and what is prohibiting such efforts. While vacancy and dereliction encompass a diverse set of material conditions, geographies, and histories, together they are illustrative of the myriad of exclusions and contradictions within our build environment. It is essential to consider the underlying conditions that have prevented rehabilitation on a wider scale thus far. Recent policy responses have focused more on incentivising existing market conditions over addressing the broader systems that underpin and enable widespread vacancy and dereliction in Ireland.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Spaces go through different uses, change hands, have periods of lowered and heightened activity, and experience uncertainty and transition. Thinking that vacancy can be entirely eradicated once and for all suggests that all space should be productively in use at any given time, rather than considering what is desirable for a given place and whether all space is enfolded into human uses at any given time. Homes might be empty while for sale or in probate, and a site might lie vacant for some time while different parties deliberate the best use for it. Or changes to a community's size or makeup might mean that buildings' original purposes are no longer relevant or needed. This is not inherently problematic.

However, let's say you've found a vacant building in your area and have gained access to it to bring it back into use. This building has been in disrepair but is structurally intact so that you could convert it into housing. What happens next?

9. For more information, see 2022 reporting on number of lack of full time employed Vacant Homes Officers across Irish local authorities, and reported take up of Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS Statistics Q1 2021), accessed 20 January 2023, https://assets.gov.ie/111511/463cef67-5639-4fdd-b211-e013fdf4fd88.xlsx.
10. See "Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund Scheme," accessed 10 October 2022, https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c2183-croi-conaithe-towns-fund/; and "Ready to Build Scheme," accessed 10 October 2022, https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/33209-ready-to-build-scheme-serviced-sites-for-new-homes/.
11. For example, see Gerard Turley, 'Why the Government's vacant homes tax is a missed opportunity,' *RTE Brainstorm*, 30 September 2022, https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2022/0929/1326149-vacant-homes-tax-budget-2023-missed-opportunity/#:~:text=The%20Irish%20vacant%20homes%20tax,a%20levy%20of%20only%200.3%25.'; Jude Sherry & Frank O'Connor, 'Is the new vacant homes tax designed to fail?,' *Irish Examiner*, 1 October 2022, https://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/commentanalysis/arid-40972844.html.

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Rehabilitating a vacant or derelict property requires money, expertise, and materials. If the necessary upgrades and renovations are more than cosmetic, then obtaining planning approvals might also be necessary. This process can take time and inevitably limits what is legally possible with existing buildings and sites. Additional approvals will also be needed if you wish to use the building or site for a use not covered by its present land use zoning. Furthermore, rehabilitation projects must also pass fire safety checks and adhere to other planning safety standards. While this might seem self-evident, our research has highlighted how navigating all of these steps, checks and approvals can be complicated, opaque and time-consuming.[12] More creative and flexible approaches to planning could be introduced, but it can be risky for planners to deviate from current requirements and face potential liability if anything goes wrong.

There is also the issue of conservation and heritage. Suppose your building is considered a protected structure or historic building of interest. In that case, you will have to work with conservation planners and undergo additional assessments to ensure that your plans do not jeopardise your building's architectural heritage. The conservation issue is fascinating since many people raise it as one of the reasons widespread vacancy and dereliction is such a travesty – that Ireland's build heritage is gradually decaying and being lost forever. Interviews with government officials, property developers, and others involved in rehabilitating vacant buildings noted how conservation processes and protections add substantial cost, time, and energy that many might not be able or willing to take on. Some suggested that reducing the strictness of conservation planning requirements and expenses might be necessary to encourage their rehabilitation. As one interviewee mentioned to us, the very processes and provisions intended to preserve our built environment can end up discouraging people from undertaking rehabilitation projects, and result in prolonged decline and vacancy.

12. Kathleen Stokes and Cian O'Callaghan, *Taking stock of Dublin's vacant sites and properties: A review of existing policies and measures.* (Dublin: TCD & Dublin Housing Observatory, 2021) and Kathleen Stokes, Cian O'Callaghan & Maedhbh Nic Lochlainn (forthcoming).

Stone Villa, North Circular

Stone Villa is a protected structure listed on Dublin City Council's Vacant Sites Register. Built in the mid-1800s, this building is said to be one of the oldest houses in North Inner City Dublin. While in continuous family ownership for over a century, Stone Villa was put up for sale in 2008/9 with an initial asking price of €2.75m. However, buyer interest declined around the time of the Global Financial Crash.

It was eventually bought by a limited company, who sought planning permission to redevelop the site into apartments over 2019/20. In response, residents have organised to challenge the proposed development, citing the lack of an Environmental Impact Assessment report, the reduced tree cover, and potential disruption to bat habitats on the site.

Figure 4: Stone Villa, North Circular (Image Rights: Martina Madden)

It is also important to talk about money. Materials and labour have costs, as does the expertise of agents, planners, architects, solicitors and others to navigate the process of bringing a building back into a habitable state. And let us not forget that purchasing a vacant or derelict site or a building is next to impossible without personal or institutional wealth, as renovation costs cannot be factored into mortgage costs. While recent government grants attempt to minimise this cost, anyone wishing to purchase and renovate a vacant or derelict property still needs to have substantial financial resources (be that personal savings, loans, or something else). Furthermore, other interviewees reported that financing for redeveloping vacant and derelict sites had become more constrained following the global financial crash, with banks expecting higher returns on investment. While this is beyond the scope of our research to confirm, it was interesting to hear private developers suggest that the State could be the one player able to finance the rehabilitation of vacant and derelict sites and properties without requiring such a high rate of returns on investment.

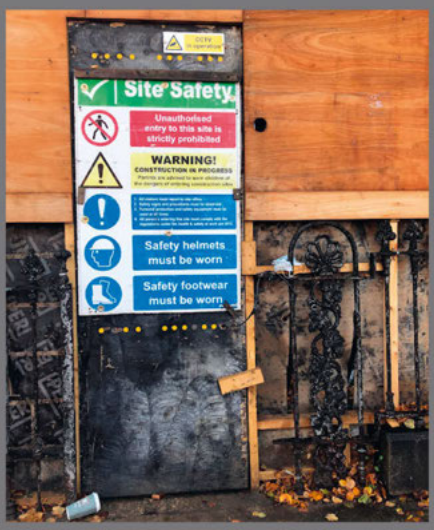
I highlight these issues to emphasise how rehabilitating vacancy and dereliction is often more complicated than we realise. Still, none of these factors are insurmountable and, indeed, finding pressure points and blockages within these intersecting systems can help to identify what intervention, and by which actors, would be most beneficial. Furthermore, rehabilitating vacancy is not limited to repair and renovation – while a crucial part of rehabilitation, it is more of a response than a rethinking of how such widespread and longstanding vacancy and dereliction have arisen in the first place. This leads us to question whether rehabilitation might also necessitate more fundamental transformations to understand, govern, and interact with the built environment and space in general.

BEYOND VACANCY: RETHINKING PROPERTY, GOVERNANCE AND SPACE

Vacancy and dereliction is often equated with vandalism and waste, with commentators decrying it as a form of misuse and incompetence. However, public discussion rarely focuses on how different incentives and logics enable and encourage distinct forms of vacancy. Far from an isolated condition or spatial failure, vacancy is an inherent part of our built environment and economies. Leaving a building to become vacant or fall into dereliction can be a strategic stage in many urban development processes. A site might be kept vacant as the owner attempts to assemble a series of sites for a more considerable development or is waiting for approval to rezone the property. Similarly, expensive luxury apartments might be kept empty instead of reducing rents.[13] This might seem illogical to some, yet it is emblematic of our speculative, financialised land and housing markets.

Alternatively, longstanding vacancy sometimes persists because it is impossible to confirm and contact the property owner – they might be absentees who have fallen through the cracks of Ireland's multiple registration systems, or ownership might be obfuscated through registration within shell companies. While strikingly different, both examples highlight the centrality of property rights within current concerns over vacancy in Ireland. On the one hand, this is implicit in public calls for owners to keep their properties in good and habitable conditions and public financial incentives for property owners to renovate and conserve their vacant and derelict buildings. The primacy of property rights is also implicit when occupiers are quickly (and sometimes violently) expelled from vacant and derelict sites, as seen in Dublin over the last year with the evictions of Sunnyvale Social Centre and Parkgate House/ Ionad Sean Heuston, to name a few.

13. Killian Woods and Sarah Taaffe-Maguire, 'Hundreds of Luxury Apartments Controlled by US Fund Lie Vacant in Capital', Business Post, 17 January 2021.



414 North Circular Road

414 North Circular Road is listed on Dublin City Council's (DCC) Derelict Site Register and has been classified as "dangerous" due to its dilapidated condition. The house caught fire in Spring 2019 after previously referred to as a "tinderbox" in several press articles in late 2018.

Around this time, the building has been reportedly illegally occupied, while descendants of deceased property owners had been taking measures to remove the inhabitants. As of February 2022, DCC had appointed a contractor to undertake refurbishments with an estimated completion date of Q3 2022.

Figure 5: 414 North Circular Road (Image Rights: Martina Madden)

In addition to property rights, the role of State in addressing vacancy is also frequently called into question. The extent to which State actors should be responsible for direct intervention remains unclear, and dependent upon a broader distribution of governmental powers and capabilities. Presently, national policy and legislation have placed significant responsibility on local authorities for identifying and responding to vacancy and dereliction. While local governments can implement compulsory purchase orders, they are seen as a last resort and must compensate the owner at the market cost of the property. Yet compulsory purchase orders can be time-consuming and costly due to long appeal processes and inflated property values, which cannot be reduced to account for redevelopment or repair costs.

There are examples where local authorities have compulsorily purchased a vacant building and converted it to social housing. We can ask whether this process could be made more widespread, cost-effective, efficient, and accessible than simply building anew. For instance, one interviewee suggested giving more autonomy to local authorities devise strategies for working with owners to address instances of vacancy and dereliction, as well as the freedom to seize properties for less than market value when more collaborative options were not possible (so that finances could be leveraged to undertake repairs). While this might not be suitable for all instances, it highlights a generative interpretation of the State's current role in urban development and in rehabilitating vacant and derelict properties.

However, rehabilitating vacancy should not be limited to pursuing *any* form of redevelopment or reuse for the sake of it. A more just approach to rehabilitation should also consider who gets a say regarding vacancy, and endeavour to reflect residents' needs, desires, and visions for their built environment. For instance, activist occupations have transformed vacant buildings into community spaces and accommodation for unhoused people, creating temporary illustrations of alternative, socially-orientated potential uses of vacant spaces. Conversely, residents also voice refusal to proposed developments to vacant and derelict space through protest, petitions, or planning submissions. While these kinds of efforts reflect people's desire to have a say in the future rehabilitation, most available efforts are also, by necessity, reactive. What if communities didn't have to wait, but proactively could take on the vacant sites and buildings in their area or, at the very least, be involved in determining their best uses for their current and future needs?

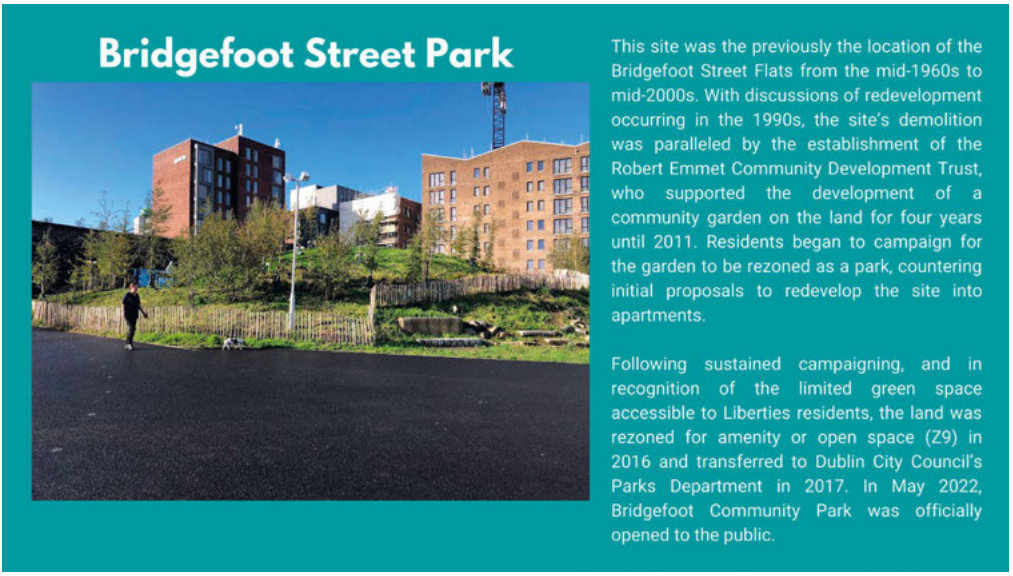


Figure 6: Bridgefoot Street Park (Image Rights: Martina Madden)

To rehabilitate vacancy and dereliction in a just manner, we must reconsider how space is governed, valued, and inhabited in Ireland more generally. I don't pretend this is an effortless endeavour that would be without risk or the potential for capture. Still, rehabilitating vacancy and dereliction should be thought of as more than a matter of a construction, given the limited success of such efforts to date.

Instead, rehabilitating vacancy can be a starting point for determining what kinds of environments we wish to inhabit, with a view to devising opportunities that further democratise planning and our relationships to land and the build environment, encourage more proactive and socially-minded governance, and contribute towards more equitable and sustainable forms of spatial development, stewardship, and care.

A Presbyterian Meets the Pope

Steve Stockman

Rev. Steve Stockman is the Minister to Fitzroy Presbyterian Church in Belfast. He is author of the book *Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2* (Relevant Books, 2001) and a regular contributor on BBC Radio Ulster.

INTRODUCTION

It is quite a moment. Unforgettable for sure. After lining up with the thousands already going through security at St Peter's Basilica at 8am on a beautiful Italian spring morning we are suddenly ushered away. Like the chosen few we are now walking through wide corridors, nodding at the Swiss police standing to attention. Then up what seemed like an awful lot of steps, through a long series of throne rooms to the last one, a waiting room.

We wait for about twenty minutes, admiring the art work. Then there is movement. A Dutch Bishop opens a door and walks through to us. The anticipation is heightened. The young women fix their dresses. The young men their ties. My plastic clerical collar had snapped in two as we were going through security. My wife, Janice, is making sure it stays in.

Suddenly our group is moving. Slowly. Janice and I are wondering why. Then suddenly we round the door and Pope Francis is standing in all his charismatic humility. He reaches out his right hand out to welcome us into his Private Library in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican.

It is quite overwhelming, as it is when you meet someone who is that famous. Even more so as we had imagined him already seated and us being shown to ours. No, he is determined to greet us personally, to make us feel special. So, Pope Francis looks me in the eye and shakes my hand. I lean in and say, "I am the Presbyterian in the group". He reaches for my arm with his other hand and says, "Well, then you are particularly welcome." We smile again.

How did a Presbyterian from Ballymena, the Bible Belt of Northern Ireland, end up in a private audience with the Pope? It is quite a journey. It is my journey. I am so thankful for that journey, everywhere God has led me, everything God has taught me, all that I have experienced, got wrong, confessed and, like that clerical collar, made right again. I am most surprised and privileged at reaching this particular destination on my journey.

Pope Francis meeting with the students from the QUB Catholic Chaplaincy on 25th April 2022. Rights: Alamy

"I am the Presbyterian in the group". He reaches for my arm with his other hand and says, "Well, then you are particularly welcome."

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

"No Pope Here!" That was a slogan I was familiar with growing up. Who knows, as a child I might even have shouted it with my mates. There are many who still stand by the sentiment. There are many who felt angry and maybe even betrayed that I shook hands with the Pope.

In a fascinating new book *How to Inhabit Time*, James K. A. Smith writes:

> *"Our past is not what we have left behind; it's what we carry. It's like we have been handed a massive ring of jangling keys. Some of them unlock possible futures. Some of them have enchained our neighbours. We are thrown into the situation of trying to discern which is which."*[1]

If Smith is right, and I believe he is, then I carry not only my personal family past with me but the societal past too. I grew up in a middle-class, white, mid-Antrim family in a predominantly Unionist town. There are a lot of jangling keys there. Then as a teenager I had a Damascus Road conversion to a Presbyterian, evangelical faith. More keys!

1. James K. A. Smith, *How to Inhabit Time: Understanding the Past, Facing the Future, Living Faithfully Now* (Minnesota: Brazos Press, 2022), 33.

Deciding to follow Jesus as a seventeen-year-old was dramatic for me. I had been an atheist from about the age of seven. It was a humiliating about-face and change of direction. Though momentous, it was also quite naive. I was excited to follow Jesus but had no idea about the keys from the past that I was now going to get caught up by.

As I look back now I believe that at the time of that conversion I was a peacemaker in its purest form, but it all got encrusted. I came to Jesus via The Beatles. In my teens, music was my way in to work out the big questions. I was an atheist and The Beatles attempted to filled the god-shaped hole. *"All You Need Is Love"* and *"Give Peace a Chance"* were slogan choruses that I could stand behind.

I then realised that The Beatles were asking the right questions, pointing to some answers, but their answers lacked a robustness. The flower power of 1967 was all turning violent by 1969. As singer Larry Norman once sang, *"The Beatles said all you need is love but then they broke up."* When I started reading about Jesus I saw someone who was also concerned with these issues but somehow had some spiritual energy to make them happen.

Chapter 6 of Luke for me is the "hardest ask" in the Gospels. There are so many counter-intuitive challenges to following Jesus but it gets no more hard-core then when Jesus says, "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you (Luke 6:27-28 NIV)." This is the kind of exhilarating vision that a teenager responds to. This is beyond eating and working and sleeping for 70 years before you die. This is a life worth living, if you can reach it!

When I read *"love your enemies"* in 1979's Northern Ireland, it did not take me too much thought to apply it. Ballymena, where I grew up, might not have been an epicentre of the bombs and bullets but I knew we were a divided country. I now knew that Jesus wanted me to love my enemies.

Peacemaking, it seemed to me, was at the heart of the Gospel. Right there at the birth of Jesus, there were angels singing to shepherds about peace on earth. That should not be much of a surprise as *shalom* – a word whose meaning transcends merely 'peace' to suggest a wholeness and completeness that spans not just society but all of Creation – is a major concept in Old Testament theology and practice. A slip towards error is when we see the peace that Jesus came to deliver as entirely personal. If we miss the societal aspect of shalom, we confine and restrict the breadth of the Kingdom of God that Jesus emphasises in his taught prayer.

The Church has a peacemaking vocation that is lost in our sectarianism. The Gospel is not about justice or vengeance; it is not about proving who was right or wrong. It is not about us and them and us winning. The point of this mission that God had in coming to earth was peace. That peace was not just for my soul. It was about peace on earth. Anyone following this Jesus whose birth is heralded in this angel's song should be all about peace.

CONVERTED AGAIN THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

About a year after my conversion, I got involved in a spat in the letters page of our local paper, *The Ballymena Guardian*. I wrote about this love for the enemy. My spiritual innocence was shocked when another Christian wrote a letter attacking me the very next week. Attacking me for quoting the Bible? The shock soon became sadly too familiar.

Looking back, thirty-five years later, I realised that this was the start of my encrusting. Very quickly that young adult, with a yearning to cultivate peace in his surrounds, got his soul weighed down with cultural, societal and, worst of all, ecclesiastical myths and fears that stopped me from following Jesus as I should.

That set me on a path: A low, unchallenging one. For thirty years I was what Professor John Brewer would call a "passive" peacemaker.[2] I was a believer in peacemaking and as a chaplain at Queen's University Belfast I taught it to my students. We took student teams to South

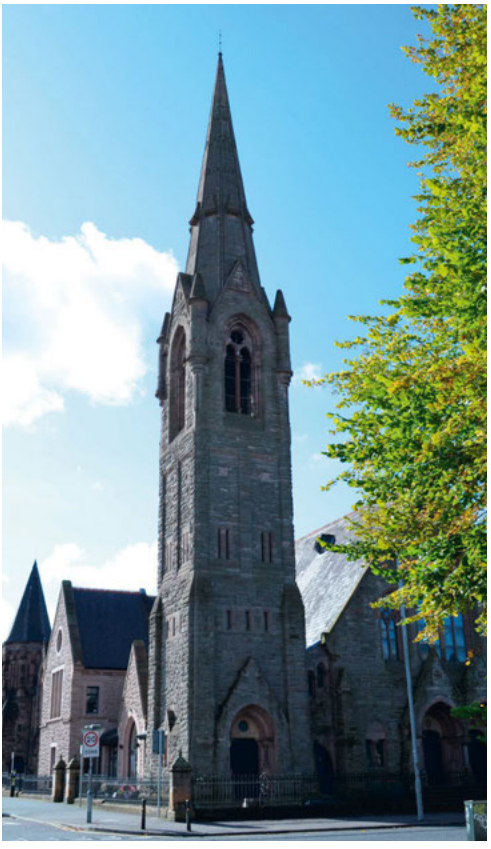
2. John D. Brewer, Gareth I. Higgins, and Francis Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Peace wall at Cupar Way in Belfast. Rights: Wikimedia Commons

Africa where we engaged with reconciliation with the help of International Centre for Transitional Justice.[3] Yet the encrusting still stopped me short of engaging with the "other side."

Then near the end of my time at Queens, the other two full-time chaplains and I took a decision to welcome and try to work alongside a new Catholic chaplain, Fr Gary Toman. His friendship was like a John the Baptist preparing the way for what Professor Brewer described as the better way of "active" peacemaking.

In 2009, I became the minister of Fitzroy Presbyterian Church in the shadow of Queens University. I was by now much more prepared for the congregation's peacemaking DNA and their ongoing relationship with Clonard Monastery in West Belfast.[4] The Clonard-Fitzroy Fellowship had been active since 1981,[5]



Fitzroy Presbyterian Church in Belfast. Rights: Wikimedia Commons

3. The International Centre for Transitional Justice was founded in 2001 by Alex Boraine, a lawyer and former south African politician who had a pivotal role in the Truth and Justice Commission. For more, see 'Our Story', International Centre for Transitional Justice, https://www.ictj.org/.
4. Clonard Monastery is a congregation of Redemptorist priests and brothers who came to Belfast in 1896, after first arriving in Limerick in 1852. See Redemptorists Clonard Belfast, "About Us," accessed 15 November 2022, https://www.clonard.com/about-us/.
5. "Fitzroy Presbyterian Church : Fitzroy-Clonard Fellowship," accessed 15 November 2022, https://www.fitzroy.org.uk/Articles/125832/Fitzroy_Presbyterian_Church/To_be_reviewed/Ministries/Fitzroy_Clonard_Fellowship.aspx.

Interior of Clonard Monastery. Rights: Wikimedia Commons

originating on the simple foundation of a friendship between Very Rev. Dr Ken Newell and Fr Christopher McCarthy. In 1999, Fr. Gerry Reynolds and Ken won the Pax Christi Peace Prize.[6] I was standing on the shoulders of these peacemaking giants. I was soon visiting Clonard Monastery regularly and was a guest speaker at their 2010 Novena. I began to believe that the Holy Spirit was chipping away at the encrusting, trying to free me from it.

If I can mix metaphors for a moment, I began to see that encrusting as a hard layer on top of the soil of my soul. Jesus' telling of the parable of the sower speaks of God's word landing on hard ground. You don't need to be agrarian to see it bouncing down the path. All those things that I had feared had encrusted my soul so that I was hardened to hear God's word of invitation to reconciliation.

Thankfully, the encrusting was about to meet its end. I had recently struck up another friendship across the divide, Fr Martin Magill. He was parish priest in St Oliver Plunkett's, Lenadoon at that time.[7] He wanted to do Irish language classes that brought together both communities. He knew Protestants would find it hard to go to Lenadoon but felt that Catholics would go to Fitzroy, where an Irish language service – An Tor ar Lasadh – was already being held once a month.

Martin and I met for a coffee and something happened. It was a *kairos* moment. Like meeting God, like meeting Janice my wife, that coffee seemed like something significant had happened. It was like a vocational friendship. Over the next few months we met up, attended each other's churches. Then came the invitation that led to that smashing of my encrusting.

Fr Martin was invited to hear Gerry Adams' closing address of the 2011 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis that was taking place in Belfast. Having asked my predecessor in Fitzroy, Ken Newell for advice, Ken told Martin that he should go… and, being aware of our new friendship, that he should take me with him.

6. Pax Christi International seeks to honour men and women who stand up for peace, justice, and nonviolence across the globe. See Pax Christi International, "Pax Christi International Peace Prize," accessed 15 November 2022, http://paxchristi.net/programmes/peace-prize/.

7. The parish was established in 1976, at a time of severe deprivation including very high unemployment levels, overcrowding, people living in temporary housing and the ongoing "Troubles." For more, see St. Oliver Plunkett Parish, "Our History," accessed 15 November 2022, https://stoliverplunkettparish.ie/history/.

It was at that point that the encrusting did its deadly deed. As I pondered whether to go along with Martin, I could see a TV camera scanning around the hall catching me sitting beside a Catholic priest listening to Gerry Adams. What would my family think? What would my hometown of Ballymena think? What would my denomination think? Would I get myself onto to those awful talk-shops on the radio where I would be asked difficult questions and other contributors would shout "Lundy" at me? Would I be judged as "unsound" and damned by Presbyterians across Ireland? I knew what I should do but the encrusted ground stopped me from doing it. I said no. Fr Martin went to hear Gerry Adams on his own.

The very next morning the encrusting was finally smashed. I got up in Fitzroy during our Sunday morning service and repented for not attending the previous night's Ard Fheis. I shared all my fears and told my congregation that it was utter disobedience to God's call to peacemaking and I allowed my fears to get in the way of following Jesus. As I look back I believe that it was a turning point in my life and ministry. I broke through the encrusting that had confined me as a *passive* peacemaking where I could talk a good game but was too fearful to move into *active* peacemaking.

AWKWARD DANCE OF RECONCILIATION

I find what happened next, wonderfully Biblical, poignant and very amusing. Four years later I got a phone call one afternoon from Declan Kearney, the northern Chairperson of Sinn Féin.

- Steve, the Ard Fheis is in Derry this year.

Ha! The soil is fertile. I know how I am going to answer this. I'm going to say, "Yes Declan I would love to attend."

Then…

- And we were wondering if Fr Martin and you would like to come along and address the Ard Fheis.

A deflated silence on my end. What?!?!

- Ah… ok Declan… can you give me some time to think about that!

The apostle John, in his first letter, writes "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins…" (1 John 1:9 NIV). I call that the cuddly part of the verse. I knew and welcomed God's forgiveness that morning in Fitzroy when I confessed to the impact of all my encrusting. I was forgiven. However, the verse then moves from God's caress of grace to his clashing with our selfishness. God loves us enough to forgive us but loves us even more to fix us. That means changes in behaviour. So, John continues, "… and purify us from all unrighteousness." I often joke that maybe if I had just gone to that first Ard Fheis I wouldn't now have to consider speaking at the one in Derry!

The work of reconciliation is not easy. Fr Martin and I took time to consider the invitation. We spoke to many people in many walks of life. I spoke to close friends who had lost loved ones in the Troubles. I needed their permission. We were careful about every word we spoke. Breaking through the encrusting and ploughing up the soil to be more fertile for God's Word did not mean that there were not dilemmas and complexities. As I put it in a poem at the time:

This is an awkward dance
With partners disconcerting
The tender tentative steps
With all our wounds still hurting
Take two up and one back
Move close to hold the seams
Swirl in the suspicious space
To swoop in audacious dreams.

The Gospel is an awkward dance.

I preached a short series in Fitzroy recently based around a definition of sin by the American Presbyterian minister and author, the late Frederick Buechner. In his book called *Wishful Thinking; A Seeker's ABC* in which he defined lots of theological words with wit and depth of wisdom, he wrote this about sin:

> *The power of sin is centrifugal. When at work in a human life, it tends to push everything out toward the periphery. Bits and pieces go flying off until only the core is left. Eventually bits and pieces of the*

core itself go flying off until in the end nothing at all is left. 'The wages of sin is death' is Saint Paul's way of saying the same thing.[8]

As a more pragmatic-than-cerebral theologian, who constantly surmises the outworking of the Scriptures in everyday life and particularly human relationships, this works for me. It is a simple but powerful image of the effects of sin. Whether personal or societal, political, or indeed ecclesiological it pushes away the Other.

The first three chapters of Genesis are all about pushing away. As Adam and Eve reach for the forbidden fruit hoping that it will make them more than the humans that they were created to be, and become more like God, they end up less than they were, as broken fallen humans. That worked out in pushing away God, pushing away each other, pushing away the pieces of our very own souls.

Jesus' Gospel, on the other hand, bridges the gaps. He draws people in, first to God, then to self, our neighbours, our enemies, and stretching out to all of Creation. That is what the peace that the angels of the nativity were singing about does. God comes to earth in human form to draw us back. The Gospels are strewn with awkward dances of reconciliation. Think of Zacchaeus, the woman caught in adultery, or the Roman centurion who servant Jesus healed. Jesus in all his encounters was reconciling. Jesus on the cross was reconciling. It was not smooth or painless. It was denial of self and sacrificial (2 Cor 5:11-21 NIV).

The work of the Kingdom of God is reconciliation. Peacemaking is not a deluxe add-on to following Jesus. It is right at the core of it. It is what it is about. With all my encrusting blasted, I was able to finally live it.

Fr Martin and I did address that 2015 Ard Fheis in the Millennium Theatre in Derry. We spoke about grace. We called it the gem of Christianity, that it means unconditional love and that God loved us and made the first move. We shared how we believed that only by grace could relationships be restored.

8. Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* (Rhode Island: Mowbray, 1994).

“The work of the Kingdom of God is reconciliation. Peacemaking is not a deluxe add-on to following Jesus. It is right at the core of it. It is what it is about.

4 CORNERS FESTIVAL AND AN INVITATION

Three year earlier, in 2012, Fr. Martin and I, with an amazing bunch of soul mates, founded the 4 Corners Festival.[9] The Festival is held annually in Belfast and aims to bring the city together with different arts, talks, storytelling, and sports events. Last year was our 10th anniversary and we were delight that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby agreed to speak.

It was at this stage of our planning that put in motion the immediate chains of events that led us to the Vatican. My friend, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, invited me to review Pope Francis' book *Let Us Dream; The Path To A Better Future* for the Anderstown News.[10] I could see his angle. A Presbyterian minister reviews The Pope! He had no idea what he started.

I found the book prophetic. Yes, there was a lot of Catholic discussion that either seemed irrelevant or not theologically suited for me. But there was much which challenged me deeply. I loved how he talked about Covid-19 as a 'stoppage'. He went on, "In every personal 'covid', so to speak, in every 'stoppage' what is revealed is what needs to change; our lack of internal freedom, the idols we have been serving, the ideologies we have tried to live by, the relationships we have neglected."[11] I have used that some in my sermons since.

I loved his emphasis on the common good and the danger of what he called "hyper-individualism". I was whispering Amen to his belief "that wealth must be allowed to roam unhindered in order to deliver prosperity

9. "4 Corners Festival Belfast," accessed 15 November 2022, https://4cornersfestival.com/.
10. Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2020).
11. *Let Us Dream*, 36.

for all."[12] When he wrote about the "great danger in remembering the guilt of others to proclaim my own innocence" and of "reducing a person's history to the wrong they did,"[13] I was listening in my own context of Northern Ireland.

I loved it so much that I found myself jokingly suggesting that we book him for the 4 Corners Festival. In the midst of the laughter, the soundtrack of most of our planning meetings, someone said that Austen Ivereigh had helped Pope Francis write the book.[14] Who? I was told about Austen and immediately suggested that we find a way to bring him over for the Festival. So, we did, and Austen opened our Festival in the Anglican St Anne's Cathedral while Justin Welby closed our Festival in the Catholic St Peter's. Even more amazing than this, Austen had been with Pope Francis days before the Festival and got us a two-minute video message.[15]

After the first Sunday evening event, Austen came back to our house for some refreshment and outrageously suggested that he should try and get Fr Martin and I into a private meeting with Pope Francis to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of 4 Corners. It would also coincide with the 50th Anniversary of the Catholic Chaplaincy at Queens University. We could go together. We laughed out loud but a few weeks later and the invitation came.

CONCLUSION

When we all had sat down in Pope Francis' private library, he quickly grabbed my utter respect. He told us that his speech was translated and printed and on our chairs. So, he went on, you can read that later. Let's have a chat instead. Any questions? What he had just done was far from lost on me. Here was an 86-year-old man giving up his control of the meeting. A man of that age to have the confidence to let go and believe that he was going to be mentally sharp enough to answer any question that might come his way. Questions not given in advance. A challenge at any age but at 86? But then, he is the Pope!

As well as sharp, I found his conversational style warm, intimate and humorous. When the students asked about how they could share the faith with their friends, Pope Francis first of all eased their intensity. He told them to have fun and be students! He even suggested that he himself did only as much as he needed to pass his exams. I related! He spoke of about the importance of having a drink and a laugh with friends.

Pope Francis encouraged us to get ourselves a little book of the Gospels. Keep it in our pockets. Read it when the opportunities came. If we steep ourselves in these stories of Jesus we will eventually wear him. He discouraged preaching at your friends. It puts them off. Then, my favourite line from the day, "The soul is moved by witness".

Perhaps it was having a couple of Presbyterians in the room but he then shared about being out walking with his grandmother at around the age of five and bumping into two women from the Salvation Army. Though not Catholic, his grandmother was very positive about them. He said it was his first ecumenical moment. He encouraged the students to see their Protestant friends as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Pope didn't seem to have any time for those who keep us divided. He suggested, with that humour again, that we should send all the theologians out onto an island where they could debate the theological differences while the rest of us stayed in the real world and got on with it. That 'it' was very clearly the living out of the Gospel, working together in Kingdom building, justice and peace.

I thanked the Pope for his message to our 4 Corners Festival and how amazing it was to have him open the Festival and then have Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, close it. His eyes lit up at Justin Welby's name. He spoke very fondly about his him as a dear brother and their work together for

12. *Let Us Dream, 109-110.*
13. *Let Us Dream, 29.*
14. Austen Ivereigh is a UK-based Roman Catholic journalist, author, commentator and biographer of Pope Francis.
15. Pope Francis Message to 4 Corners Festival 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OesX6FZnksM.

peace in South Sudan.[16] He told us that they were keen to meet the South Sudan leaders in July but that the Pope had refused to respond to their invitation until Justin Welby and his wife Caroline were invited on an equal footing to himself. That humility again; that working together.

I have one regret. As we left, the Pope again stood at the door and greeted each of us, gifting us with Rosary beads, even the Presbyterians. I was at the end. It was again very personal. As I went to leave he asked me to pray for him. I felt that humility yet again. I cannot tell you how sorry I am that I didn't put my hand on his shoulder and pray right there and then. Maybe next time!

As we left he asked that I would pray for him. I heard from a Belgian priest outside that Francis has arthritis in his knees and is in some pain. I told him I would pray for him, especially his knees. He thanked me and I was gone… gone to continue to follow the same Jesus my brother Francis follows.

God had taken me on a long journey, both joyous and painful at times in differing measures. Through His commitment to dealing with the encrusting of my heart—slowly closing me off from fraternity with people of different traditions— I can now recognise the Holy Spirit's ongoing work to loosen its stranglehold over 35 years. Ultimately, answering God's call to active peacemaking was the tipping point causing the encrusting to shatter thereby opening me up to a new world of opportunity and possibility. I no longer had to be shaped by fear, defensiveness, or the court of public opinion, but could step confidently into the life-affirming reconciliation work of the Kingdom of God. To understand that peacemaking is at the heart of the Gospel, and to live in the grace and rhythms of that practice, has changed my life, my ministry, and my relationships. It has made all the difference.

16. Frances D'Emilio, 'Pope, Hobbled by Knee Problem, Looks Forward to S Sudan Trip | AP News', AP News, May 7th 2022, https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-africa-religion-middle-east-justin-welby-b42f39045ccfc7bca57369165af10090. That "pilgrimage of peace", where Francis was joined by Welby and the Church of Scotland Moderator, Rt Rev Dr Iain Greenshields, went ahead in February 2023.

Rewilding: Biodiversity's Ability to Heal

Ciara Murphy

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THE STATE OF IRELAND'S BIODIVERSITY

Ireland is known as the Emerald Isle for its green hills, a label which evokes lush vegetation and biodiverse landscapes. This visual representation of Ireland as "Tír glas" gives us an undeserved representation for environmental sustainability. Our green hills camouflage a largely denuded landscape bereft of complex ecosystems. The absence of a mosaic of ecosystems— including native woodland, scrubland and wetlands— is mirrored by a lack of biodiversity which rely on them for survival.

Ireland's biodiversity crisis is not a new phenomenon. We have a long history of ecological degradation linked closely to our colonised past and more recently with the modernisation of the agricultural system and accelerated urbanisation. The 16th and 17th century's systematic levelling of our forests for timber and grazing[1] alongside the elimination of predators including the wolf[2] are widely recognised for both their cultural and ecological transformation of the Irish countryside.

Extensive agriculture is widely associated with diminished biodiversity. The alternative is established with traditional grazing meadows, extensive hedgerows, and freshwater ecosystems. This provides habitat for an abundance of species. Populations of farmland birds can flourish on land. Plentiful salmon and trout can be found in the water. And linear wooded ecosystems enabled by the hedge network allow for connectivity between the smaller pockets of woodlands while providing for smaller animals and birds.

> "Biodiversity is important not only for its intrinsic value but also in terms of its contribution to ecological functioning and the role it plays in our climate response.

1. "Forestry since Tudor Times - Forestry Focus," accessed 6 October 2022, https://www.forestryfocus.ie/forests-woodland/history-of-irish-forestry/forestry-since-tudor-times/.
2. Sean Mac Connell, "Curse of Cromwell Extended to Ireland's Wolf Population," The Irish Times, 11 November 2009, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/curse-of-cromwell-extended-to-ireland-s-wolf-population-1.769291.

While utterly transformed from what was there generations before, the manmade habitats of intensive agriculture have become the new normal by which we judge our ecological health.[3] In recent decades the biodiversity which established itself alongside our agricultural systems has been again degraded by intensification of the sector. This includes increased chemical inputs and land "improvements" of draining and reseeding with grass, which removes residual marginal wilder ecosystems that provided refuges for the biodiversity that remained on our land.[4]

This decline in the state of the Irish environment is clear when reviewing the reports produced by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Environmental Protection Agency. Approximately 85% of protected habitats in Ireland are in "inadequate" or "bad" condition with an ongoing trend showing that only 2% of these are improving in quality. The conservation status of protected species fare little better – just over half of the species listed are in favourable status.[5] When compared to the rest of Europe, Ireland is rated as one of the worst countries for ecological integrity[6] with our diminished diversity of larger fauna and the dominance of land use dedicated to grazing further reducing the complexity and diversity of our landscape (See figure 1 below). Whatever way we look at it, the state of Ireland's biodiversity leaves a lot to be desired. But why should we care?

In this essay, I will outline why our biodiversity is important not only for its intrinsic value but also in terms of its contribution to ecological

3. This phenomenon is known as shifting baseline syndrome. Peoples first hand experiences of biodiversity and ecosystem functioning is limited to their lifetime. As these progressively deteriorate over the course of decades, the expectations of what biodiversity should be present within certain ecosystems shifts. An older person recognises that there is less biodiversity present today than when they were younger while the biodiversity that a child experiences today will be what is considered 'normal' for their lifetime. See Masashi Soga and Kevin J. Gaston, 'Shifting Baseline Syndrome: Causes, Consequences, and Implications', *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 16, no. 4 (2018): 222–30.
4. Environmental Protection Agency, "Ireland's Environment 2020 - Chapter 13 - Environment and Agriculture" (Wexford: Environmental Protection Agency, 2020), https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/state-of-the-environment/EPA-Ireland's-Environment-2020-Chapter13.pdf.
5. Environmental Protection Agency, "Ireland's Environment: Nature," accessed 6 October 2022, https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/irelands-environment/nature/.
6. Néstor Fernández et al., 'Boosting Ecological Restoration for a Wilder Europe' (Halle-Wittenberg: German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) and Martin-Luther-Universität, 2020), 20.

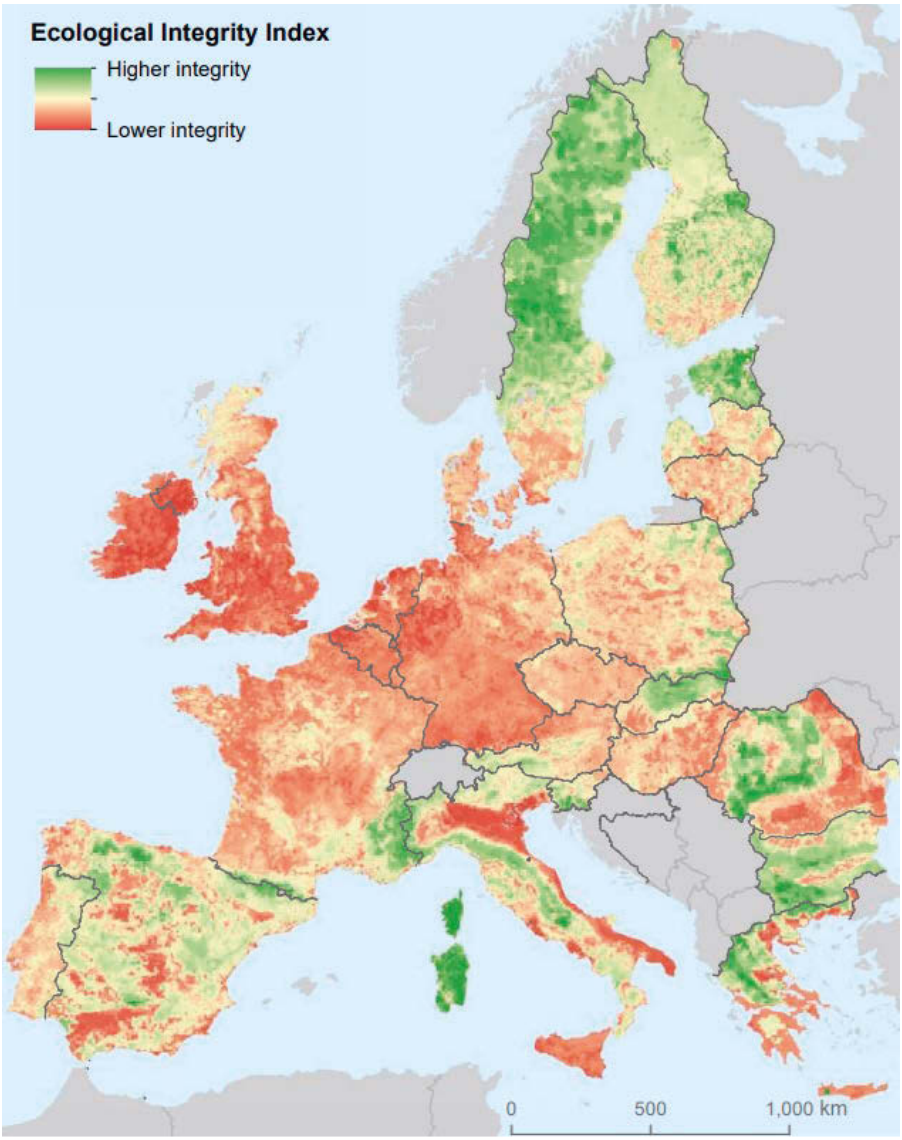

Figure 1: Ecological Integrity Index (Fernandez et. al. 2020)

functioning and the role it plays in our climate response. Rewilding, as a policy instrument, goes beyond conserving our remaining biodiversity, giving it the space to heal and expand. Ultimately, I will argue that rewilding is crucial to help shift our relationship with nature from one of domination and control to partnership.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BIODIVERSITY

While biodiversity and nature are often used interchangeably, this essay will refer predominately to biodiversity. Nature is typically taken to encapsulate plants, animals, the physical environment and other features and phenomena produced by earth systems – in essence a catch all term for 'non-human' elements in our environment which is quite broad and so tends to lose its meaning.[7] Biodiversity, or biological diversity, on the other hand is the term used to describe all the myriad living creatures, plants and microorganisms that exist. While still covering a vast amount, this term is quite specific and so

7. This is to say nothing of the the ways in which 'nature' functions philosophically to underwrite a worldview dedicated to human mastery of the created world. See, for example: Jason W. Moore, 'The Rise of Cheap Nature', in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (Oakland, CA: PM Kairos, 2016), 78–115.

can be more easily understood, thus ensuring clarity of communication.[8]

An ecosystem is where the physical characteristics of an area work together with the biodiversity which exist in that physical space to form a "bubble of life."[9] The functioning of Earth as we know it, where water is filtered and cleaned, crops grow, plants are pollinated, flood waters are retained, where trees capture carbon and release oxygen, and where organic matter is recycled, ready to be incorporated into new organisms relies on this biodiversity. As it is eroded, the resilience of these ecosystems is reduced. No longer stabilised by a wide variety of different species working together, the precarious functioning of an ecosystem is less able to resist the shocks and disturbances, induced both by natural forces and human action.[10] Ecosystem functioning can also be completely transformed by removing (or introducing)[11] a "keystone" species which has a disproportionate impact on the entire system[12] or altering the species composition so that the functional groups are transformed to a point where the functioning of the ecosystem changes.[13]

The importance of the goods we receive from ecosystem services cannot be overstated. However, our connection to the natural environment we co-evolved with goes deeper than we can easily comprehend.

The link between physiological and mental health benefits and biodiversity, while widely acknowledged, is poorly understood.[14] The deep connection people feel towards the natural environment, the draw to understand and appreciate the ecological principles which underpin ecosystem functioning environment also confers a value. Of course, biodiversity does not purely exist to suit our needs, there is an intrinsic value to the living world which goes beyond what we can consume.[15]

The increasing recognition of the importance of biodiversity has led to a shift within the media and among advocates to expand the term "climate crisis" to "climate and biodiversity crisis." The prevalence of climate in our national discourse has resulted in an almost universal recognition that the climate crisis is something we need to take urgent action about. However, understanding of the biodiversity crisis lags slightly behind even though it represents a threat which is arguably of greater importance. While these crises can be considered separately, they are intimately intertwined, with similar root causes and some common solutions.[16] They also function to exacerbate the impact of each other with climate collapse, one of the leading causes of the biodiversity crisis. A diminished biodiversity also leads to less healthy ecosystems, less able to cope with the consequences of climate collapse such as drought.

HOW WE CONSERVE

Recognition of the diminishing state of Ireland's biodiversity has led to a myriad of different conservation methods and initiatives. These include programmes aimed at conserving particular types of species or habitat as well as "land-sharing" and "land-sparing" conservation programmes.

8. This principle also applies when developing policy in this area – terms with vague or unspecific definitions can lead to weaker policy then would otherwise be possible.
9. "Ecosystem | National Geographic Society," accessed 6 October 2022, https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/ecosystem/.
10. David Tilman, Forest Isbell, and Jane M. Cowles, 'Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functioning', *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution, and Systematics* 45 (2014): 26.
11. This point is referring to the introduction of a non-native species— Invasive Alien Species— which out-compete those already present. They spread easily, pose a threat to infrastructure, or function to degrade the ecosystem in some way. (In the Irish context, classic examples include rhododendron and zebra mussels).
12. Research studying how species function and interact with each other often use the "removal" method where individual species are removed from complete communities. For more, see Tasman P. Crowe, 'What Do Species Do in Intertidal Systems?', in *The Intertidal Ecosystem: The Value of Ireland's Shores*, ed. James G. Wilson (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2005), 115–33. The classic example of the possible positive impact of introducing a keystone species is the reintroduction of the wolf, a native predator, to Yellowstone National Park. Changes in abundance of other species, the growth of vegetation, and the flowing in the river all followed the introduction. See "Wolf Reintroduction Changes Yellowstone Ecosystem," accessed 6 October 2022, https://www.yellowstonepark.com/things-to-do/wildlife/wolf-reintroduction-changes-ecosystem.
13. Tasman P. Crowe and Roly Russell, 'Functional and Taxonomic Perspectives of Marine Biodiversity: Functional Diversity and Ecosystem Processes', in *Marine Hard Bottom Communities: Patterns, Dynamics, Diversity, and Change*, ed. Martin Wahl (New York: Springer Verlag, 2009), 375–90.
14. "Biodiversity and Human Well-Being: An Essential Link for Sustainable Development | Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences," accessed 7 October 2022, https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rspb.2016.209.
15. "It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential 'resources' to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves. … Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right." Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (Rome: Vatican, 2015), §33.
16. Common root causes of the climate and biodiversity crisis are over-consumption and over-extraction. Ecosystem restoration and reducing resource consumption are examples of common solutions as healthy ecosystems, such as active bogs absorb carbon dioxide emissions which are produced. There are some instances where mitigation for the climate catastrophe and the biodiversity collapse clash, including construction of renewable energy infrastructure in areas of high biodiversity and land use change to enable the increased production of biofuel.

> Reducing ecosystems to single species or habitats without considering how they interact with other species or the physical environment can have unintended consequences.

Land sharing methods consider how we might protect and enhance biodiversity in the areas which have a use that is predominately not for nature protection. Urban areas in Ireland are hostile to biodiversity, often lacking good quality green space and mature trees. While greening urban areas – through tree planting, planting native plants in unpaved areas and creating parks – can help biodiversity in urban areas to thrive, it is impossible to recreate fully functioning ecosystems. In agricultural areas, Results Based Agri-Schemes[17] and other programmes that encourage buffer zones around fields, the establishment of habitats for biodiversity (ponds, scrubland, woodlands, wetlands etc), and initiatives which encourage conditions for the protection of particular species and nutrient management are all methods that are used – with varying success – to enhance biodiversity in agricultural settings.

Land sparing involves setting substantial tracts of land aside, predominately for biodiversity and ecological function. This includes the establishment of National Parks,[18] restoration of bogs,[19] and preservation of woodland for recreational use.[20] Rewilding fits squarely within this type of conservation.

While there have been several success stories in Ireland in relation to species conservation, some of these methods are not without criticism. Conserving for particular species or habitat can have an overall deleterious impact on the overall biodiversity integrity in an area.[21] Concentrating on particular popular or more understood species can blinker the health of the ecosystem. Reducing ecosystems to single species or habitats without considering how they interact with other species or the physical environment can have unintended consequences. Similarly, conservation with a particular baseline in mind, such as the bare, treeless uplands common throughout Ireland, can result in maintaining a degraded system. This is the landscape that our present generation has come to understand as the "natural" or optimum ecosystem. It is not.

In some cases, expending huge amounts of energy to manage ecosystems for a specific function or landscape (even completely prohibiting the natural succession into more mature ecosystems), may be appropriate. But it fails to appreciate the complexity and potential of natural ecosystem processes to self-govern. Heath is an example of this conundrum: this man-made ecosystem was established by deforestation and maintained historically by grazing, mowing, or some other way of removing biomass. This maintenance was required because left to its own devices, the eco-system would become woodland.[22] Conserving heath is a valuable thing to do. It is a biodiverse-rich ecosystem which has strong cultural significance.

> This is the landscape that our present generation has come to understand as the "natural" or optimum ecosystem. It is not.

17. Caroline Sullivan, 'High Nature Value Farmland: Getting Results from Farming for Biodiversity', *Working Notes* 34, no. 86 (June 2020): 41–46.
18. While this is technically accurate, in Ireland much of the National Parks are in poor ecological condition and are used predominately for tourism.
19. "National Parks and Wildlife Serive and Intel launch bog restoration project to increase water storage by millions of litres," accessed 7 October 2022, https://newsroom.intel.ie/news-releases/national-parks-and-wildlife-service-and-intel-launch-bog-restoration-project-to-increase-water-storage-by-millions-of-litres/.
20. Coillte, "Dublin Mountains Makeover," accessed 7 October 2022, https://www.coillte.ie/coillte-nature/ourprojects/dublinmountainsmakeover/.
21. Burning is often used as a management tool in upland areas to allow for regeneration of heather, the food source for several species of birds. However, fire is not a natural part of Ireland's ecosystem and can result in devastating impacts on the ecosystem including complete destruction of plant biomass, destruction of habitats, mortality of ground nesting birds and other animals. See "Mourne Mountains: Huge Gorse Fire Causing "Horrifying" Damage", The Irish Times, 25 April 2021, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/mourne-mountains-huge-gorse-fire-causing-horrifying-damage-1.4546868; Sarah Mooney, "Wicklow Mountains Fire "Set Deliberately" Destroys over 300 Hectares of Natural Habitat", BreakingNews.ie, 31 March 2022, https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/wicklow-mountains-fire-set-deliberately-destroys-over-300-hectares-of-natural-habitat-1282948.html.
22. Jan Bokdam and J. Maurits Gleichman, 'Effects of Grazing by Free-Ranging Cattle on Vegetation Dynamics in a Continental North-West European Heathland', *Journal of Applied Ecology* 37, no. 3 (2000): 415–31.

But conserving it means that we are suppressing its succession into woodland, which is in itself a valuable biodiverse ecosystem – and one which in Ireland is devastatingly rare. We need to think clearly: Are we overvaluing one type of ecosystem by undervaluing another? Can we get to a point where we can manage the land differently, using different processes allowing a range of different ecosystems, habitats, and species to flourish?

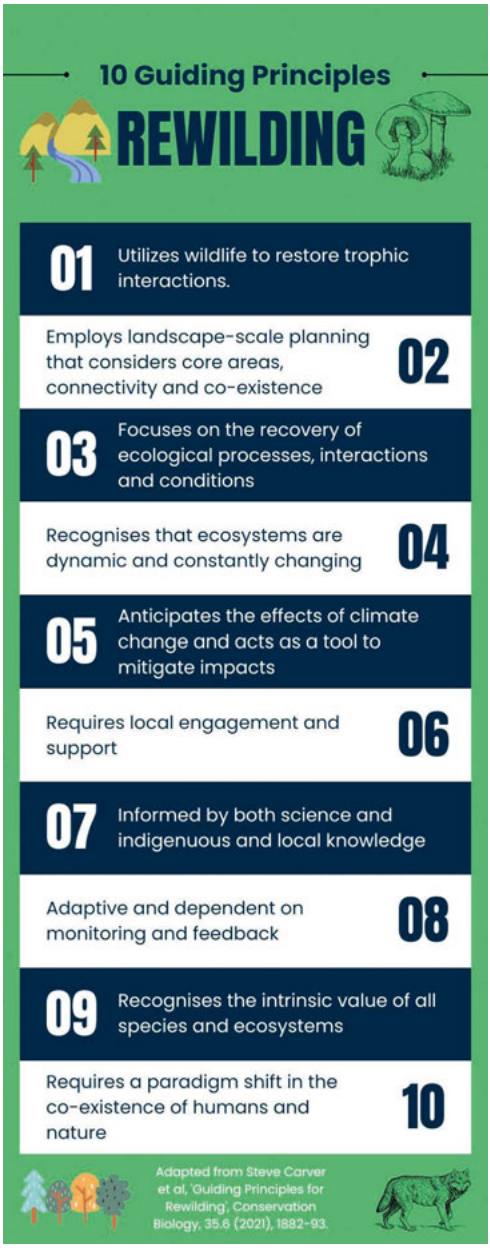

Figure 2: Ten Guiding Principles of Rewilding

REWILDING – COULD DOING LESS BE MUCH MORE?

The defining characteristic of rewilding is allowing natural processes drive the transition to ecological restoration, not managing ecosystems to obtain some predetermined result. It's about "letting nature take care of itself."[23] Different definitions have emerged with different authors attributing varying themes and frames around "rewilding."[24] Even within the rewilding community there are differing opinions about which projects should be considered rewilding and what should instead be called regenerative agriculture or simply natural regeneration.

While this increased interest in an alternative form of conservation is challenging the dominance of the more traditional conservation concepts, the ambiguity around what rewilding actually is – and what it isn't – has been a barrier to its acceptance as a valid method of restoration. To remedy this somewhat, the International Union of the Conservation of Nature – a union comprised of both government and civil society organisations – established a Rewilding Thematic Group[25] with the mandate to work towards developing an internationally recognised definition, as well as a set of universal guiding principles (see figure 2 below) for rewilding projects.[26] We can now say that:

> *Rewilding is the process of rebuilding, following major human disturbance, a natural ecosystem by restoring natural processes and the complete or near complete food-web at all trophic levels as a self-sustaining and resilient ecosystem using biota that would have been present had the disturbance not occurred. This will involve a paradigm shift in the relationship between humans and nature. The ultimate goal of rewilding is the restoration of functioning native ecosystems complete with fully occupied trophic levels that are*

23. Rewilding Europe,"What Is Rewilding?," accessed 3 October 2022, https://rewildingeurope.com/what-is-rewilding-2/.
24. Nathalie Pettorelli, Sarah M. Durant, and Johan T. Du Toit, eds., *Rewilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
25. "IUCN CEM Rewilding Thematic Group," accessed 7 October 2022, https://www.iucn.org/our-union/commissions/group/iucn-cem-rewilding-thematic-group.
26. Steve Carver et al., 'Guiding Principles for Rewilding', *Conservation Biology* 35, no. 6 (2021): 1882–93.

nature-led across a range of landscape scales. Rewilded ecosystems should – where possible – be self-sustaining requiring no or minimum-intervention management (i.e. natura naturans or "nature doing what nature does"), recognising that ecosystems are dynamic and not static.[27]

While this definition may seem fairly straightforward, there are many potential pitfalls on the rewilding journey. There is much that must be understood and nothing that can be precisely discerned in the abstract. Questions include: What plants and animals would have been present had human disturbance not occurred? What was the complex functioning of the ecological processes we are trying to restore? How do we logistically approach that task – considering the land available and the potential reintroduction of species (each – large herbivors or omnivores or predators – requiring its own sensitivities)? Rewilding is a process. Different projects may follow some of the same principles, but depending on the stage of the journey, some may be closer to their ultimate goal of a fully self-regulating system than others. Depending on the constraining factors around the site, some projects may never realistically satisfy the definition of rewilding, potentially requiring fresh thinking about how to categorise and integrate such projects in wider ecological restorations.

Using this definition and these guiding principles, we can examine two different rewilding projects in the UK and Ireland; Knepp estate in West Sussex[28] and Beara Rainforest in West Cork.[29] Both people leading the respective projects have written extensively to document their journey and to increase the general awareness of rewilding, biodiversity and ecological function.[30] In both cases, there is an obstacle to full rewilding since they cannot reintroduce major predators. This means that while the areas are incredibly

Lynx as example of an apex predator. Rights: Wikimedia Commons

biodiverse, they are undoubtedly missing some trophic levels.[31] Working from two very different starting points, their stories show how the concepts of rewilding can be implemented in different ecosystems. The processes are different; the goal is the same.

The rewilding process in Knepp highlights how the order of different human interventions can lead to vastly differing landscapes and ultimately, the generation of a patchwork of habitats in the ecosystem. Reintroduction of large herbivores and removal of human-induced disturbance, like ploughing, mowing, herbicide and pesticide spraying, was the predominant method used for ecological recovery in this once intensively-farmed land. The investment required for fencing, seeding, and buying animals proved to be prohibitive in some sections of the project area. Their solution was essentially land abandonment of certain fields – allowing natural regeneration of scrub and saplings to re-emerge. This reordering of processes resulted in extraordinarily biodiverse areas which thrived in completely different ways from the areas where grazers were introduced immediately.

In Beara, the initial conservation efforts included removing invasive plants along with fencing to exclude grazers, which were

27. "ECOS 42 (3): Time to Put the Wild Back into Rewilding – ECOS – Challenging Conservation," accessed 3 November 2022, https://www.ecos.org.uk/time-to-put-the-wild-back-into-rewilding/.
28. "Home — Knepp Wildland," accessed 3 November 2022, https://knepp.co.uk/home.
29. "Beara Rainforest - A Wealth of Biodiversity on the Peninsula," accessed 3 November 2022, https://beararainforest.com/.
30. Isabella Tree, *Wilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm* (London: Picador, 2018); Eoghan Daltun, *An Irish Atlantic Rainforest: A Personal Journey into the Magic of Rewilding* (Dublin: Hachette Books, 2022).
31. A food web consists of all the food chains—the path that energy and nutrients may take— in a single ecosystem. Organisms in food webs are groups into categories called trophic levels. In general, these are divided into producers (first trophic level), consumers, and decomposers (final trophic level). Plants are the most easily recognisable form of producer. The next trophic levels are animals—herbivores, omnivores and carnivores—that eat producers. There may be many levels of consumers before a food chain reaches its apex predator, commonly at the fourth orfifth trophic level, who have no natural enemies except humans. The final category are the detritivores—vultures and dung beetles—and decomposers—fungi and bacteria. For more detail, see "Food Web: A food web consists of all the food chains in a single ecosystem," accessed 13 February 2023, https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/food-web.

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slowing killing the rainforest, and removing understory plants and saplings. This strategy allowed the plant and soil life time to recover, creating habitats for birds, insects, and other forest creatures. Here there was less focused on appropriate disturbance from grazers and omnivores (which some might consider an unnatural process in itself, albeit one that is much less destructive than over-grazing). As the rewilding process evolved, domestic cattle were reintroduced for winter grazing.[32] This mimicked the natural ecological function of large animals that would historically have been present in Ireland. However, without the presence of a top predator – in this case the wolf or the lynx – which have been extinct from Ireland for several hundred years, a certain level of human intervention will always be necessary to ensure the numbers of grazers do not exceed the carrying capacity of the forest. In the Knepp estate their solution to this is to cull the grazers periodically and sell the meat as an additional income stream. This ultimately means that the land is not self-sustaining, as it requires extraction of animals from the system for it to remain in balance.

THE COMPLICATED REALITY OF REWILDING

Wisdom is required to harmonise the regeneration of a particular piece of land with ecological sensitivity while recognising political realities. Guidelines are just that. As long as people are unwilling to countenance the return of some creatures we have made extinct on the island, workarounds will be required. Were rewilding to be embraced as a conservation method, and implemented on larger patches of land, the reintroduction of such species might be viable. That would enable the restoration of important ecological functions and reduce the need for such compromises. How are we to address these complications, which go beyond ecological process and express themselves in the political and social realm?

In 2019 when tabling a motion on forestry policy, Eamon Ryan, leader of the Green Party, expressed his support for bringing wolves back to Ireland.[33] This suggestion was roundly met with derision, with many dismissing the idea as unworkable.[34] Reintroducing top predators,

32. Eoghan Daltun [@IrishRainforest], "The Dexters Enjoying the Soft Misty Sea Drizzle That's down for the Day Here", *Twitter*, 12 January 2021, https://twitter.com/IrishRainforest/status/1349004352413986817.

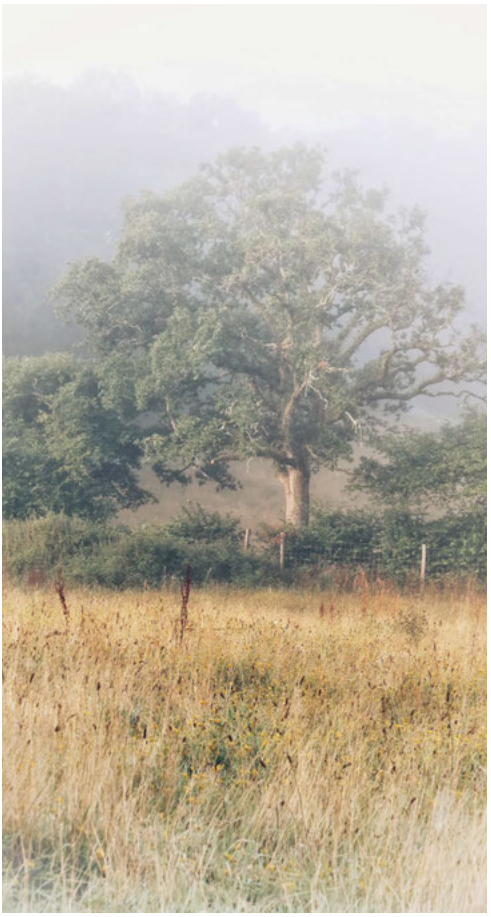
33. For more information, see Harry McGee, 'Greens Call for Wolves to Be Reintroduced to Ireland', The Irish Times, 1 October 2019, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/greens-call-for-wolves-to-be-reintroduced-to-ireland-1.4036692; Daragh Brophy, 'Almost 250 Years after the Last Native Wolf Was Killed, Is Ireland Ready for the Debate about Bringing Them Back?', TheJournal.ie, 1 October 2019, https://www.thejournal.ie/is-ireland-ready-to-reintroduce-wolves-ireland-2029-podcast-4761981-Oct2019/.

34. Sarah Carey, 'Reintroducing Wolves to Ireland? We'd Be Barking Mad to Miss the Risks of Rewilding', 11 June 2022, https://www.independent.ie/opinion/comment/reintroducing-wolves-to-ireland-wed-be-barking-mad-to-miss-the-risks-of-rewilding-41741586.html.

such as wolves, and other slightly contentious animals including the wild boar into Ireland would be a boon for rewilding. While much work can be done up to this point – without the reintroduction of members of all trophic levels – the potential benefits would never be fully realised. There would remain gaps in the ecological functioning. A national discussion around the real possibility and potential of reintroducing absent species will need to take place, acknowledging the factors around resistance, including potential risks to farming, human safety, and Ireland's carrying capacity for such animals. However, taking a look around Europe, where wolves are slowly naturally increasing their range, we can learn lessons about how we can safely reintegrate wolves back into our society.

Resistance to rewilding stretches beyond reluctance to welcome wolves back in to the Irish faunal fold. The majority of Irish lands are currently under agricultural use. For rewilding to be a widespread conservation tool in Ireland there will unquestionably be competition between agriculture and nature for land use. Generating the required community buy-in, as well as finding the appropriate land use balance between rewilding, primarily for biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, and agricultural or cultural use will need to be achieved. A guiding principle of rewilding (see figure 1 above) specifically states that local support is required – ensuring overall benefits for local communities. Early and sustained engagement will be vital.

Rewilding, while ecologically sound, has unfortunate but inescapable connotations with the idea of wilderness and the racist, misanthropic undertones which go with that.[35] The preservation of wilderness, or pristine areas, through national parks, particularly in the US are considered to be among the first recognised conservation efforts. However, many argue that these parks are racist, classist artificial constructs, invented by elites in conjunction with corporate power.[36]



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To create the beautiful wilderness, the indigenous people who called that environment home were removed. This is what happened with the establishment of the first national park in America, Yellowstone[37] and is unfortunately a practice continuing to this day, especially on the African continent.[38]

It is important, however, to distinguish clearly the difference between 'wilderness' and 'rewilding'. Rewilding appreciates and respects the potential of natural ecosystem processes to restore and rejuvenate ecosystems, which can be contrasted with the idea of a wilderness that humans need to be excluded from, to conserve what is there. The exclusion of humans is premised on the idea that our

35. Kim Ward, 'Decolonising Rewilding', in *Rewilding*, ed. Nathalie Pettorelli, Sarah M. Durant, and Johan T. Du Toit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 34–54.

36. Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, eds., *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement* (Cambridge, Massachussetts: MIT Press, 2007), 27.

37. Allie Patterson, "Indian Removal from Yellowstone National Park," accessed 7 November 2022, https://www.intermountainhistories.org/items/show/344.

38. John Vidal, "The Tribes Paying the Brutal Price of Conservation," *The Observer*, 28 August 2016, sec. Global development, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/aug/28/exiles-human-cost-of-conservation-indigenous-peoples-eco-tourism.

relationship with the natural environment is inherently destructive. While this can be the case it is not inevitable. Wilderness imagines that we are *apart* from nature rather than embedded within it. In rewilding, we work to change this relationship to a more positive one, where we respect the existence and functioning of biodiversity and ecosystems. Changing this relationship and finding a balance in terms of land suitable for rewilding, and the human interventions required, will vary from site to site. Rewilding in already established national parks, which would be the best hope of recreating small patches of self-sustaining ecosystems, will look very different to a large land owner applying the rewilding principles to their agricultural land.

This problematic relationship between colonial wilderness and rewilding is well understood; the 10 guiding principles actively functions to guide the practice away from this troubling convergence, towards a more holistic and socially just relationship between ecosystem functioning and humans. This active redirection is the most important differentiator and goes some way to assuage the fears of those who are opposed to this concept. Rewilding, like all serious environmentalism, involves humans too.

CONCLUSION

Ireland's biodiversity and ecosystems are trashed. In the ecological crisis we find ourselves in, this equates to systematically demolishing your home brick by brick until you find yourself in a situation where shelter and security are no longer possible. Rewilding offers huge potential where we can not only conserve what biodiversity we have, but restore what is missing. The process of allowing rewilding to happen is also a process of shifting our relationship with nature from dominion to partner. While there are few rewilding projects in Ireland, the discussion around why we should take this leap of faith in biodiversity's ability to heal itself is gathering pace.[39] We must recognise our reliance on biodiversity and ecological functioning. When we do, what appears to be "radical" action to turn the tide on its destruction becomes entirely sensible.

"Ireland's biodiversity and ecosystems are trashed. In the ecological crisis we find ourselves in this equates to systematically demolishing your home brick by brick until you find yourself in a situation where shelter and security are no longer possible.

39. Irish Wildlife Trust, "Chapter 9: Bear County – Irish Wildlife Trust," accessed 7 November 2022, https://iwt.ie/chapter-9-bear-country/.

Prisoner Rehabilitation: Challenges, Risks Upon Release, and Barriers to Integration.

Pauline Conroy

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INTRODUCTION

> *One of the things that always surprised me…was that this Dáil had a series of Ministers who were what you might call distinguished jail birds in their time - men who for very good reason had spent a long time in jail and very honourably in jail but few of them… showed the House how stupid and futile and degrading is the whole principle of locking up people and how utterly sterile it is and unproductive of any change. It is quite valueless from the point of view of the individual and from the point of view of society.*[1]
>
> Noel Browne TD (Houses of the Oireachtas, 1970)

Prison reform, particularly the creation of opportunities for people in prison to rehabilitate and reintegrate, has been slow to emerge from the Department of Justice. This delay from the 1960s to present day has been in spite of the strong efforts of individual senior civil servants. It is certainly not for lack of discussion and debate. The 1980s was a period of considerable research and reporting on prisons by prisoner and social justice-oriented bodies,[2] emphasising rehabilitation amongst other themes. Academics have described this period of increasing concern with rehabilitation as the goal of imprisonment as one of "penal welfarism."[3] The reports, while attracting mild approval among a small elite of decision-makers in the civil service and main political parties, generated no considerable change decades later.

In this essay, I will consider the role of rehabilitation within the Irish prison system. Firstly, I will briefly trace the development of rehabilitation, both in discourse and practice, within Ireland with a specific focus on parole. Then I will discuss the challenges to rehabilitation within our prisons, the risks for former prisoners upon release, and barriers to integration. Finally, I will reflect upon these risks and barriers in the context of forgiveness for the prisoner.

DEVELOPMENT OF REHABILITATION

Modern prison systems claim to offer opportunities and rehabilitation to prisoners. The Irish Prison Service declares that part of its mission is "providing safe and secure custody, dignity of care and rehabilitation to prisoners for safer communities."[4] But what is meant by rehabilitation of prisoners, and how can a system provide for it? These are both conceptual and practical problems. The idea of rehabilitation only entered the vocabulary of the Irish prison system in 1962 when an Inter-Departmental Committee on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders was established. Until then, deterrence and incapacitation of prisoners were the prevailing values of prisons. The Committee's results were never published. Speaking of the outcome, the Minister of Justice Charles Haughey TD stated that they had "in the main as their aim the social rehabilitation of the offender."[5]

While Haughey attempted a few reforms in the area of parole and psychiatric care, his successor Patrick Cooney TD did not believe in rehabilitation at all. Three decades later, the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice concluded that certain sections of the media "sees justice in terms of imprisonment with a vengeance and ignores the rehabilitative element that is part of the stated aim of penal sanctions."[6] Have things changed? In 2022, the Minister of Justice Helen McEntee TD announced a plan to change the duration of a sentence after which a prisoner could apply for parole from 12 years to 20 years, or even 30 or 40 years.[7]

1. Noel Browne, 'Prisons Bill, 1970: Second Stage' (Houses of the Oireachtas, 26 May 1970), https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1970-05-26/42/.
2. See 'Inquiry into the Prisons System' (Prisoner Rights Organisation, 1982); 'The Prison System' (Council for Social Welfare, 1983); Cormac Behan, 'Putting Penal Reform on the Map: Prisoners' Rights Movements and Penal History', *Champ Pénal/Penal Field*, no. 21 (2020).
3. For a fuller explanation, see David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
4. For the Irish Prison Service, the second of five strategic pillars is 'Prisoner Support' where they commit to "further develop the integration of prisoner care and support services to deliver more effective rehabilitation to prisoners." See Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Strategic Plan 2019-2022' (Longford: Irish Prison Service, 2019), 2.
5. Cited in Mary Rogan, 'Rehabilitation, Research and Reform: Prison Policy in Ireland', *Irish Probation Journal* 9, no. 1 (2012): 6–32.
6. Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 'The Irish Prison System: Vision, Values, Reality' (Dublin: Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, March 2012), 99.
7. Helen McEntee TD, 'Sentencing Policy – Tuesday, 24 May 2022 – Parliamentary Questions (33rd Dáil)', Houses of the Oireachtas, 24 May 2022.

Mountjoy Prison Campus. Rights: Wikimedia Commons

Successful rehabilitation demands a level of acknowledgement of wrongdoing by a prisoner where s/he has been convicted of an offence which has led to a custodial sentence and that the principal way to avoid a future incarceration is to desist from committing future offences. This is rehabilitation at the most basic level. Elements of this idea are implicit in Ireland's two open prisons and those prison regimes where prisoners have the opportunity to mix in the local area, to take up jobs outside the prison or attend further education, returning to the prison in the evenings. Rehabilitation cannot be "delivered" to prisoners. It is neither a gift nor a service.

In terms of specific effects, much may be attributed to the particular conditions of detention, whether they are harsh or humane. This is a view with which the Irish Penal Reform Trust agrees in their critical discussion of reintegration of prisoners after release.[8] Warren Graham, a prisoner speaking from Loughan House open prison, to a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Rehabilitation in 2022 said:

> *Studying criminology and sociology at third level has enabled me to see my life from the experts' position and using their opinions and theories I have seen that prison is often considered as containment for the purpose of retribution, not rehabilitation. I see this in Irish prisons. I see that some people are considered no-hope, beyond reach and are merely in prison to serve out their time. They are released and return again continuing the same vicious cycle for the duration of their life.*[9]

The European Court of Human Rights in interpreting the European Convention on Human Rights does not guarantee, as such, a right to rehabilitation. The Court's case-law presupposes that convicted persons, including prisoners with life sentences, should be allowed to rehabilitate themselves. Even though States are not responsible for achieving the rehabilitation of life prisoners, they nevertheless have a duty to make it possible for such prisoners to rehabilitate themselves. In this interpretation, prisoners cannot be the objects of rehabilitation – they are the subjects who make decisions for themselves to change their outlook on life and on their own lives. In this sense, a prison system cannot offer rehabilitation but it can offer opportunities for prisoners to rehabilitate themselves.

8. Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'IPRT Submission to the Joint Committee on the Topic of "An Examination of Rehabilitative Opportunities within the Prison System"', 4 March 2022, 7.

9. Warren Graham, 'Joint Committee on Justice - Rehabilitative Opportunities within the Prison System', Houses of the Oireachtas, 29 March 2022.

In 2016, the European Court of Human Rights discussed rehabilitation in a judgement of some length in the unusual case of a life-sentenced prisoner, Mr James Murray, who had been imprisoned in the Caribbean Netherlands[10] for murder, but who had died before his case was heard. His siblings pursued the case on his behalf. The following are extracts from that judgement:

> *[T]he obligation to offer a possibility of rehabilitation is to be seen as an obligation of means, not one of result. However, it entails a positive obligation to secure prison regimes to life prisoners which are compatible with the aim of rehabilitation and enable such prisoners to make progress towards their rehabilitation. In this context the Court has previously held that such an obligation exists in situations where it is the prison regime or the conditions of detention which obstruct rehabilitation.*[11]

In Ireland, the Parole Act 2019 extended the custodial period of life sentenced and long sentence prisoners from eight to 12 years before they can apply for parole or a sentence review.[12] The current average amount of time served by a prisoner prior to obtaining parole is 20 years. This reinforces the custodial, as opposed to the rehabilitative policy of prisons. The Act provided an opportunity to define rehabilitation, which is at the heart of its significance as a policy change. Section 24 of the Parole Act 2019 proposes that prisons should have the objective of ensuring that there is an incentive for persons serving sentences of imprisonment to be rehabilitated.

A decision on parole for an applicant is to take into account that the parole applicant "has been rehabilitated and would, upon being released, be capable of reintegrating into society."[13] However, the 2019 Act does not contain a definition of rehabilitation, or how it is to be measured, so both parole applicants and Parole Board members may be in the dark as to the basis on which decisions are to be made in terms of rehabilitation, despite the several other factors on which their decision is made being based in law. The Act creates legal uncertainty about rehabilitation by omitting to define it. What is clear is that the Act distinguishes between rehabilitation – whatever that may be – and reintegration into society. Non-nationals who have been convicted of a crime and will be subject to deportation orders are apparently not eligible for parole. The right to parole therefore is not universal. This is curious since Ireland adopted an EU Directive permitting cooperation in probation and serving of sentences of prisoners but perhaps only applies this to EU nationals.

Social and economic integration is a distinct approach from rehabilitation. The European Union Peace and Reconciliation Programme for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties promoted the concept of reintegration into society for ex-prisoners, sometimes referred to as former combatants, between 1989 and 2020.[14] Reintegration measures for politically motivated ex-prisoners, eligible for release, were based on the principle of self-help with autonomous, ex-prisoner-controlled organisations delivering services to themselves. This was a form of peer-to-peer provision in which some ex-prisoners took responsibility for other ex-prisoners. The question of rehabilitation did not arise. Prisoners were not expected to express remorse. This had been agreed at the level of negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement. The European Union Peace and Reconciliation Fund provided funding to support prisoner re-integration schemes distributed by the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust - which assisted in financing a "self-help model for reintegration" managed by former prisoners e.g., the Republican organisation Coiste na n-Iarchimi. EU funds were expended on ex-prisoner integration projects in Louth, Cavan, Monaghan, Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal. What the Peace Programme experience demonstrated is that it is possible to have publicly funded self-managed reintegration programmes without insisting on rehabilitative content.

10. The Caribbean Netherlands consist of the three islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, located in the Caribbean Sea.
11. Murray v. the Netherlands, No. 10511/10 (European Court of Human Rights - Grand Chamber 26 April 2016). Section 104.
12. Government of Ireland, 'Parole Act 2019' (Government of Ireland, 2019).
13. Government of Ireland. Section 27 (a) (ii).
14. PEACE Programmes Learning Platform, "The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement," accessed 14 November 2022, https://peaceplatform.seupb.eu/en/story-of-peace/key-themes/ex-prisoners/.

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CHALLENGES WITHIN PRISON

To promote engagement with prison services and reward good behaviour, the Prison Service has operated an incentivised regime programme for the last 12 years, which adds or subtracts privileges according to a prisoner's level of regime: basic level, standard or enhanced. The advantages of moving up the levels are considerable, with the prospect of more spending power in the tuckshop and better visiting arrangements. Protection prisoners cannot get an enhanced regime as they do not engage with many services. Prisoners on an enhanced level for some time can apply to go to an open prison. For the system to work there must be sufficient services and activities for prisoners to engage in. Some prisons have excellent workshops, some have not. Some can offer drug treatment, others cannot. This calls into question the universal validity of the incentivised regime as a general road to opportunities for rehabilitation.

The Integrated Sentence Management System (ISM) is widely reported by the Prison Service as a mechanism to facilitate prisoner sentence planning.[15] It applies to prisoners serving sentences of 12 months and more. The idea of individualised sentence planning by and with prisoners is a good idea, supported by the European Prison Rules.[16] Implementing it has been a mixed experience relying sometimes on paper-based reporting, while a prisoner has no copy of her/his plan. If the ISM were to function effectively it would involve a very large number of prison officers interviewing and following up individual prisoners along with new arrivals and imminent departing prisoners. One of the ways around this would be to have officers on prison landings playing a greater part in the process.

15. The Irish Prison Service, "Resettlement & Reintegration," accessed 14 November 2022, https://www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/reintegration/.
16. European Committee on Crime Problems, 'Revised Rules and Commentary to Recommendation CM/REC (2006)2 of the Committee Of Ministers to Member States on the European Prison Rules' (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 8 October 2018).

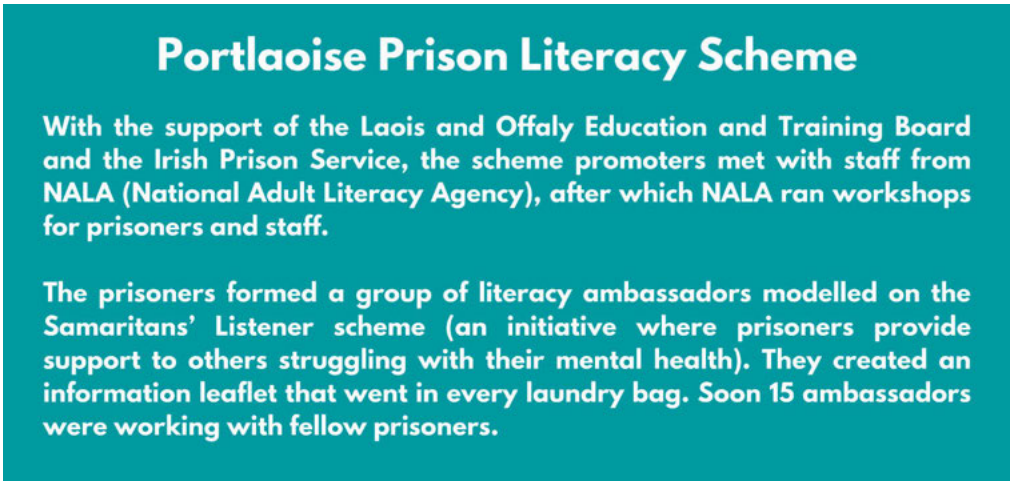

Figure 1: Portlaoise Prison Literacy Scheme

Opportunities for second chance education is a serious contribution to prisoners' outlook on life. A prisoner is five times more likely to have had only basic or primary school education compared to the population as a whole, with almost 70% of people in prisons leaving school before the age of 14.[17] Education can open up another view of the world, facilitate the acquisition of new qualifications and support family life with school-going children. Education can reinforce personal identity and esteem often damaged by early experiences of school (see Figure 1 above).

A significant minority of prisoners enter and exit prison without any apparent relationship to the State other than as a prisoner in custody. They have no PPS number, have never claimed social welfare, have no driving license, no PAYE Revenue number, have never applied for housing assistance or enrolled in Further Education. This unusual state of affairs was revealed in a Central Statistics Office (CSO) study and follow-up of the almost 3,800 prisoners in custody on the night of Census 2016.[18] Twenty-five per cent of prisoners – almost 1,000 women and men were not just marginal to the State, they functioned outside the State altogether. In this regard these outsider prisoners were state-less or akin to displaced persons.

> *Offending behaviour, and stepping out of it, is so complex that often the most effective intervention is this communication that takes place between one who is a couple of steps further on than the other and who knows how to navigate his thoughts and feelings and provide information on what one must do to stop offending.*[19]
>
> Mark Johnson (User Voice, 2013)

The CSO study found that more than half of all prisoners did not continue education beyond primary school. Levels of education were substantially lower than for the population of Ireland. Only 12 per cent had what the CSO describes as "substantial employment" - that is, they earned at least €100 per week. Of those 1,720 prisoners not in education or substantial employment in 2019 on leaving prison, 12 per cent were in insubstantial employment. Examples of employment include selling race cards on race days, selling rosettes outside football matches, casual labouring, and events, temporary agency cleaning, car park attendant.

17. Patsy McGarry, 'Almost 70% of Irish Prisoners Are Early School Leavers', The Irish Times, 5 July 2022.
18. Central Statistics Office, "Offenders 2016: Employment, Education and other Outcomes, 2016-2019," accessed 14 November 2014, https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fp/p-offo/offenders2016employmenteducationandotheroutcomes2016-2019/introduction/.
19. Mark Johnson, 'Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality Debate - Wednesday, 27 Feb 2013', Houses of the Oireachtas, 27 February 2013, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_justice_defence_and_equality/2013-02-27/2/

Cork Prison's Open Door Pop-up Restaurant

The programme is designed to train and educate prisoners to improve and develop their culinary skills in workplace learning, and then progress towards further Training, Education and Employment opportunities in the community. It supports and encourages all participants to reach their potential and acquire recognised industry and academic accreditation such as a Special Purpose Award in culinary skills and the EHAI Primary Course which includes food safety and HACCP training. This then allows a participant to secure future employment in hotels, restaurant and the wider catering industry in Ireland.

Following an eight-week accredited training course in culinary skills, a prisoner described his experience with hope that "[w]e are coming out of here with a qualification. We are coming out of here with experience."

Figure 2: Open Door Pop-up Restaurant

This poses the question of what rehabilitation means to those prisoners who arrived in prison already unintegrated into civil society, from disadvantaged areas, operating outside the formal labour market and with minimal levels of education. They have no civil society identity.

In theory, opportunities for rehabilitation should begin at the start of a prison sentence. This is not always the case. There can be long queues for psychological therapy, an absence of occupational therapy, insufficient workshops with accredited vocational training—though some examples exist, see Figure 2 above—and some prisons have no provision for drug detoxification and treatment.

RISKS ON RELEASE

Release from prison has its own risks. International Probation expert Charlie Brooker has devoted extensive research resources to examining how probation works in the UK and other comparable countries from the perspective of the prisoner and the probation service. Speaking in Dublin in 2021, he presented data which showed very high death rates among UK prisoners on probation compared with the death rates of prisoners in custody, as did a significant report from the UK Howard League for Penal Reform.[20]

In the case of Ireland, an alternative measure of release risk can be calculated using the reports on deaths in custody and on temporary release investigated by the Inspector of Prisons.[21] This has the advantage of including those who are not on probation and not serving long sentences. There were 50 deaths in custody investigated between 2016 and 2020 of which 25 were on temporary release. Of the 25 prisoners who died on temporary release, there was no information on the circumstances of two, 15 died of illnesses. The remaining eight died in other circumstances such as found dead, died in fire, shot dead, suspected drug overdose, died shortly after suicide attempt, found dead at home or elsewhere, and single vehicle collision. This measure reveals that almost one in three prisoners on temporary release for reasons other than illness do not survive release. In the words of a former prisoner, "It's like there's a tin of biscuits and we're all the broken biscuits at the bottom of it."

Of those who do survive release, a crude measure of rehabilitation is recidivism – the rate at which men and women released from a prison sentence are reconvicted within a period of time. This rate is high in Ireland. For those released from prison in 2018, almost 48 per cent had reoffended within a year. For those under 21 years of age, 70 per cent had reoffended a year after release. On the face

20. Loraine Gelsthorpe, Nicola Padfield, and Jake Phillips, 'Death on Probation: An Analysis of Data Regarding People Dying under Probation Supervision' (London: The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2012).

21. See Office of the Inspector of Prisons, "Death in Custody – Report by Year of Death," accessed 20 January 2023, https://www.oip.ie/publications/investigation-reports/death-in-custody-investigation-reports/death-in-custody-report-by-year-of-death/.

> In the words of a former prisoner, "It's like there's a tin of biscuits and we're all the broken biscuits at the bottom of it."

of it, these figures suggest that a sentence of imprisonment is not effective in rehabilitation in terms of prisoners sustaining a crime-free life.

Before leaving prison, every prisoner should have a wallet or purse containing their immediate address, their social welfare office, and a copy of their application for benefits. If not on probation they should have a named key worker where they can get advice. Where appropriate they should have already been registered with a methadone clinic.

BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION

> *For example, some prisoners on release may not have family support. While the prison sentence is the punishment, for many prisoners, punishment begins or continues upon release.*
>
> Paddy Richardson (IASIO, 2014)

A barrier to prisoner reintegration is a practice ostensibly designed to protect the general public from the risk of prisoner release, namely Garda vetting. Employment candidates must disclose convictions prior to or in employment in specific jobs.[22] Certain other jobs or economic activities which are "licensed" carry compulsory Garda vetting prior to obtaining or not obtaining a licence for holding a security industry post or taxi licence. The number of potential exclusions are considerable (see Table 1 below).

Potential Exclusions from Employment

Employment Area	Number
Public Sector	35,394
Airport Staff	2,730
Licensed Activities	30,343
Total	**68,467**

Author's calculations based on the Appendix to the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016

Table: Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice • Created with Datawrapper

Table 1: Potential Exclusions from Employment

22. Government of Ireland, "Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016," https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2016/act/4/enacted/en/pdf.

The Garda Vetting system and obligatory disclosure of convictions has been designed to protect the public, and are in many instances necessary, but for the prisoner it can seem like a second punishment where s/he is denied the second chance after serving her/his time. The life sentence prisoner released on license has no sense of an ending. His/her sentence ends at death.

Secondly, voluntary activity is affected through a legal prohibition on a former convicted prisoner becoming a charity trustee. The ban can only be appealed to the High Court. Former convicted or sentenced prisoners are disqualified from any decision-making role in a Charity, including voluntary bodies working with ex-prisoners. Section 55 disqualifies a person who is, either, convicted on indictment of an offence, or is sentenced to a term of imprisonment by a court of competent jurisdiction.

The third barrier arises in education. Higher Education Universities and Institutes of Technology can require student applicants to be Garda vetted and may refuse a place on a course to an aspiring student who has been convicted of a crime. It is comprehensible that jobs with children, minors and vulnerable persons should be protected employment. However, the reach is much greater than these employments. The University of Limerick, as an example, requires Garda Vetting for admission to 21 courses including: BA in Performing Arts, BSc in Sport and Exercise Sciences, BSc in Physical Education, B. Ed Languages. The Teaching Council has wide ranging powers in the registration and re-registration of teachers, including vetting and in disclosures.

> The University of Limerick, as an example, requires Garda Vetting for admission to 21 courses including: BA in Performing Arts, BSc in Sport and Exercise Sciences, BSc in Physical Education, B. Ed Languages.

Education has been and still proves to be a proven method of reducing criminal behaviour. It allows individuals become productive members of society, break away from a cycle of poverty and imprisonment and improves their life opportunities. This legislation has the potential to lead to safer communities, parents engaged in their children's lives and not in prison.

Niall Walsh (Pathways Project Dublin, 2019)

On the one hand, prisoners are supposed to prepare for integration into employment, education or voluntary work but, on the other hand, the pathways are strewn with dozens of barely visible and unexpected barriers.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have highlighted the presence of "rehabilitation" within penal policy discourse and practice for over sixty years. Yet many challenges, risks and barriers remain for those within our prisons and those re-entering society. Rehabilitation is an individual determination to change an outlook on the world. It is encouraged by actions, measures, environmental alterations, services, and programmes providing opportunities. Rehabilitation is a transformative process by an individual who rehabilitates him or herself. It cannot be imposed, donated, or promised by others. It is a means not an outcome.

There are many reasons why prisoners might not be able or do not have the opportunity to avail of rehabilitation opportunities. The barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration opportunities remain high for those released from prison; both as potential students and employees. Rehabilitation opportunities can be provided on both sides of the wall: in prison and outside in neighbourhoods and townlands. The many and unexpected barriers suggest that prisoners are not forgiven for their convictions when out of prison. Their punishment continues in a different form of separation and exclusion once their sentence has ended.


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