



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland



Culture & Creativity Strategy

2023–2027



Laois

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Foreword

As Cathaoirleach and Chief Executive of Laois County Council, we are very pleased to welcome the publication of the Culture & Creativity Strategy for the period 2023-2027, and its alignment with Laois County Council's Corporate Plan 2019-2024 and County Development Plan 2021-2027. The Culture & Creativity strategic framework is informed by and will support delivery of appropriate national, regional, and local authority policies, plans and priorities.

The ambition of the Creative Ireland Programme is to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation. From 2018 to 2022 Laois County Council received an investment of €837,220 from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, for its Creative Laois initiatives, and we in turn have engaged with almost 400,000 people across the county, as audiences and participants.

Laois County Council will lead and engage with the Creative Ireland Programme 2023-2027 to utilise creativity as a strategy for wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development. Through our Culture & Creativity Team, representing expertise in the arts, library, heritage and community, we look forward to embedding creativity in public policy at local level and supporting cross departmental collaboration and innovation.

In Laois our culture is what identifies us as a people, with layers of creative expression, interdisciplinary activities and networking located within our creative hubs, including Dunamaise Arts Centre and its Creativity in Older Age programming, and opportunities for children and young people in its Young Curators and Young Filmmakers projects. Laois Arthouse celebrated its 10th anniversary with a new exhibition In Trust. In Gratitude. In Hope. inspired by a poem by critically acclaimed poet, Pat Boran, and new artworks from esteemed members

of Aosdána; Rita Duffy, Martin Gale, Cathy Carman and Nick Miller, and Laois based artists, Jen Donnery, Ray Murphy, Adrienne Symes, Kevin McCann, to name a few. Laois School of Music and Music Generation Laois with its Music-Rich Schools project targets DEIS Schools in the county to ensure every child has access to performance music education, without barriers of cost, and high-quality tuition.

Culture is closely aligned to our tourism offering, attracting visitors to experience our distinct heritage, architecture, biodiversity, folklore, etc. Laois Library Service Digital Archive contains specialist collections on the social, cultural, political, economic, and natural history of the county. A successful collaboration between Arts, Heritage and Libraries is represented in the outdoor animation projections by artist Caroline Conway celebrating Laois women with Helen Roe (Irish librarian and antiquary, 1895-1988) at The Old Fort wall, Portlaoise and Anne Jellicoe (Educationalist and Social Reformer, 1823-1880) at Mountmellick Community School for Culture Night 2020 and 2021 respectively. Culture and Creativity also contribute to the spectrum of employment for extant and emergent creatives across the county and new constituents and communities making Laois their home.

We are looking forward to the next 5 years of exploration and incorporating creativity as an integral part of wider policy agendas in Laois whilst enhancing creative capital as a strategy for wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development.

Thomasina Connell
Cathaoirleach Laois County Council

John Mulholland
Chief Executive Laois County Council



'Superhuman' actor Aaron Edo on location at St Abbans Athletic Club, Monavea, Crettyard. Laois Short Film Bursary's winning film by writer and director Michéal Fleming and producer Michael-David McKernan.
Photograph: Michael-David McKernan

The Creative Ireland Programme is an all-of-government initiative committed to enhancing access to, engagement with, and enjoyment of Ireland's culture and creativity. Within the broad range of available definitions, creativity is considered as *a set of innate abilities and learned skills; the capacity of individuals and organisations to transcend accepted ideas and norms and by drawing on imagination to create new ideas that bring additional value to human activity.*

The vision of the Creative Ireland Programme 2023–2027 is to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation so that individually and collectively, in our personal lives and in our institutions, we can realise our full creative potential thereby promoting individual, community and national wellbeing.

The Creative Ireland Programme will deliver through collaboration and partnership promoting understanding and appreciation of the value of creativity in all its forms — whether through the arts, culture, heritage, or technology.

The Creative Ireland Programme will prioritise its work around five aspects for the period 2023–2027:

1. Creative Youth
2. Creative Communities
3. Creative Industries
4. Creative Health and Wellbeing
5. Creative Climate Action and Sustainability

Through the Creative Ireland Programme, *Creative Communities* supports the partnership between the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Ireland's local authorities. This partnership enables citizens and communities to explore their culture and creativity at local level and, where appropriate, leverage that creativity to strengthen wellbeing, advance social cohesion and support economic development.

Creative Communities is also innovative in deploying creativity to achieve greater integration across targeted policy priorities. This has delivered new creative engagement initiatives in relation to for example children and young people, older persons, climate action, and local economies. Individuals' and communities' perception about the role and value of culture and creativity as central to our wellbeing in its broadest sense is being enhanced.

The opportunity embraced within the Laois Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 is to support people's participation, inclusion and expression within communities, and further strengthen local creative economies.



Performance of 'The Impossible Dream' by Martin Tourish and the Music Generation Laois Trad Orchestra as part of the Festival of Flight at St Peter's Church of Ireland Portlaoise. **Photograph:** Alf Harvey

Cruinniú na nÓg Drumming Circle with Kemi Adedeyemi and Bolaji Adeyanju from the Laois Africa Support Group and local children as part of *Cruinniú na nÓg* in Rathdowney in partnership with Rathdowney Arts Group (RAG). **Photograph:** Terry Byrne

2 Culture and Creativity in Laois

The vision of Creative Ireland is that every person living in Ireland will have the opportunity to fully realise his, her or their creative potential. A Sense of Place was chosen as the overarching theme for Laois County Council - Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018-2022, which guided a set of strategic priority themes that reflected the five pillars of the original Creative Ireland Programme.

“Over the last few years Creative Laois has enabled me to realise some key projects and artistic desires. In 2018 I was invited to stage Gaeilge Tamagotchi in Portlaoise shopping centre. For me, it was one of the most exciting experiences of bilingual theatre, freely available for shoppers to experience in the heart of a busy shopping centre. It allowed me reach a new and non-conventional audience that I never previously had access to in art centres, theatres and galleries. Creative Laois were also the sole commissioner and producer of my Home Stories Direct Provision project, which involved me visiting Direct Provision residents in Abbeylax and Emo in which I got to share stories about Irish heritage, culture and language, and they shared stories about the heritage and culture of their own homelands. The Home Stories podcast series was profiled in the Irish Times, aired on Midlands 103 in 5-minute segments, and is available on all major podcast platforms”.

Manchán Magan, Writer, Broadcaster, and Theatre Maker.

Creative Laois is led by a Culture and Creativity Team comprising Laois County Council inter-departmental representatives from arts, heritage, library, housing, and community sections, in addition to cultural partners external to Laois County Council representing Music Generation Laois, Dunamais Arts Centre and Laois Offaly ETB Local Creative Youth Partnership.

“I have created two murals in Laois as part of the Creative Laois Programme. Both murals have sparked conversation with ‘Into the West’ - Portarlinton’s site-specific mural paying homage to the iconic film and providing a trip down memory lane for many local people who were ‘extras’ in the making of the film at the Savoy Cinema and holding a special place in the folklore and the hearts of the townspeople, as well as the opportunity to introduce this beloved and enchanting film to new and young audiences. The Rathdowney mural was inspired by the people, culture, heritage, new communities, and natural hinterland landscapes. The murals are very different however, both of them sparked a renewed sense of pride in the communities – reinforcing identity through arts, culture, heritage and creativity”.

Adam Warren (ADW), Artist.

Over the last 5 years, the Creative Laois initiatives have established roots and reinforced Laois County Council’s commitment to the role of arts, heritage, culture, and community. Between 2018-2022, a step change was registered, with an environment conducive to collaboration, innovation and creativity, and for culture and creativity recognised within the local authority as a determinant to achieve community wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development. Furthermore, the Culture & Creativity Team proved of enormous value to the Laois Resilience Committee in relation to devising, developing and delivering projects to meet the needs of the Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19, and the Healthy Ireland KEEP WELL Campaign.

“The role of Creative Laois in instigating the Laois Short Film Bursary within the Creative Communities pillar (2018-2022) was welcome and practical support for the development of

film in Laois. The first two years of its operation have shown a wide range of emerging skills in writing, directing, producing and other specialist film production skills. The continuity of this bursary and other screen and media initiatives will establish foundations upon which film practice and film culture in Laois may be grown in the years to come. It is evident from other counties and cities that investment in the growth of film culture will, in time, generate economic dividends from such investment, in terms of employment, tourism and services”.

Arthur Lappin, Film and Stage Producer/Cultural Consultant.

During the lifespan of our 2018-2022 programme, we received an investment of €837,220 from the Creative Ireland Programme and engaged directly with almost 400,000 participants and audiences. Approximately €98,000 of this was invested in children and young people, and direct engagement with 11,000 children and youth participants and audiences, as part of our *Cruinniú na nÓg* annual programme.

“Art is my favourite. I love it. I prefer painting to colouring. I like cutting and sticking. I’m very good at it”.

Midlands Down Syndrome (participant).

“We were very excited that Rathdowney Arts Group is part of Cruinniú na nÓg. It is a wonderful opportunity for our local children and young people to celebrate their creativity and to provide them with new opportunities to make, experience and create, as well as opening up opportunities for local artists to facilitate and showcase the incredible wealth in talent and creativity within our community”.

Clodagh Kennedy, founding member of Rathdowney Arts Group (RAG).

In line with the Creative Ireland Programme and our previous strategy, the Laois Culture & Creativity Strategy 2023-2027 champions the three key ambitions of the national *Creative Communities* initiative to;

1. Support collaboration and break down silos in how the sections of local authorities can work together and innovate
2. Embed creativity in public policy at local level
3. Utilise creativity as a strategy for wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development.

Our Culture & Creativity Team is galvanised as the key starting point for such collaboration. Our 2023-2027 strategic priorities are aligned and created within the context of Laois County Council Corporate Plan 2019-2024, and informed by regional, national, European and international policy documents, such as the Climate Action Plan 2021, and UN Sustainable Development Goals.

“It is crucially important that we utilise every lever available to us to both promote and support positive climate action within our communities. Through Culture and Creativity, Laois can harness inspired perspectives and use them to engage and motivate people on climate action, build awareness on Portlaoise being designated as Ireland’s first low carbon town and promote the type of behavioural changes required to achieve our climate goal”.

Breda Maher, Eastern and Midlands CARO.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2020-2032, set out the framework for the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027. The Eastern and Midlands Region RSO 5 directly targets the development of Creative Places with the stated ambition to ‘enhance, integrate and protect our arts, culture and heritage assets to promote creative places and heritage led regeneration’.



Abbeyleix Climate Action Project, winner of the Sustainable Communities category in the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards 2021.
Photograph: Alf Harvey

The Festival of Flight led by the Col Fitzmaurice Commemoration Committee was in partnership with Laois County Council Heritage Office, Creative Laois, Laois Heritage Society, Music Generation Laois, Dunamaise Arts Centre, Midlands Science, and the Heritage Council. This multidisciplinary festival featured a maelstrom of activities including:

- Public display of The Portlaoise Plane, the 100-year-old artefact built in Portlaoise which was one of the first planes to fly in Ireland.
- Live performance of ‘The Impossible Dream’, the suite of music composed by Martin Tourish and the young musicians of the Music Generation Laois Trad Orchestra to celebrate the life and achievements of the Portlaoise Aviator James Fitzmaurice.

- Schools and families programme exploring all aspects of flight, from the science of superheroes and the biology of flight in the natural world, to flights of fancy with imagination and creativity.

“Creative activities are central to developing rounded individuals by promoting education outside the classroom. By attending the Festival of Flight our learners here in Portlaoise Youthreach developed an awareness of the history in their local area. This allowed them to appreciate Laois science and engineering culture and encouraged them to explore more heritage in their area”.

Anne Malone, Youthreach Portlaoise Coordinator.

Our Culture & Creativity Strategy 2023-2027 aligns with 3 out of 7 objectives in the Corporate Plan:

1. To enhance the social, cultural and economic lives of the people of Laois;
2. To foster and promote sustainable environmental initiatives and practices in the county/region; and
3. To promote and support socially inclusive communities.

“The Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) has pioneered the development of programming for older people in museums and galleries in Ireland since its founding in 1991. IMMA has welcomed the opportunity to partner with Laois County Council Arts Office to guarantee the inclusion of older audiences in all of its programming at a local and national level. By working in partnership, we were able to provide meaningful cultural encounters for older people living in Laois; from those who are healthy, independent and well, to older people with disabilities, and a growing population of people living with dementia or caring for someone living with dementia. The programme introduced new individuals to the IMMA and Laois County Collections to stimulate engaging conversation with participants about Contemporary Art”.

Annie Fletcher, Director, Irish Museum of Modern Art.

The Culture & Creativity Team is positioned to collaborate with and support interdisciplinary and cross local authority strategic objectives within the context of Arts, Heritage and Library services, Healthy Laois, Age Friendly Laois, Climate Action, Business Development, Local Enterprise Office, Local Participation Network, Laois Partnership, Laois Tourism, etc., and any subsequent cross local authority collaborations during the lifespan of this strategy.

“It was an absolute pleasure to work with the Abbeyleix Tidy Towns and local community

on raising awareness about the topic of climate change. The Abbeyleix Climate Action Project culminated in a ground-breaking new Climate Action Walk for Abbeyleix and was the end project in my science communicator in residence role in partnership with Laois County Council Heritage Office, Midlands Science and Abbeyleix Tidy Towns. This project was the winner of the Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Sustainable Communities Award 2021.

The links between personal wellness and environmental wellness are well documented and this project encourages people to enjoy a leisurely walk in Abbeyleix Heritage Town while also engaging with climate action. An important aspect of this project was the attention given to the importance of having good scientific data to back up policy, and in creating public engagement with science with our ‘Fast Facts’ series, ‘Abbeyleix Almanac’ online programme, and other outreach elements, allowing us to explore how science can be localised and brought into a community in a real way. Successful climate action does require deep changes in our society, and this cannot happen without citizen engagement at the heart of public policy change, and our point of entry in Abbeyleix was through creativity and communication”.

Dr Niamh Shaw, Science Communicator.

We are aligned with the vision of Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 and Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021 *“ensuring that every citizen has access to elements (....arts, culture, heritage..) which contribute to creating a better quality of life”.*

Our alignment with Laois Tourism Strategy 2019-2023 recognises the importance on harnessing Laois’s rich heritage and narratives through the Laois Towns Experience Project, and contributing memorable and high-quality visitor experiences in Portlaoise as the Destination Town for Fáilte Ireland’s Ancient East in the county.

“The Creative Laois approach in its new strategy is one that looks at the larger picture within the county and seeks to deliver value to its communities with the potential of ambitious programming in areas including digital technologies, augmented reality, architecture, design, science, agriculture, engineering, urban planning and wellbeing, and with a particular focus on developing public engagement through socially engaged practice with specific communities of interest in the county. Transforming understanding of cultural value at policy level not only can enhance the critical reputation of Laois’s culture and creativity sector but can increase vibrancy and wellbeing, improve economic opportunities, and build capacity and social cohesion among Laois communities”.

Ann Mulrooney, Culture Consultant and CEO and Artistic Director of the VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art in Carlow (2013-2018).

According to the 2022 Census, Laois has a population of 91,657, a growth of 8.2% from 2016, 14% from 2011 and an increase of 56% since the 2002 census. Laois Partnership - Laois Integration Strategy 2019–2023 states that Laois is home to an ethnically, cultural and religiously diverse population, and based on the 2016 census, more than 8,000 people representing almost 100 nationalities live here and comprise 10% of the total population with at least 57 languages spoken. The total projected population growth for County Laois for the period 2016-2027 is 10,003 (from 84,697 to 94,700), (Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027).

“Laois Le Chéile – Laois Together was a welcome opportunity to bring music and integration to the heart of Portlaoise, in partnership with Music Generation Laois, Laois Partnership Company and Creative Laois. We were thrilled to be part of Cruinniú na nÓg - a day dedicated to the creativity and talent of young people in Laois, underpinned with the dynamic richness of Laois’s new communities, young people and their families. Portlaoise is one of the most culturally positive and diverse towns in Ireland with one in five Portlaoise people being non-Irish. Laois Integration Network is proud to be part of this energetic cultural milieu, with opportunities to interact with others – creating bridges to trust, respect, and understanding across cultures”.

Karen McHugh, Chair, Laois Integration Network (LIN).



Launch of Mountmellick’s street mural celebrating Ireland’s Swift (Apus apus) by artist James Kirwan, in partnership with BirdWatch Ireland. Mountmellick is a stronghold within County Laois for these charismatic and threatened birds. **Photograph:** Alf Harvey

3 The Creative Ireland Vision for Laois

Laois will deploy culture and creativity innovatively and collaboratively and harness the power of these assets for social cohesion and societal wellbeing.

We are ambitious for our creative initiatives to excel in areas of empathy, exploration, and critical discourse. Such approaches can unearth valuable local insights and knowledge that can provide an important anchor, touchstone or USP to the wider local authority processes and programmes. We will identify target groups/communities (whether communities of interest or communities of place) in relation to their needs, ambition or cultural and creative curiosity.

From such a starting point, cultural and creative expertise can be integrated to support the development of initiatives that deliver on our six priorities and are underpinned by the local authority strategic objectives in terms of Placemaking, Integration, Health and Wellbeing, Climate Action and Sustainability.

Throughout the lifespan of our Culture & Creativity Strategy 2023-2027, we aim to focus and build on engagement pathways that position us at the nucleus of co-developing and co-supporting the sustainability of creative communities. We want to particularly ensure that children and young people are co-creators and co-producers of their own programmes. We will propel this objective with the use of planning tools from Hub na nÓg, and also Laois Offaly ETB Local Creative Youth Partnership's targeted toolkit for young people ages 10-24, who are considered at risk, vulnerable or seldom heard.

Our vision until 2027 is that culture and creativity will be further embedded within public policy at local level and across wider local authority priorities, policies and plans, such as climate action, enterprise, tourism, youth, urban, rural and community development, and community health and wellbeing; enabling a shift in how creativity is valued as a strategic support for broader societal issues in Laois.

4 How The Creative Ireland Programme Works Principles and Values of Creative Communities

Creative Communities will continue to support local authorities as a wellbeing strategy through:

- **Policy** — Working in partnership across government supporting local authorities to deliver relevant local, regional, and national policies and priorities;
- **Practice** — Flexible, cross-cutting Culture and Creativity Teams providing an agile and adaptable approach central to the delivery of *Creative Communities* as it addresses locally-relevant priorities;
- **Participation** — Providing more opportunities for people to engage with and enjoy culture and creativity at local level in ways that underpin equality of access; and
- **Partnership** — Between central and local government, County Laois and our local culture and creative sectors.

This approach is based on addressing a shared, strategic agenda while delivering on the challenges and opportunities unique to each local authority area.

The *Creative Communities* partnership will be delivered in line with the following principles and values:

- i. Broaden access to, and participation in, cultural and creative activities locally.
- ii. Use culture and creativity as a catalyst for collaboration and innovation in achieving greater wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development.
- iii. Strengthen the capacity of local authorities to integrate culture and creativity across place-making, regeneration, renewal, and the development of more vibrant, creative, and sustainable places.
- iv. Investing in culture and creativity to support environmental, social, and economic returns that help deliver local authority agendas — from local and regional, to national and international.
- v. Build on the agility and integrated approach of Culture and Creativity Teams to sustain further delivery of targeted collaborative programmes.

5 The Strategic Priorities for Laois

Strategic Priority 1: Creative Placemaking

Creative Placemaking is a process to bring creatives, community members, arts and culture organisations, community developers, and other stakeholders together in collaboration and partnership, and to use creative and cultural strategies to implement community-led change.

By a 'place-based approach', we can work differently across Laois's Municipal Districts to realise the ambitions of communities and support the Rural Development Policy 2021–2025's integrated place-based approach to rural development, and align with the Eastern and Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031 and Local Economic Development Plan (LECP) 2016-2021.

Over the next 5 years, our focus is on the design and implementation of creativity and cultural interdisciplinary narratives to achieve wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development outcomes for our communities, and proactively respond to:

- LECP Goal 2: Diversify and Strengthen a Sustainable Laois Economy - Support the marketing of Laois as a Visitor Destination & improve the Visitor Experience.
- LECP Goal 7: Cultivate a Strong County Identity and an Excellent Quality of Life - Use Heritage, Arts and Library events and initiatives to explore Laois' identities.
- LECP Goal 10: Enhance and Sustain our Town and Village Centres and their function as Focal Points for their Rural Hinterlands.

As Creative Placemaking is an evolving field of practice we plan across the lifespan of this strategy to engage with colleagues and opportunities across the community sector and the public sector.

Objective:

Use culture and creativity to enhance local placemaking and to embed the value of culture and creativity in development agendas (whether local authority or other development agendas) to revitalise our towns and villages and to assist with the deliver under:

1. Town Centre first;
2. Healthy Placemaking; and
3. Visitor Experience planning.

Key Goals:

- Through collaboration, partnership, and shared leadership, cultivate connections between people and place utilising the strategies of culture and creativity in the arts, culture, heritage, and library services.

We will build on heritage-led approaches to increase public understanding of and engagement with built, natural and cultural heritage agendas, such as Music Generation Laois's place and people centred music commissions. We will use innovative multidisciplinary approaches to placemaking with public ephemera and environmentally friendly projects, and new media as a way of unlocking local culture and preserving it for future generations.



Senior infants from Scoil Phadraig Naofa B.N.S. with Laois County Council Cathaoirleach Catherine Fitzgerald, author Jennifer Farley and Mountmellick librarian Edel Heffernan with Jennifer's 'Scout's Best Day Ever' at Mountmellick Playground for the launch of the Laois County Library Service 'Storystroll'.
Photograph: Alf Harvey.

Strategic Priority 2:

Creative Media and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Maths)

Creative Laois will focus the next 5 years on creating a framework to incorporate media and STEAM development and excellence across Laois.

We will embed creative media and STEAM into a partnership consortium with key local and national stakeholders, including creatives in the arts, heritage, library service, Laois Offaly ETB Local Creative Youth Partnership (LO ETB LCYP), Makeport makerspace, Midlands Science, primary and post-primary schools, Youthwork Ireland Laois, Irish Museum of Modern Art, CREATE, Irish Research Council, Laois Media Network and Screen Ireland as well as creatives in the arts.

Laois will be explored through a range of visual and sensory experiences with emergent media, screen production, and digital archives.

Objective:

Creating a framework to foster design, creativity, and innovation opportunities with the development of Laois's screen sector, emergent media and STEAM learning and place-based solutions.

Key Goals:

- Engage with local creative expertise, regional and national screen sector, and STEAM professionals in collaboration with creatives, strategic community partners and stakeholders to support the design of a number of key initiatives and implementation plans from 2023 to 2027.
- Explore creative ways to engage with the artefacts and materials of the Laois Digital Archive, as well as that of the Laois County Art Collection.

Laois Library Service will embed best practice and sustainability in its STEAM programme in collaboration with Midlands Science and MakePort makerspace, for primary and post-primary, youthreach and other constituents to generate creative thinking that can identify and solve real-world problems. The extent of collaborative projects is limitless, such as developing Augmented

Reality and Virtual Reality assets to create narratives, visitor experiences, and virtual tours for all ages, abilities, and communities of place and interest.

We will seek to continue to support the Laois screen sector exploring narratives that reflect aspects of Laois and Irish experiences across different generations, gender, ethnicities, class, culture, heritage and landscapes. We will engage with neighbouring film offices/commissions on potential collaborations to augment resources for emerging filmmakers, animators, and screen professionals in the midlands.

Strategic Priority 3:

Creative & Cultural Integration

To foster a sense of unity within Laois and its communities, we understand integration as a dynamic process that can facilitate effective participation and nurture a shared sense of belonging. Integration in Laois has the benefits of allowing all our citizens to respect each other and cultures.

This document sees “Culture & Creativity” as one pathway to assist with integration across our communities. We seek to use creativity to help integration across communities of identity on the one hand and communities of disadvantage on the other.

Indeed it is recognised that common memberships can exist between communities of identity and communities of disadvantage—for example incomes of persons who identify as disabled tend to be lower than in the general community; for example members of the Traveller community tend to have lower life expectancy and poorer health; for example disadvantaged communities in rural areas can have increased difficulty accessing cultural events in major centres.

The tools of creativity and culture are intrinsic to our engagement and connection with our targeted communities within the duration of this strategy.

Objective:

Each year over the course of the Strategy we will include within our programmes events that help address issues of Diversity, Inclusion, Integration, Disadvantage and Disability.

Key Goals:

- Engage the expertise of local, regional and national ‘integration’ professionals in collaboration with creatives, strategic community partners and stakeholders to support the design of a number of key initiatives and implementation plans from 2023 to 2027.
- Create links with the Heritage Council's Cultural and Inclusive Officer to explore projects that celebrate traveller heritage, cultural heritage exchanges with new communities, and engaging seldom heard groups in heritage.
- Signpost and engage targeted groups with ongoing creative and cultural opportunities in Laois, e.g., *Cruinniú na nÓg*, Culture Night, Heritage Week, STEAM programming, Dunamais Arts Centre's Young Curator Project and Young Filmmakers Project, Creative Laois grant schemes and capacity development opportunities, etc.
- Seek frameworks of collaboration and co-financing from identified opportunities including Healthy Laois, LO ETB Local Creative Youth Partnership, Garda Youth Diversion Programme, Laois Travellers Action Group, LGBT+, Arts Council of Ireland, Heritage Council, European funding, etc.

Laois and in particular Portlaoise has a very high population of migrants including asylum seekers and refugees. We will continue to build on our creative pathways to integration which began with ‘Welcome to Laois’ Tours in association with Laois Partnership Company in 2019, and also to collaborate with Laois Library Service's partnership work with Laois Integration Network and the Anti-Rumours campaign, as well as build on the success of Portlaoise Library as becoming the first Library of Sanctuary in Ireland.

Strategic Priority 4:

Creative Health and Wellbeing

We advocate for culture and creativity as integral to health and wellbeing from the very young to

the elderly and every demographic in between. Creativity is linked to better physical and mental health. It can stimulate and entertain people while also breaching loneliness and isolation. Making and experiencing creativity and culture can transform people and communities and quality of life.

We are aligned with the Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025 which is implemented by the Healthy Laois plan and its goal to improve the health and wellbeing of all our citizens and the Laois Partnership Integration Strategy, Objective 3.2: Develop & deliver targeted initiatives that promote health & positive wellbeing.

Objective:

To build on our relationships with HSE care facilities, Age Friendly Laois, Healthy Laois, Age & Opportunity, IMMA's Arts & Ageing Programme, Dunamais Arts Centre's Dementia Café, as well as Midlands Down Syndrome Centre, with a focus on positive mental health and overall wellbeing in the co-design of durational and co-funded initiatives with additional targeted groups, such as Portlaoise Family Resource Centre, and Laois Traveller Action Group.

Key Goals:

- Engage with the expertise of cultural and creative experts in the field of arts, culture, heritage and health/wellbeing, locally, regionally and nationally in collaboration with creatives, strategic community partners and stakeholders to support the design of a number of key initiatives and implementation plans from 2023 to 2027.
- Health & Placemaking underpinned by Laois Heritage's theme of ‘Nature is Good for You’ and the benefits of being out in nature and promotion of specific Laois sites rural and urban for people looking to increase wellbeing.
- Leverage co-financing identified opportunities across the local authority including Healthy Laois, Age Friendly Laois, as well as the Creative Ireland Programme - Creativity in Older Age fund, HSE, Arts & Health, Arts Council of Ireland, European funding, etc.

We will build on the knowledge and recommendations from the *Mapping Arts & Health Across the Midlands - Arts Council Invitation to Collaboration Scheme project (2021)*, commissioned by Laois County Council Arts Office, in partnership with Offaly and Westmeath County Council Arts Offices and in association with key partners.

In addition, we will embed the learnings and recommendations from the *Creative Laois - Creativity in Older Age 2022* evaluation report, and the recommendations of 'Activations' a capacity development project for active ageing artists in Laois.

Strategic Priority 5: Creative Climate Action & Sustainability

Culture and Creativity have a vital role to play in helping to address the climate emergency. We want to deliver work in a more sustainable way, as well as to influence wider social transformation, using culture and creativity to inform, inspire action, encourage changes in behaviour, and to improve participation in climate change debate and policy.

Our strategy embeds the National Climate Change Strategy and Laois County Council Climate Change Adaption Strategy as part of the Laois Corporate Plan 2018-2023 objective *to increase knowledge and understanding of our changing climate, grow resilience and enable effective responses to the threats posed by climate change* and Goal 13 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals which advocates for *urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*.

Objective:

Focus on bringing a creative approach to illustrating and making the changes needed to slow down climate change.

Key Goals :

- Engage with creative and climate experts in collaboration with Laois's Environmental Awareness Officer and the Climate Action Team to employ cultural and creative strategies to engage in climate change behavioural actions within communities, embedding the research

undertaken by the Creative Ireland Programme 'Engaging the Public on Climate Change through the Cultural and Creative Sectors'.

- Commission, produce and create initiatives that deal thematically with climate change, climate justice and the human response, to engage participants and audiences to contribute to these important societal conversations such as biodiversity loss and climate action.
- Invest in creative initiatives that explore climate issues and/or pioneer new sustainable methods of creative expression, artmaking and/or practise ethical and sustainable sourcing of goods and services, and participate in the circular economy.
- Embed the championing of transformative behaviour across the Creative Laois Programme, the implementation of its 6 priorities and opportunities to promote carbon reduction, climate justice and climate adaptation.
- Leverage co-financing identified opportunities across the local authority including Healthy Laois, as well as Creative Climate Action II: Agents of Change programme (a joint initiative of the Creative Ireland Programme and the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications), Arts Council of Ireland, European funding, etc.

We will build on the success of the Abbeyleix Climate Action Project and QR coded Animated Walk. By encouraging people to walk, it helps to reduce our carbon footprint aligning with national emission targets. Additionally, the project has a big impact in improving peoples physical and mental health by encouraging them to get outdoors and to engage with nature. The project over all helps people to engage with the science of climate change and to understand how we as individuals can have an impact on climate change. One of the best ways we can enable our society to address climate change effectively is to raise our overall level of scientific literacy and engage in actions and discussions on climate issues.



Creativity in Older Age 2022.
'Activations', a capacity development initiative for Laois's active ageing artists with Mary Slevin, Kevin McCann, and Sarah Thornton, founding artistic director of Collective Encounters at Laois Arthouse & Library. **Photograph:** Alf Harvey

Strategic Priority 6: Creative Capacity Development

Building local capacity is the keystone of effective and sustainable development. Creative Laois aspires to support capacity development opportunities that are tailored to participants, and respond to the needs and assets identified by them.

Objective:

That the investments under this strategy will serve to both broaden and deepen the pool of creative talent operating in Laois, to the betterment of the cultural and economic life of the county.

Key Goals:

- A series of open calls to be issued to support professional development and life-long learning for creatives within contexts such as active ageing, screen development, creative entrepreneurs, cultural leaders, climate action, integration, etc.
- Augmenting digital capability and strengthening infrastructures and related skillsets in the making of content and its distribution to diverse and underrepresented audiences/communities or making of content by diverse and underrepresented communities.
- Entrepreneurial development in seeking outside expertise to assist in adapting existing practice and operations or exploring alternative models and platforms for creating, platforming, collaborating, mobility or distribution.
- Masterclasses by experts across a range of multidisciplinary fields that place a value on culture and creativity and achieving outcomes within the parameters of wellbeing, social cohesion and economic development, e.g., supporting festival organisers and groups to further develop festivals and events which in turn will yield a cultural, social and economic benefit to the county.
- Mentoring creatives within the field of arts, culture, heritage, libraries, creative industries and activism, on community development, empowerment and co-creation.
- Collaborative and partnership initiatives with national, regional, local agencies e.g., IMMA, Midlands Science, Eastern & Midlands CARO, Heritage Council, and key national festivals/events, e.g., Bealtaine, *Cruinniú na nÓg*, Heritage Week, Culture Night, Science Week.
- Exploring communication channels and the positioning of Laois's culture and creativity assets, to promote and contribute to the

collaboration with Laois as a Tourist Destination of value at the centre of Ireland's Ancient East and support the work of Laois Tourism to further develop the tourism product and improve tourist information facilities and online information for visitors to the county.

The capacity of the Culture and Creativity Team to deliver targeted collaborative programmes that champion Laois's local development agendas with agility and integrated approach will require annual underpinning and cultivation during the lifespan of this strategy.



Performance of 'The Impossible Dream' by Martin Tourish and the Music Generation Laois Trad Orchestra as part of the Festival of Flight at St Peter's Church of Ireland Portlaoise. **Photograph:** Alf Harvey

6

Implementation by the Laois Culture and Creativity Team

Laois has a Culture and Creativity Team in place to guide and oversee implementation of this Strategy.

The Culture and Creativity Teams are the cornerstone of *Creative Communities* across all 31 local authorities in Ireland. These teams bring together a significant range and level of expertise and, in many cases, include professionals from architecture, archives, the arts, climate action, community, enterprise and environmental development, heritage, information and communication technologies, Irish language, libraries, spatial planning, tourism and more. This depth of technical expertise affords each local authority a level of insight, resources and delivery experience which few other public or private sector organisations can match.

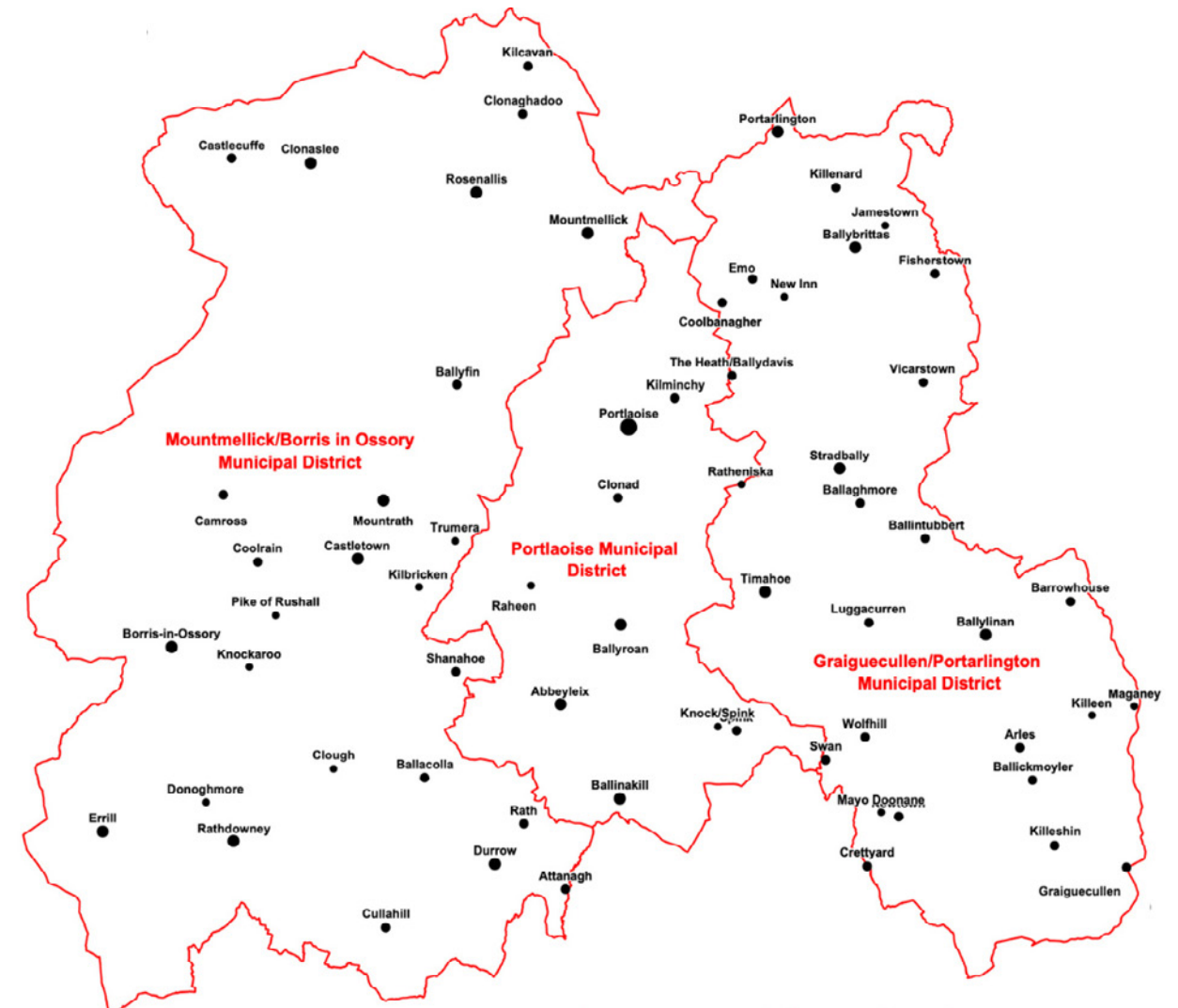
The role of this team is to:

- Provide a collective forum for the ambition of culture and creativity within the local authority;
- Focus on diversity and inclusivity and enable harder to reach communities to participate in cultural and creative activities;
- Build on existing in-house expertise and strategies across areas of wellbeing, social cohesion and economic development to leverage culture and creativity to deliver on targeted local authority agendas;
- Enable a shift in how the cultural and creative sector is valued within and across local authorities and ensure that culture and creativity is embedded across local authority plans, policies and project teams;

- Drive cross-collaborative actions that support change and positive outcomes locally, and potentially between local authorities at regional level; and
- Be innovative and take risks – try new projects and new ways of working.

The delivery of the Strategy is led by the Director of Services for Corporate Affairs, Climate Action, Community, Information Technology and the members of the Culture and Creativity Team for Laois include the Senior Executive Officer Housing & Regeneration, Senior Executive Officer Community Arts & Sports, Arts Officer, County Librarian, Heritage Officer, Assistant Arts Officer, Assistant County Librarian, Director Dunamais Arts Centre, Coordinator Music Generation Laois, Coordinator LO ETB Local Creative Youth Partnership, Clerical Officer and Creative Laois Committee Secretary. These structures and processes are a critical success factor that will enable *Creative Communities* to deliver on strategic priorities for Laois.

Map of Laois



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