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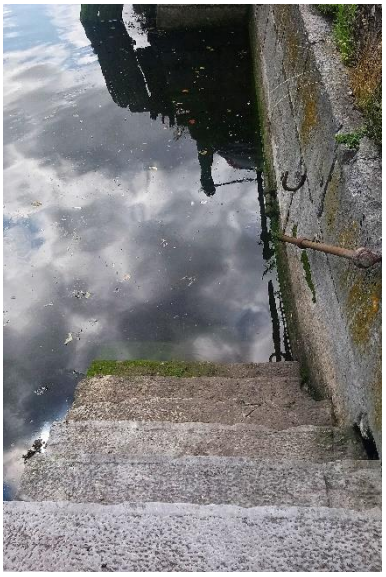


Cork is the Lee

Public Project Report

Cork is the Lee

Overview



This project combined a podcast and audio workshop to explore the cultural and natural heritage role of the river Lee in the life of Cork city. It was co-led by Dr Richard Scriven, building on his work into local cultural heritage and the use of sound as a research and dissemination tool. Vicky Langan, independent artist, contributed greatly to project in the making and editing of extensive field recordings.

The project was received a Cork City Council Local Heritage Grant, which supported the production and dissemination of a podcast, and the running of a performative sonic workshop during Heritage Week 2019. Using the unique capacity of sound to convey meaning and evoke emotions, this project combines interviews with people who use and appreciate the Lee, historical sources, and field recordings to create a rich and unique insight into river as a cultural and natural heritage. The podcast benefits from the popularity and accessibility of the medium and its capacity to reach larger audiences. The workshop brought the participants on an audio journey along the Lee, presenting the river in a new and impactful way. The project highlights the historical and contemporary place of the Lee at the heart of the city in a distinct and novel form.

River Lee

Cork's origins lie with the River Lee, as historic settlements were based on water transport with people and goods moving by sea and river. The city was founded on the flat swampy islands on the Lee, as reflected in the name *Corcaigh Mhór Mumhain*, the Great Marsh of Munster. As a result, Cork remains a shifting landscape with the river adding to the life of the city, bringing benefits and risk, alongside commerce and culture. Since its foundation in the early medieval period, Cork has been a meeting place where waves of migrants have quickly become natives as Vikings and monks are joined by Normans and Anglo settlers, and later Huguenot and Jewish refugees, then today European migrants and contemporary refugees add to the life of the city. The medieval city was defined by the river with the walls and port clinging to the banks, while the expansion starting in the seventeenth century slowly bridged and culverted the river joining small islands to form the modern central island. Cork, a safe harbour for ships, still functions as a port, with the river continuing to provide economical, social, and cultural advantages.

This physical geography is the canvas for a rich cultural and social history that has shaped the identity of the region and influenced all who have visited or called this place home. The geological folding of over 275 million years ago, has created several parallel valleys running west-east that provide the structural

guides for Cork's three main rivers - the Bandon, the Blackwater, and the Lee - as well as shaping the distinct bay-headland shape of the county's coastline. After the most recent Ice Age, 20,000 years ago, the valley glaciers left esker ridges and morrianes that created the pattern of the modern Lee and its tributaries which have a catchment area of over 1,200 km² (Devoy 2005).

The main branch of the River Lee rises in Gougane Barra a secluded valley nestled in the Sheehy Mountains where streams and rivulets flow down the steep sides of the glacial canyon filling the lake. It is valued as a place of great natural beauty, but is also a site of local cultural and spiritual significance through its link with St Finbarr, the patron saint of Cork, whose life is associated with the river from its source to his monastic foundation on the southern banks of the modern city near St FinBarre's Cathedral (McCarthy 2006).

The River Lee and its tributaries are a rich habitat for wildlife and biodiversity running across county Cork and through the city. At each stage of the river, varieties of flora and fauna can be found on the banks and in the water. This is most obvious on upper stretches of the river where there is an abundance of natural beauty, but even within the urban area, the Lee is a haven for birds and fish, including salmon and mullet, as well as otters, seals, and the occasional dolphin, not to mind the millions of microorganisms we can't see (Cork Nature Network 2019; Whelan 2005). With positive interventions and decision-making that values nature, we can help foster a river that is brimming with life, bringing multiple benefits to the area from the wellbeing of experiencing the natural world to tourists recognising Cork's rich natural and cultural heritage.

Cork was founded on a marsh area which early settlers could reach by boat, but could also ford the Lee. Bridges and crossings of different kinds across the river have shaped the development of Cork city, as well as Macroom and villages such as Inchigeela and Crookstown. Today Cork has a rich range of distinct bridges that mark centuries of built heritage and by charting the developed of these crossings the history of Cork city is also revealed (O'Callaghan 2012).

The river Lee is the defining geographical feature of Cork. It has shaped the development of the city and influenced how its histories have unfolded. In song, story, and legend, the Lee is part of local identities, while also being a fabulous amenity. In exploring the watercourse, this project has help understand the important and ongoing role of the river in the life of the city and county.

Outputs

The project's rationale was focused on the production of two key outputs, a workshop for Heritage Week and a podcast series; combined these, along with the research process, have directly contributed to Cork City Council's Heritage Plan.

Podcast

The *Cork is the Lee* podcast has six episodes, with three released at time of writing this report, which had a total listening of 322. Collectively, the series presents a range of perspectives and sources to forge a nuanced story of the Lee as a watery space that has been central to the life of the Cork region, using a range of socio-economic, cultural, and environmental registers. Six broad themes were chosen to capture the breath of natural and cultural heritage associated with the Lee:

1. Reflections on sound and river
2. Source to City
3. Crossings: Bridges and Tunnel

4. Cultural Connections
5. Natural Heritage: Wildlife and nature
6. Being on and with the Lee
7. Conclusions

Over fifty people were interviewed for the series, and we were permitted to use excerpts from the Cork Folklore Project's extensive oral history collection and a local primary school shared some of their local heritage research. To ensure a high-quality product, music was composed and played by musician Claire Layton, and branding was produced by illustrator Maia Thomas. The podcast is hosted on the Soundcloud Platform and is distributed through Soundcloud, iTunes, Spotify, and Siticher. In addition, a project specific Facebook page was created to promote the project and recruit participants, and the podcast featured in the *Cork Independent*. The series was also linked to Dr Scriven's existing podcast, Littoral Space, to increase its impact and audience. It is available here: **liminalentwinings.com/littoral-space-podcast/**

Heritage Week Workshop

A performative workshop for Heritage Week 2019 involved the playing of a longer cut of the podcast materials in format that led the audience down the Lee valley from Gougane Barra to the Harbour using the voices of participants and the field recordings. Thirty-eight people attended the event, which was held in the Department of Geography, UCC. Very positive feedback was given with people responding to the audio presentation and the novel medium for considering the Lee as a natural and cultural force in the life of Cork.

Contributions to Cork City Council's Heritage Plan

The project has made distinct contributions to achieving the City Council's current heritage plan:

- Continue promoting and supporting Cork Walks project (Goal 2): The podcasts could be integrated with the planned Cork Walks app, adding an immersive audio dimension to the experience, that will highlight the place of the Lee for visitors and locals
- Support a programme of Heritage events and products (Goal 2): the Heritage Week workshop presented an innovative way of exploring local cultural and natural heritage that enhanced the programme of events in Cork city. The podcast is a new and lasting heritage product that is accessible and easily shared in a variety of cultural, educational, and touristic contexts. In addition, the series encourages audiences to explore and appreciate the river and the work of clubs and organisations who use it.
- Promote Heritage in Schools (Goal 3): Podcasts are ideally suited to be distributed to schools, as either standalone products or as additional features incorporated with existing or new school packs. This novel means of communicating cultural and natural heritage can harness and foster young people's understanding of their city.



Expenses

The project expenses primarily centered on promoting the workshop and podcast, and production costs for the podcast. Most of the costs were provided on a non-remunerated basis by the project team.

Items	Cost
Promotional Printing	104.55
Recruitment Printing	20.34
Sounding Editing	80
Musical Composition and Recording	85
Illustration and Branding	110
Podcast Hosting Platform	99
Online Promotion	24.80
	523.69

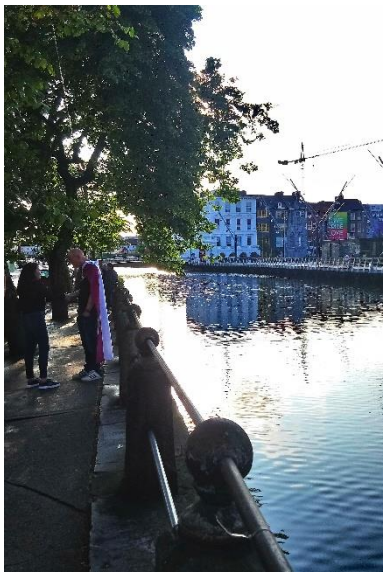
Project Participants

This is a collaborative project between Dr Richard Scriven, UCC, and a number of key participants, especially Vicky Langan. Dr Scriven has extensive experience in research on cultural heritage in Ireland using interviews and archival study. He was an Irish Research Council Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellow and a Royal Irish Academy Charlemont Scholar. Vicky Langan is a Cork-based artist whose practice focuses performance, sound, and film. Her innovative approach has been acknowledged through her gaining bursary awards from Cork City Council and the Arts Council of Ireland. Narration was conducted by Ruth Harrington and Aisling White, the music was composed and played by Claire Layton, Maia Thomas produced the branding and cover design, and production assistance was provided by Joe Kiely.

Interviews were a key strand of the work enabling a diverse range of perspectives that gave voice to the river and its historical and on-going influence in the social, cultural, and economic life of Cork. Over fifty people volunteered their time and expertise for the project. Also, Cork Folklore Project were especially helpful in supporting the project through the provision of several of interviews from their collection; and, St Michael's (Church of Ireland) Primary School carried out research specifically for the project.

Conclusions

Reflecting on the project and the engagements with a diverse range of people and organisations, there are three key findings that should be highlighted:



1. **There is a distinct and vibrant growing appreciation for the role of the Lee in the life of the city.** Recruiting participants for the project was a relatively easy process, with all people enthusiastic to share their experiences and understandings of the river. In addition, the audience for the podcast and online engagements have shown that the general population is interested in this topic and value the Lee. More systems and tools need to be put in place to facilitate and foster use and connection with the river in the city, and beyond.
2. **There is an eagerness for the river to become more accessible.** As the city approaches a new stage of development, there is a clear opportunity to ensure the urban infrastructure and organised events help further individual and communal engagement with the Lee. Recent physical changes, such as the boardwalk at the intersection of the South Mall and Grande Parade and the Mary Elmes bridge illustrate how people will use riparian locations once they are accessible. Also, activities such as the Cork Harbour Festival enable people of all ages and visitors to use and appreciate the river in new ways. People will respond very positively to these types of active interventions designed to harness and further current levels of valuation of the Lee.
3. **The potential for the City Council, and other governmental actors, to engage with Heritage Groups and other Civil Society Organisations (CSO) to develop use and understanding of the river.** Building on the Council's pre-existing support for and interactions with CSOs and community groups in the city, there is considerable opportunity to enable greater appreciation, use, and nurturing of the river and surrounding spaces. The project's emphasis on the Lee as a both a natural and cultural heritage has illustrated how different groups and communities are currently engaging with the river and the capacities for future develops. A definite strategy for the Council and other official bodies to work with these organisations to encourage utilisation and recognition of the river would be very beneficial and impactful.

Acknowledgements

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