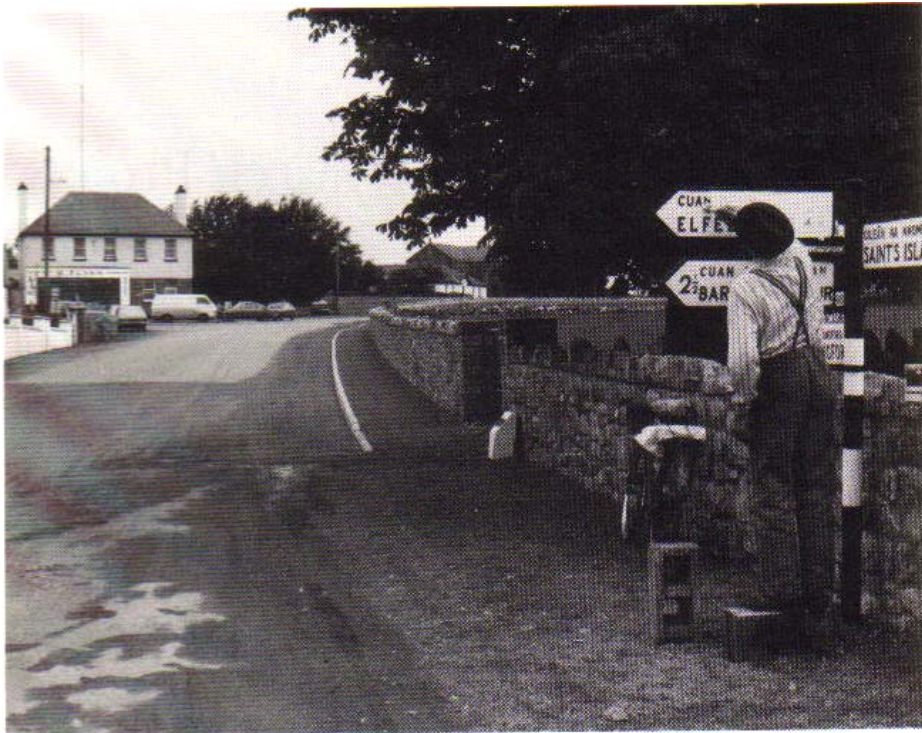


AnCo/Bord Failte Research Project

*A report on
Bord Failte's
Tidy Towns Competition*

1958-1982



Newtowncashel – Preparing for Tidy Towns, 1981



***Message from
Mr. Michael J. MacNulty, Director General, Bord Failte***

I am very pleased to acknowledge the impressive contribution made by the fifteen young people who participated in this jointly sponsored AnCo/Bord Failte Research Project for the Silver Jubilee' celebrations of the Tidy Towns Competition.

A phototnaphic exhibition, based on the Project, will be shown at the celebrations in Mounshannon, Co. Clare, on 29 August. In recognition of the team's achievement Bord Failte has had printed this Report which they wrote to accompany the exhibition.

It is a fine story and brings to light aspects of life in the Ireland of the past twenty-five years that, perhaps, have too often been forgotten I am sure that this Report will be read with interest by all those who have been associated with the Tidy Towns Competition down through the years and who have worked so hard to make it the great success that it has become. I hope too, that young people will read it, because it is they who hold the key to the future development and improvement of our environment at community and national level. This Report is an excellent starting point for anyone wishing to become actively involved in the vital job of caring for our physical environment at community level.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael J. MacNulty'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'M' and 'J'.



***Message from
Mr. J. A. Agnew, Director of AnCo***

I am very pleased that AnCo and Bord Failte had the opportunity to combine their efforts to afford fifteen young people with the opportunity to research the history of the Tidy Towns Competition, organise a photographic exhibition to display their findings and to produce this excellent report.

The quality of their presentation is in itself a tribute to the work of the fifteen young people involved on the project. I am confident that the special skills they have developed during their period of training will help them to secure full-time employment in careers of their own choice in the near future.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all voluntary organisations, which may have suitable community amenity projects, that AnCo are available to assist them with such projects under their Community Youth Training Project.

J. A. Agnew

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INTRODUCTION

by Kieran Hickey

As part of its celebrations of the 25th Anniversary of the Tidy Towns Competition, Bord Failte - Irish Tourist Board decided to arrange a photographic exhibition, which would record the developments and the achievements of the scheme since its beginnings.

It was decided that the preparation of the exhibition would be entrusted to a group of young people working as part of a joint AnCo/Bord Failte Research Project. I was appointed as the supervisor of the course.

From May 1982, a wide range of speakers, among them town planners, architects, economists, librarians and Tidy Towns workers, came to talk to the students during the first few weeks of the course. It is a measure of the appeal of the Tidy Towns Competition that the students, all of them under 25, rapidly came to understand the significant effects which the scheme has had on provincial Ireland in social, community and, already, historic terms, and also came to share the enthusiasm of all those who work in it.

The students then set off to more than eighty destinations throughout Ireland to collect photographic material and to learn more about the workings of the Competition at first hand. They received a great deal of co-operation and hospitality during their travels and returned eager to display the material in exhibition form.

As preparations for the exhibition advanced, I felt that the information, which had been obtained on the history, the concepts and the operation of the Tidy Towns Competition, should also be recorded in another form. So, in addition to the photographic exhibition, which will be on display for the first time at Mountshannon on 29th August, a report has been written by the students to complement the pictorial history of twenty-five years' achievement.

The Tourist Board have generously agreed to have this report printed and made available. It is a story of the origins of the Tidy Towns Competition and its progress towards its present-day consolidation as a countrywide scheme of community effort. This expansion is seen by the report to be contemporaneous with a quarter of a century of social and economic change. Here, perhaps for the first time, the competition is placed clearly in the context of many other major developments in Irish life.

I have had the pleasure of making two films on Tidy Towns: Tyrrellspass - European Architectural Heritage Year 1975 and Our Tidy Towns (1979), the second written in close collaboration with Patrick Shaffrey. In supervising this Youth Project, I brought to it my own concepts of the Tidy Towns Competition gained from my work on those two films and also many ideas about the nature of Irish towns which I have learned from Patrick Shaffrey

I do know that the enthusiasm of Tidy Towns Committee workers and of their communities communicated itself to the fifteen young people who worked for Inc. I am certain that the exhibition and its accompanying report will be seen both as an achievement on the part of those who prepared them and also as a tribute to the people whose story it tells.

The fifteen members of this AnCo/Tourist Board project first collected and then collated the pictorial material, which forms the Exhibition. They then divided into two groups, one to design and mount the Exhibition and the other to write the accompanying Report.

Those who prepared the Exhibition were:

Helen Bolger
Paul Bourke
Lucy Callaghan
Martin Cassidy
Geraldine Fanning
Noreen Kelly
Sean Mac Bride
Tom O'Brien
Therese Rochford

Those who prepared the Report were:

Dermot Brennan
Madeleine Clarke
Alan Drumm
Louise Gunning
Carisa O'Kelly
Mark Phelan

A great many people and organisations generously gave their time, help and hospitality to the members of the Course and lent material for the Exhibition. In addition to the representatives of the Tidy Towns Committees, our thanks are due to the National Library of Ireland, The Irish Architectural Archive, Bord Failte Photographic Library, Longford-Westmeath County Library, Monaghan County Museum, National and Provincial newspapers, County and Branch Libraries, Local Photographers, Local Tourist Board Officials, Local Authorities and the College of Marketing and Design, Dublin.

TOWNS AND VILLAGES

Let us be frank. Except in the vicinity of the larger towns, where a certain amount of metropolitan influence may prevail, or along the more sheltered shores, where influx of summer visitors connotes a more modern though not necessarily a more attractive standard of architecture or of hygiene, the Irish village does little to aid the natural amenities offered by the countryside. In the poorer areas it generally displays clear indications of the presence of an impoverished and decreasing population. Too many of the villages suggest the phrase in which they have been despairingly described as consisting of a dozen inhabited houses, a dozen ruined ones, and half a dozen public houses. This is the effect of a rural economy betrayed by the potato, resulting in a reduction in population of one-half. But that represents the Irish village at its worst. Conditions have improved and are improving. But most villages carry with them an indefinable Hibernian flavour, traceable in part to an Irish dislike of being unnecessarily tidy.

R. L. Praeger: *The Irish Landscape*, 1953

CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS

Ireland in the 1950's displayed the symptoms of an introverted and demoralised society. The people were disappointed with the lack of growth in their economy and pessimistic about the country's future. While the rest of post-war Europe was reaping the benefits of rapid economic growth, isolationist Ireland's average rate of growth in the first years of the 1950's (1949—1955) was a modest 1.8%. Growth in the industrial sector was only at the rate of 3% and agriculture, the primary employment sector, was also performing badly.

*Indexes of Gross National Product and
Sectoral Contributions to Output, 1947—1961
(1947=100)*

	1947	1951	1956	1961	
Index of G.N.P.	100	114	119	137	
Industry	21%	25%	24%	27%	
Agriculture	27%	26%	26%	22%	
Others	52%	49%	50%	51%	(1)

The first half of the decade saw little progress in Ireland's protectionist economy, but worse was to come in the following years. Personal consumption did not grow between 1950 and 1954; yet another crisis in the balance of payments occurred and the unstable post-war food exports to Britain ended. To combat this the Government was forced to take deflationary action. This action led to a severe recession in 1956. The next two years saw large cuts in public investment which some believe lengthened the depression. These harsh economic facts are reflected in the employment figures for the same period.

Occupational Structure 1951—1961

	1951	1961	
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (Primary Sector)	40.6%	36.0%	
Mining, Manufacturing etc. (Secondary Sector).	23.7%	24.6%	
Services (Tertiary Sector).	35.7%	39.4%	
Total at work as percentage of total population (14 years and over)	41.2%	37.3%	(2)

There was a drop in the numbers employed in the primary sector during the 1950's and only a slight increase in the numbers dependent on the other two sectors. The effect of severe unemployment and slow economic and industrial growth resulted in the most notable characteristic of the 1950's, mass emigration.

Brown bag bulging with faded nothings, a ticket for three pounds one and six to Euston, London via Holyhead. (3)

Unlike the mass emigration of the 1840's, which happened at a time when the population was naturally decreasing, the emigration of the 1950's occurred when, the annual average birth rate was twice the annual average death rate.

Birth Rate	1951-1961: 61.7 thousand	
Death Rate	1951-1961: 34.8 thousand	(4)

Despite the natural increase in population during the 1950's the Census of population in 1961 recorded an all time low of 2.8 million people. This demographic change came about as a result of emigration, mainly to England.

Annual Average Emigration Rate per 1,000 of Population

1946-1951	1951-1956	1956-1961	
8.2	13.4	14.8	(5)

The phenomenon of mass emigration increased the demoralisation already apparent in Irish society. Social and economic historians are in agreement that conditions in Ireland gave rise to what has been described by a prominent present-day economist as the 'death-wish' of a society. Mass emigration's legacy to rural Ireland was a sparsely populated landscape dotted with derelict homes. It also had the lasting effect of draining Ireland of a complete generation, the youth of the 1950's. There was general recognition by the end of this dark decade that the country was 'stagnant and pessimistic' (6). The most notable characteristics were falling output, increasing unemployment; low housing standards and the steady flow of emigrants exiling themselves from a country, which they felt, had nothing to offer them.

A radical change in social, economic and cultural policy was needed.

'After 35 years of native Government, people are asking whether we can achieve an acceptable degree of economic progress. The common talk amongst parents in the towns, as in rural Ireland, is of their children having to emigrate as soon as their education is completed, in order to be sure of a reasonable livelihood.'

(T. J. Whitaker, *Economic Development* 1958 p. 5)

In 1955, the Government, aware of the grave state of the economy, appointed a Capital Investment Advisory Committee to examine the position with regard especially to public investment and urged that a programme for economic development be drawn up. Mr. T. J. Whitaker, then Secretary to the Minister for Finance, was appointed architect of the plan.

Mr. Whitaker set about his task late in 1957 and in May of 1958 he presented his report 'Economic Development' to the Government. The report, published by the end of that year, was later described by Professor F. S. L. Lyons as 'a watershed in the modern economic history of our country'. Whitaker's report summed up the economic

failings of the previous forty years and offered remedies, which may at the time have appeared radical in nature, but intelligently applied to the Irish situation, could cure the malaise.

In November 1958 Whitaker's arguments appeared in the First Programme for Economic Expansion, which the Government put to the Oireachteas. The first step towards economic revival in Ireland had been taken.

However, during this depressing decade some positive developments had occurred. Bord Failte, established in 1952, had already launched a scheme of its own to bring about a revitalisation of Irish provincial life and to change the appearance of numerous Irish towns and villages.

* * * *

The 1952 Tourist Traffic Act reorganised Irish tourism by establishing Bord Failte. The Act effectively realised the potential and importance of tourism in the Irish economy. The new Board was given widespread powers to develop and market the tourist resources of the Republic. Its basic duty was to 'encourage and promote the development of tourist traffic in and to the State'. (7)

The Act provided the Board with many powers including a power of acquisition, which enabled it to involve itself in planning and development - a function not common to other tourist associations. One of the more unusual but certainly better known duties of the Board was the supplying of road signs to the various local authorities. This gave the Board widespread recognition with people all over the country.

Fogra Failte was also established under the Act to deal with the promotion and advertising side of the Board. However, it was eventually merged with the Board. Although the Board at that time had extensive powers, it led more by encouragement and by example. It tackled problems energetically and created considerable awareness in a country suffering from economic stagnation.

Tourism in the 1950's was not the organised business that it is today. There were only two markets - the United States and Britain and, as far as Europe was concerned, Ireland did not exist. The U.K. market was the single biggest market and Ireland's attraction was the fact that food and drink were more plentiful and cheap than in Britain, which was still suffering from post-war austerity. The American market was an ethnic one and many emigrants returned on holidays during these years.

Nevertheless, the tourist figures available for the first half of the decade show a general decrease up until 1954 (Table 5). Therefore, it is probable that the Board did not begin to make an impression on the country until two years after its formation. This is best illustrated in the gross receipts for the years 1951-55. After a sharp decline, there was a rapid jump in 1955 (Table 6). The tourist season at that time was confined to July and August. One of the first objectives of the new Tourist Board was to extend that season.

TABLE 5

Year	NUMBER OF VISITS				5 Visitors who remained more than one day (by sea, air, rail, omnibus and private motor vehicles)	6 Direct arrivals from U.S. and Canada (by sea and air)	7 Visitors resident in U.S.A.	8 Visitors by sea and air (direct from and via Gt.Britain)	9 Registrations of visitors in Hotels and Guest Houses
	1 By sea, air, rail and omnibus	2 By private motor vehicle	3 By sea, rail, omnibus and private motor vehicle	4 Day trippers					
1950	1,657,000	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	17,206	26,000	560,000	N.A.
1951	1,787,000	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	13,595	18,400	594,000	488,000
1952	1,630,000	2,214,000	3,817,000	N.A.	N.A.	17,105	23,800	633,000	544,000
1953	1,373,000	2,487,000	3,860,000	2,381,000	1,479,000	21,320	33,000	570,000	482,000
1954	1,275,000	2,521,000	3,796,000	2,135,000	1,661,000	24,436	38,000	569,000	481,000
1955	1,279,000	2,754,000	4,033,000	2,226,000	1,807,000	23,577	43,000	611,000	491,000

N.A = Not available

Columns 1+2=3

Columns 3-4=5

TABLE 6

Estimated gross and net receipts from tourism, travel, etc for the years 1949-1955 inclusive

Year	Gross		Net Receipts (Total)
	Receipts	Expenditure	
	£ Million		
1949	31.0	7.0	24.0
1950	28.0	7.0	21.0
1951	31.0	9.0	22.0
1952	29.5	9.8	19.7
1953	28.4	10.9	17.5
1954	29.5	11.6	17.9
1955	31.8	11.8	20.0

* * * *

In 1953 a National Spring Festival was initiated by An Bord Failte. The Festival intended to:

- ❖ Be a new incentive to national progress in every field.
- ❖ Extend the tourist season in the springtime and thereby increase the national income.
- ❖ Encourage more civic spirit to match national pride.
- ❖ Give every city, town and village an opportunity to participate in its own special way.
- ❖ Be a feature of Irish life every year

(8)

The Festival was given the title of An Tostal, an old Gaelic phrase with many shades of meaning signifying a 'pageant', 'gathering', 'array', or 'display'. The term embodied the wish to revive the ancient tradition of great festivals in Ireland. In addition to the Gaelic title an explanatory title in English was adopted - 'Ireland at

Home'. This more realistic term expressed the aim of conveying 'a welcome to Irish exiles and their friends', at a time when emigration was still a major factor of Irish life. (It has been said that the original suggestion for a festival to attract Irish emigrants back to Ireland as holidaymakers came from an executive of Pan-Am, the U.S. airline that had a newly opened transatlantic route into Shannon Airport).

The Festival consisted of pageants, parades, theatre, music, sporting and religious events which appealed to all sections of the community. There were huge gatherings for these events at places like Slane and Croke Park, while every county and most towns and villages also contributed with their own festivities. An Tostal Councils, bodies composed of local business and tourist interests, were established under the aegis of Bord Failte in each participating centre to organise local festival activities.

Extensive publicity was given to the Festival at home and abroad, to attract wide-ranging support. In the first year of the Festival it was reported that 'Everywhere in Ireland tremendous enthusiasm for An Tostal is being displayed and the people are putting their wholehearted effort into the project, by giving full support to the National Tourist Organisations, Local Authorities and cultural and sporting bodies'. (9)

As part of the first year's An Tostal activities the Irish Countrywomen's Association ran a National Roadside Gardens Competition. This competition was designed to brighten up approaches to, and add to the amenities of towns and villages. As a scheme to improve the appearance of Irish towns and villages it reflected An Tostal's aim of encouraging more civic pride to match national pride. Bord Failte, in the furtherance of this objective, promoted a National Spring Clean Campaign each year from 1953 to ensure that towns, villages and resorts were made to look their best prior to the commencement of the tourist season. This campaign, however, was subsidiary to the main Festival activities such as pageants, parades and sporting events.

The initial popularity of the Festival continued for a number of years. But this early enthusiasm was not sustained due mainly to the fact that Ireland had failed to emerge from economic depression. By 1958 the organisers realised that An Tostal needed new direction. Pageants and parades were not attracting visitors, so more realistic and effective tourist attractions had to be devised. At a meeting in July 1958, convened by Bord Failte at the Mansion House, Dublin, it was decided to extend the An Tostal period over the entire holiday season. Instead of parades and pageants, emphasis was placed on more tourist-oriented events like the Cork Film Festival and the Dublin Theatre Festival.

In April 1958, Bord Failte had organised a 'Tidy Towns and Villages Competition' to find the best-kept town in Ireland. This scheme was a natural development of the Spring Clean Campaign. The Competition was inaugurated as part of the An Tostal activities and each An Tostal Council was invited to participate. The first competition proved to be an enormous success. At the Mansion House meeting in July it was decided that the spring months would be dedicated to cleaning and preparing the country for the tourist season. The newly formed Tidy Towns Competition, because of its success in that year, was to be central to these efforts. The competition ran under

the An Tostal banner for a number of years. But the 'Ireland at Home' Festival was well in decline at this stage.

Today, An Tostal survives in only one outpost, Drumshanbo, County Leitrim. However, its crusading offspring continued to go from strength to strength.

REFERENCES

- (1) Chubb, Basil: *The Government and Politics of Ireland*
- (2) Calculated from the census of population as shown in Chubb, Basil: *The Government and Politics of Ireland*
- (3) Kennelly, Brendan: *Dublin Collection*
- (4) Central Statistics Office
- (5) Census of population, 1966, I, XX
- (6) Chubb, Basil: *The Government and Politics of Ireland*
- (7) Tourist Traffic Act, 1952, Government Publications
- (8) *Longford Leader*, April 1953

CHAPTER 2

TAKE-OFF

In April 1958 Bord Failte launched their new scheme inviting entries for a competition to find the tidiest town or village in Ireland. Circulars were distributed around the country and from the start the scheme was a success.

Response was good: 52 centres entered and every county, except Carlow, Dublin, Sligo and Westmeath, was represented. Co. Donegal produced the first National Tidy Towns Winner, Glenties, which became known as Ireland's Tidiest Town. In 1959 the entries increased threefold from 52 to 179, with every county represented.

The Tidy Towns Competition succeeded initially because the ground was well prepared. At the community level almost every town and village in Ireland had elected a Tostal Council whose duty it was to organise the pageants, parades and sporting fixtures during festival time. They also organised the Spring Clean-Up prior to Tostal. The transition from being a Tostal Council to a Tidy Towns Committee was easy and in fact in many cases the two were probably synonymous in the early years of the competition.

At the official level, the Board set up an independent panel of Assessors to judge the towns and villages, awarded cash prizes and a perpetual plaque to the National Winner and above all laid down guidelines for the committees. The Board was always close at hand to give advice and encouragement where needed.

By introducing a competitive element to the Spring Clean Campaign the strong Irish competitive trait, already evident in the nationwide network of G.A.A. clubs, was put to further use.

The Competition encouraged the involvement of more organised groups around the country. For example, Muintir na Tire took part from the beginning. As the competition grew and developed, other groups, the I.C.A. and An Taisce for example, became involved.

The provincial press played a very important role in promoting the competition. Provincial papers provide local news and reflect county interest through coverage of sporting fixtures, feiseanna and local events ranging from marriages to U.D.C. meetings. The papers represent regional pride and inter-county rivalry. When a town wins a county or national prize the local papers give enormous publicity. Pages of photographs, articles and interviews appear. The national newspapers also give coverage and the winning town's name is national news.

The Tidy Towns Competition appealed to the provincial press from the start. When the first year's results were announced the Donegal Democrat gave extensive coverage to Glenties' victory.

GLENTIES IS IRELAND'S TIDIEST TOWN
*Malin Highly Commended in
Tostal Competition*

In their report to Bord Failte the judges remarked: 'We consider that the competition did serve a useful purpose. It is quite obvious that the various Tostals over the years had a cumulative effect in a yearly improvement in the towns, but the competition has led to a particularly competitive effort rather than a general tidying up. The competing towns made a definite effort, and the resulting improvement must encourage them to maintain this level and even improve it'. (1)

GLENTIES' PROUD DAY

Sunday week promises to be a big day in the history of Glenties as a result of winning Bord Failte's 'Tidiest Town and Village' competition the ceremony will be filmed for T.V. and cinema newsreels.

The competition has received international notice and it might almost be said that through the medium of the cinema, radio and television the world is about to visit the town and see for itself. The townspeople, although delighted at winning the competition, hardly realised what widespread attention would be focused on them as a result and are determined that no stone will be left unturned to justify the title they have so worthily earned, when the spotlight swings in their direction in nine days time. (2)

* * * *

When the first tentative steps towards launching a nationwide competition were taken by the Board, the early-entrants had only basic guidelines to work from. However, the independent panel of assessors used comprehensive and detailed judging criteria. The Board had marked a path along which the competition would grow and develop, which was to become more evident to the public with time. It gently led the competitors forward from the start; it understood how they would progress, and foresaw the mature and sophisticated system which operates today.

In 1959 the assessors—Messrs. T. P. Kennedy, President of the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland; C. A. Kelly, representing the Irish branch of the Town Planning Institute; Dermot O'Toole, representing the Institute of Landscape Architects—prepared a report entitled: *Observations made by the Expert Panel of Assessors (Tidy Towns Competition 1959)* and calculated to be of general advice and assistance.

This report is significant because it shows the far-sightedness and expectation of Bord Failte from the outset.

The report examined the response from various regions. 'A Tidy Town seems to exert a good influence over a wide area in its vicinity', it observed. Donegal was leading all other counties; Glenties, Malin and Greencastle were exceptionally good

with 250 plus marks out of 300; Wexford and Galway were second best whereas Kerry's results called for an 'examination of conscience'. The assessors were not preoccupied with litter control. They described derelict sites as a 'kind of cancer in our towns' and saw many of the faults, which became evident while judging as the result of poor town planning. They encouraged the development of natural amenities, i.e. rivers, lakes and green spaces, and called for the preservation of distinctive items of street furniture.

Rather than force towns and villages to join the competition the Board used encouragement and made itself available for consultation and advice. A film on the scheme should have been made at this time and used as an educative medium; unfortunately it was not until 1975 that the Board commissioned its first film on the scheme.

However, in its role as educator, the Board did publish an enlightening, optimistic and encouraging booklet entitled:

*Three heads are better than none...
or a recent happening at Mile Tree.*

Here, Bord Failte uses a fictional narrative to point out that if a town or village improves and promotes itself it will benefit in many ways: it will benefit financially from increased tourist traffic and the community will benefit; its spirit will be lifted and a concern for the environment will grow and develop.

The story tells of a town, 'Mile Tree', somewhere in Lakelands, and its tourist development committee, which sets about improving and promoting its own place.

How is Mile Tree seen by visitors?

An American is curious about the village, its people, its buildings and its amenities. However, he is disappointed with the reply to his question;

'Well, is there some place I could eat?'

'Can't we fix you up over at the hotel?', suggested Tom, one of the locals.

'A cup of tea maybe, and some cheese sandwiches - it's between times you know'.

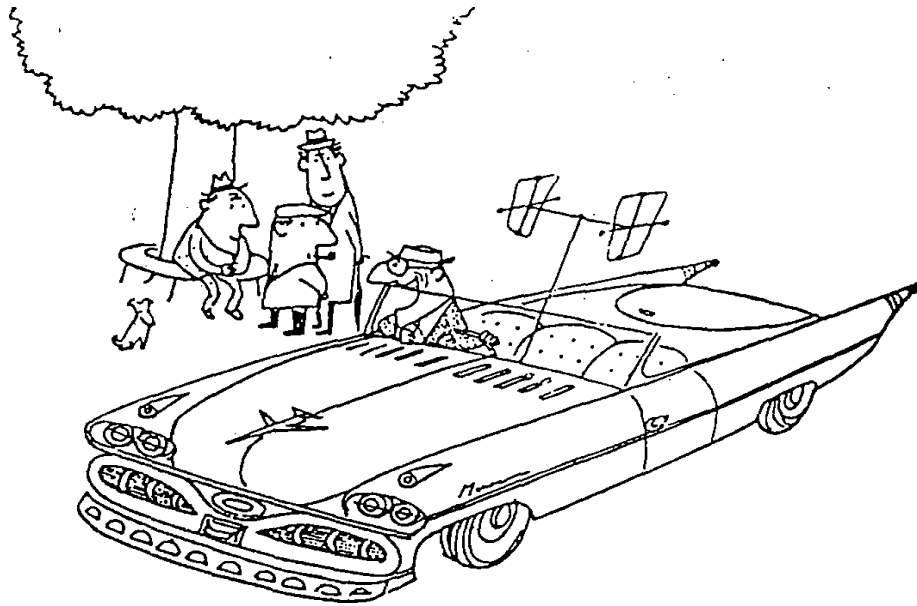
'Or there's the pub,' Lannigan cut in.

'Well thanks, I guess I can wait until I get to the next town.'

The American engaged gear and paused, 'Do many people emigrate from here?'

'A fair few,'

He nodded and drove away



This incident at first annoys the three Mile Tree villagers, but gradually they come to see why they lost a tourist;

'Buckets of opportunities are kicking about here but nothing is ever done because nobody believes in them' growled Tom.

Dan cautiously espouses the tourist potential of Mile Tree.

'I believe Mile Tree could develop a nice little tourist business if it was tidied up and had up-to-date accommodation. After all, it's a pleasant part of the country, not very spectacular but there are nice walks around the river and lakes and we have a few interesting raths and things. There must be a lot of people who would come for a cheap quiet holiday to a spot like this.'

They discuss what Dan has said and imagine Mile Tree as a booming tourist town. In the end they decide to call the community together and propose developing a tourist industry in Mile Tree. Lannigan has his reservations:

'That tourism thing is only talk. Any business that depends on the co-operation of everyone in this village is dead before it starts.'

He is to be proved wrong. The first meeting sees Tom, Dan and Lannigan elected as the Mile Tree Development Committee to whom the people promise their full support.

The next step is to consult Bord Failte. Dan seeks advice while Lannigan looks for 'grants and things' to subsidise his vision of Mile Tree with a ballroom, cinema and golf course.

At this point the Bord Failte representative steps in to guide the committee along the right lines. Bord Failte can only help when the community is prepared to help itself and work to promote its village as a tourist area.

'We can't spend money helping those who aren't prepared to help themselves. As it is it's a problem to cover the jobs, which need to be done on a national, scale - everything from signposting to publishing folders and brochures. Certainly we can help but show us something worth helping.'

He goes on to explain the two ways of developing tourism. The first is Lannigan's way, to provide amenities and hopes to find a market for them to recoup the money invested. The second is more appropriate:

'Find out what kind of people you can cater for now and build up your business as you go along.'

After many cigarettes, racking of brains and the help of the Bord Failte man, the committee decide to promote Mile Tree as a Coarse Angling centre by developing its natural amenities of river and lakes. Bord Failte gives guidelines for catering for the potential tourists.

'By far the greater part of our visitors are ordinary middle-income people who want clean, comfortable accommodation with plenty of wholesome food at reasonable rates.'

Bord Failte had confirmed Dan's belief in the tourist potential of Mile Tree. The committee had two projects to work on and the community's full support was there to bring them into being.

From that point on Mile Tree hummed with activity. There were fund raising activities, gardens were tidied up, business premises painted, the river and lakes were mapped and the best angling spots marked. Everyone was involved and the community glowed with pride as they watched their village improve.

'But more important changes were in the spirit of Mile Tree. No stranger could fail to notice the cheerful, purposeful air infecting men and women . . . tourist development was snowballing and Mile Tree was no longer a dull place to live in.'

The committee advertised in British Angling Journals and the tourist trade flowed from there.

Years later, when Mile Tree was booming the American visitor arrived once more. He failed to recognise the village and on hearing its name thought his memory was playing tricks.

The Mile Tree booklet reflected the evangelistic nature of Bord Failte's approach to promoting the environmental benefits of the competition.

It was both necessary and useful, giving encouragement to those towns and villages, which had not yet progressed as far as Glenties, had done.

By concentrating on town and village development for its own sake and laying no emphasis on the competition the Board's vision of what the scheme would eventually become is now evident.



CHAPTER 3

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TIDY TOWNS COMPETITION 1961-68

The 1960's were a time of growth and expansion due partly to the policies of the government and partly to the overall economic and social climate of the time. Throughout Ireland economic and social change was manifest in a number of ways.

Each of the factors for change affected the physical appearance of provincial Ireland and the way in which people looked at towns and villages. The E.S.B.'s rural electrification scheme did much to change not alone Irish towns and villages but also the countryside. In the earlier years of electrification attention had been concentrated on the towns and villages and by 1943 about 95% of this urban and semi-urban population was being supplied. Rural electrification was essentially a post-'Emergency' phenomenon. The scheme took twenty years to complete — in March 1964 only eight out of 800 areas requiring service remained to be dealt with. The general availability of electricity made life easier in many ways (and paved the way for a more materialistic society). In dairy farming, for example, the more widespread use of milking machines was made possible. In the area of sanitary services more efficient pumping stations could be built around the country. The physical appearance of towns and villages underwent dramatic change: streets and roadsides were planted with electricity poles and overhead wires began to dominate skyline and roofscape. The intrusiveness of poles and wires was accepted for some time, perhaps because it was subconsciously associated with improvement. Neon-lit advertising signs, so out of character with the architecture of Irish villages, date from this time too.

By 1964 the Tidy Towns Competition was well under way. Although the national prize was shared between two villages for the first six years (1957-1963), the number of centres entering in the same period grew from 52 to 281. The immediate popularity of the competition is evident by the fact that in 1959 a total of 305,613 persons were represented by all the competing centres.

A number of factors made this growth possible. Television meant that the population was better informed. Radio Eireann had been founded in 1925 as part of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and in 1960 the Government decided to provide the country with a television service also and accordingly set up a State-sponsored body to administer both broadcasting media. Broadcasting of Telefis Eireann commenced on New Year's Eve 1962 and by the mid-1960's it was estimated that 348,000 out of 680,000 homes had television sets and of these approximately 137,000 were able to receive B.B.C. and I.T.V. also. Television exposed Ireland to outside views in a way never before experienced. It was a constant source of controversy, discussing taboo subjects in a manner formerly unknown and unheard of. Television competed successfully with cinema for audiences and cinema attendances declined. Consumerism was promoted by television advertising and made possible by a higher standard of living and greater surplus wealth. Television, in addition to all the above, helped make people more aware of their own place. By showing how people lived elsewhere and what their attitudes and expectations were, television allowed the viewing public to make comparisons with their own situation.

During the 1960's consumerism grew. Galbraith's 'conspicuous consumption' was manifest in the increase in the ownership of goods – items, which previously were luxuries, became standard items of necessities. Motorcars and television are two examples. Between 1969 and 1977 the total number of private motorcars registered and licensed for the first time grew from 50,523 to 82,310, an increase of over 60%. The growth in motorcar ownership was accompanied by a gradual decline in the number of passengers being carried by public transport. It ushered in an era of increased private mobility: in 1960 car ownership was 170,000; by 1979 there were 683,000 privately owned motorcars. Just as television ownership resulted in derelict or converted cinemas, so widespread motorcar ownership found its corollary in abandoned railway stations. Between 1951 and 1961 the number of tractors in the country increased by 350% while the number of horses decreased by 50%. In 1964 an Act of the Oireachtas ended street markets and provided for the establishment of marts. The physical appearance of towns and villages was altered dramatically by the absence of cattle, sheep and horses in the streets on market days. Their absence caused an overall increase in the hygiene standards of village greens and streets. However, the use to which the village greens were put seldom enhanced the quality of life in the village. Most often they were converted to unsightly car parks.

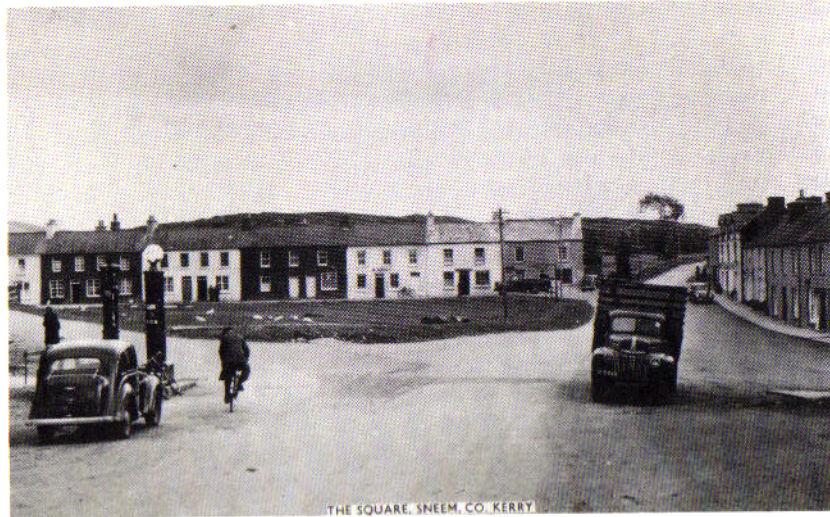
The Tidy Towns Competition and the country as a whole were affected by the change in the population structure. 1961 marked a turning point when the population reached its lowest ever recorded figure of 2.8 million. . This decline, occurring in the context of a significant natural increase (birth over deaths) in the population, was due to mass emigration. The average annual change in population between 1946 and 1981 is shown in Table 7 below. Between 1961 and 1966 there was a significant increase in population due to a drastic reduction in emigration. Returning emigrants with acquired skills, industrial and other, brought a fresh eye to old places. While people living in a town or village would be familiar with and tolerant of things such as derelict buildings (often the result of mass emigration) a visitor would be able immediately to identify the things, which detracted from the quality of the village.

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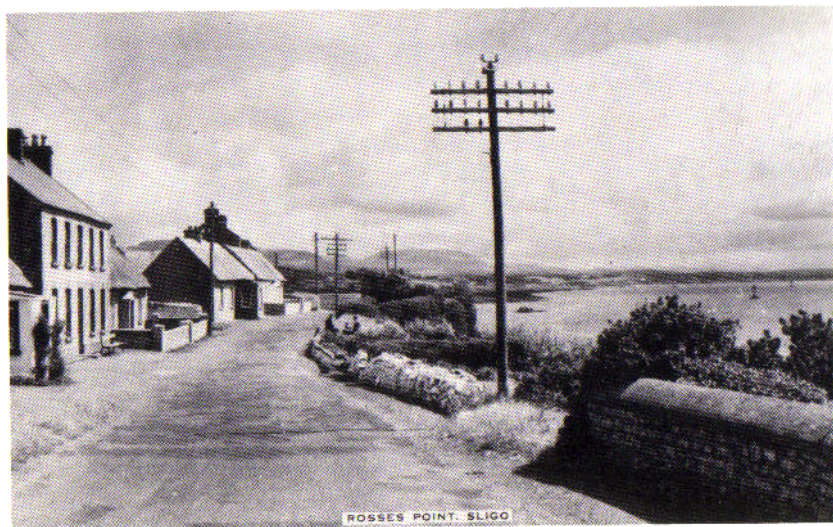




TYRELLSPASS, CO. WESTMEATH



THE SQUARE, SNEEM, CO. KERRY



ROSSER POINT, SLIGO

Improvements in basic things like housing, sanitation and education meant that people were able to spend more time and thought on improving their immediate environment. While the Tidy Towns Competition was fostering community effort and local pride a national policy on town planning was slowly evolving. The need for planning and direction on development was recognised to some extent by the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1963. The main provision of the 1963 Act was that each local authority was to prepare its own development plan every five years. While not all planning authorities prepared plans, those drawn up were of great use to Tidy Towns Committees. And in some cases the suggestions and observations of a Tidy Towns Committee were equally useful in the preparation of a development plan.

In earlier years the main concerns of Tidy Towns Committees were with dirt, dereliction and colour schemes. The importance of colour and colour harmony was emphasised and in 1960 a comprehensive booklet on exterior colour schemes for public, private and commercial buildings was distributed to participating centres. But the most important aspect of the scheme was the amount of effort made by committees and individuals towards the improvement of cities, towns, villages and the countryside, an ideal epitomised in the Tidy Towns motto 'To make our own place a better place'.

From the beginning of the competition it was decided that it would be best if the panel of adjudicators were not staff employees of the Board. This panel included architects rather than environmentalists or town planners because in the 1950's and 1960's it was architects who dealt with the areas of conservation, town planning and environmental management.

In 1959 the headings under which adjudication was carried out were

<i>Category</i>	<i>Maximum Marks</i>
Effort involved	25
Overall effect	20
General cleanliness and tidiness	15
Condition of streets and sidewalks	10
Appearance of industrial and commercial premises	10
Colour and colour harmony	10
Absence of unsightly objects	<u>10</u>
	<i>Total</i> 100

By 1961 two changes had been made:

'Appearance of industrial and commercial premises' had been changed to include public and private premises. 'Overall effect' was removed. And a new heading of 'Appearance of gardens-and window-boxes' put in. Also, more attention was being paid to entrance roads and comments were now being added by the adjudicators with suggestions on how the town or village could be improved.

In 1964 the Board divided the country into eight tourist regions allowing for specialisation in an area (say, fishing) but maintaining the facility to make bookings and arrangements outside their region. The eight tourists areas are:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. SOUTH EAST | Counties Wexford, Kilkenny, Waterford, Carlow and Tipperary South |
| 2. EASTERN | Counties Meath, Wicklow, Kildare, Louth and Dublin |
| 3. DUBLIN TOURISM | The Greater Dublin area |
| 4. SHANNONSIDE | Counties Limerick, Clare and Tipperary North |
| 5. LAKELANDS | Counties Roscommon, Longford, Offaly, Laois, Westmeath, Monaghan and Cavan |
| 6. WESTERN | Counties Galway and Mayo |
| 7. IVERNIA | Counties Cork and Kerry |
| 8. NORTH EASTERN | Counties Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim |

Throughout the 1960's the number of towns and villages entering the competition increased rapidly. The total entry for 1968 was 510 — more than half the number of eligible centres. In the first year there had been entries from 21 counties and from nine of these counties only one entry. By 1963, representation had grown. Of the 281 centres competing in 1963 the counties with the greatest number of entrants were Cork, Donegal, Galway, Wexford, Clare, and Meath. This represented all the tourist regions except the Lakelands where the county with the most entries was County Cavan. (See table 8). By 1968 Cork entries had increased from 55 to 84 and entries from Lakelands counties had doubled or, in many cases, trebled. While entries grew, the national prize was shared among only four centres in the first eleven years, i.e. 1958-1968, suggesting that although the interest was countrywide a high standard was being reached by only a few.

* * * *

In the years immediately after the Second World War, tourism had not yet been developed, but many people from Britain came here. In the 1950's An Tostal attracted Irish people home on holiday, mainly from the U.S. and the U.K. But in the 1960's a new market was opened up with many people coming from mainland Europe. The B+I Line and Sea-Link car ferries, which opened in 1968, heralded a change in the structure of tourism. While formerly tourists travelled by coach or by privately rented car, they were now able to bring their own cars. The era of the independently mobile tourist had arrived.

TABLE 6
Tourism Numbers and Revenue 1961-1968
 (Total Out-of-State Tourism)

Date	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968
Numbers '00os	1,449	1,459	1,508	1,687	1,733	1,696	1,812	1,917
Revenue £m	39.1	38.4	39.6	44.2	51.7	50.7	55.7	62.1

These figures seemed set to continue on a path of consistent growth but then the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland erupted and tourism was severely stricken. As the 1960's progressed, advertising and fly posting became more in evidence. So did litter. The increasing amount of litter was directly related to the increasing amount of packaging and the growth of consumerism. These problems clearly needed urgent attention and would require even more in the years ahead.

The Board gave further assistance to Tidy Towns Committees in 1963 with the publication of another two booklets. *An Eye to Progress* is a detailed and comprehensive guide for Local Development Associations. It tells them how to avail of all sources of finance for improvement schemes and also informs them of their statutory rights in areas of planning and tourism, listing the relevant Acts, the duties and powers of local authorities, the nature of grants from the Board itself in all the many areas of tourism, and grants available from Government Departments and other bodies. It advises how schemes of improvement can be followed and everything from cultural and sporting activities to entry to the Tidy towns competition organised. It appears to have been prepared before the 1963 Planning Act came into effect.

The Trouble with Moyle by Iain Mac Carthaigh, a narrative similar to the earlier 'Mile Tree Story' tells of a fictitious town's Development Committee and its problems in trying to improve its own place. It is a well-written and effectively illustrated chronicle of how the community eventually persuade all the members of a community to work together. This success story, however, ends with a pessimistic and dismissive postscript-

'There are few places in Ireland called Moyle. This isn't any of them. The people, firms and institutions in this story are not real people or real firms or real institutions. Any resemblance is coincidental. The whole thing is fiction. Unfortunately.'

TABLE 7
Average Annual Change in Population, Natural Increase and Net Migration in each Intercensal Period 1946-1981

Intercensal Period	Average Annual Change in Population	Average Annual Natural Increase	Estimated Average Annual Net Migration (Inward less Outward)
1946-1951	+1,119	25,503	-24,384
1951-1956	-12,466	26,887	-39,353
1956-1961	-15,985	26,416	-42,401
1961-1966	+13,132	29,253	-16,121
1966-1971	+ 18,849	29,630	-10,781
1971-1979	+46,746	35,129	+13,617
1979-1981	+36,105	40,485	-4,380
1971-1981	+46,218	36,080	+10,138

Note: The annual averages for population change; natural increase and net emigration above are shown in the form of annual rates per thousand of the average population.

TABLE 8
Change in *Number of Centres entering Tidy Towns Competition from each County and Tourist Region*

County	Tourist Region	Year		
		1958	1963	1968
Carlow	South East	0	7	7
Kilkenny		2	7	15
Waterford		2	6	13
Tipperary South		0	2	7
Wexford		3	15	16
Cavan	Lakelands	4	11	20
Laois		1	6	16
Longford		2	4	8
Monaghan		4	4	9
Offaly		1	5	19
Roscommon		1	6	13
Westmeath		0	4	11
Clare	Shannonside	1	14	28
Limerick		1	9	24
Tipperary North		3	12	27
Cork	Ivernia	6	55	84
Kerry		3	12	26
Donegal	North West	3	22	24
Leitrim		1	5	15
Sligo		0	4	12
Dublin	East	0	4	10
Kildare		3	7	10
Louth		1	2	9
Meath		2	13	18
Wicklow		1	10	20
Galway	West	6	15	27
Mayo		1	2	17
TOTALS		52	281	510

CHAPTER 4

ORGANISATION AND WORKINGS

As the Tidy Town Competition grew in popularity, so too did the need for better organisation within it. There are two roles within the scheme, the one of organiser and promoter, the other of competitor. Both of these roles involve the carrying out of many duties. Bord Failte's duties are the organisation of the competition, inviting entrants old and new, supplying these entrants with the relative entry forms and regulations, dividing the towns and villages into their categories, and selecting and appointing adjudicators.

In June of every year the Board sends its adjudicators to carry out a detailed assessment of every village, town or city taking part in the competition. These assessments are then processed and a subsequent list of places which have qualified for further examination is drawn up. These towns and villages are then revisited and a final selection of three or four is made. From these the National Winner is eventually chosen. Finally, the Board arranges a prize-giving ceremony. This is a one-day affair held in the reigning National Tidy Town.

All competitions need prize giving to make them worthwhile. Tidy Town Prize Day has become an Annual Festival, a celebratory occasion for all the committees throughout the country. Bord Failte have made this a major event and organise a day of parades, entertainment and hospitality.

Prize giving takes place in some central green space. Visiting delegates are first given lunch and then presented with the minor prizes. A review-stand overlooking the ground holds the distinguished guests - Government Ministers, Dail and Local Government representatives, Town and County Council Officials and all those whose support is vital to the Tidy Town Scheme. There are flags and bands and banners. Children in suitable costumes work as litter wardens and exhibitions by State organisations and environmental groups are on display. The visitors will, of course, spend time viewing the host town and appraising those qualities which made it last year's winner. The day is an ideal occasion for committees to meet with each other and to exchange ideas.

The delegates of each competing town or village march to the ground, each carrying their own identifying banner. Bands lead this parade and the assembled crowd finally numbers many thousands. The announcement of prizes, always a well-kept secret up to this point, brings predictable excitement with an especial cheer for the overall winner, the year's Tidiest Town. The crowds, the exuberance and the festival atmosphere are a celebratory conclusion to a year's hard work and an expression of countrywide participation and friendly rivalry.

* * * *

Although the scheme is firmly established it has yet to reach its full potential. The Board still has to promote and publicise the scheme in certain areas. It does so by arranging meetings at which the Bord Failte representative gives advice on how to enter the competition, how to organise a Tidy Towns Committee and how to involve local people. The Board also uses films to promote their scheme. In 1975 and 1979 B.A.C. Films were commissioned to produce two films on the scheme. The first film, which was made in European Architectural Heritage Year 1975, featured the village of Tyrrellspass and shows what can be achieved in a village when all parts of the community work together. The second film *Our Tidy Towns*, shows the variety of Irish towns and the effect of the Tidy Town Scheme on the 1978 winner, Glaslough. Both of these films have been shown extensively around the country and they have aroused great interest in the competition.

The Board also gives assistance to competitors by schemes such as the 1979 National Anti-Litter campaign. This campaign was launched by the Board to heighten the awareness of the litter problem, and to bring about a change of attitudes and behaviour in solving the costly and unnecessary problem of litter. Although this campaign did not succeed in eliminating this problem, it did help many towns and villages to alleviate it. Tidy Towns Committees have developed from a variety of organisations. Many of the Development and Residents' Associations have given rise to such committees. One example of this exists in Portumna, County Galway. In 1947, Monsignor Joyce P.P. founded the Portumna and District Development Company Limited. Its function was to develop the town and surrounding area. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the town revised its Tidy Towns effort and in 1981 a special Committee was formed within the Development Company for this special purpose. However, not all towns and villages have development or residents' associations and therefore rely on other organisations such as the Irish Countrywomen's Association and Muintir na Tire to Form committees. Since their establishment these organisations have helped develop rural Ireland and are now a major driving force behind many Tidy Towns. County Councils, Corporations and Urban District Councils also play their part. Indeed, in most of the larger towns and cities the work is carried out by these bodies. These committees can be sub-divided into groups with elected officers and groups made up of the whole community.

A Tidy Towns Committee has many duties. The first of these is to get the community interested in becoming a Tidy Town. In order to do this, most committees arrange a meeting of the committee and invite all the members of the community to attend. During this meeting the committee tries to make the people of the area aware of the advantages of being a Tidy Town. The need for hard work and good community spirit is also pointed out. As every Tidy Towns Committee knows, the chances of getting a full turnout are slim. The necessary follow-up usually takes the shape of a personal approach rather than an official one. A member or members of the committee call on the people absent from the meeting and inform them of what was discussed and decided. If this duty is not carried out some people may feel alienated from the community. This follow-up is a measure of the dedication of the committee to the task of developing their town or village.

Liaison with the area's local authority, i.e. Urban District Council, County Council or Corporation, is another important duty of the committee. If the town or village is to achieve its aims, co-operation between the committee and the local authority is of

vital importance. In order to achieve this co-operation the committee may need to call upon the influence of local politicians and so, lobbying of these politicians is necessary. Since street-scape plays such an important role in the appearance of a town or village, the support of the E.S.B. and the Department of Posts and Telegraphs is also invaluable.

In order to develop a town or village into a Tidy Town, money will need to be spent on paint, lawnmowers, trees, shrubs, litter-bins, fencing and other materials. It is the duty of the Tidy Town Committee to organise fund raising activities in order to purchase these items. Even the committees of the more successful towns and villages need to raise funds since the prize money cannot pay for all that is needed, but then it is not the prize money alone which entices them to enter the competition.

The involvement of the children in a town is needed to ensure the continuation of the community effort in future years and it is up to the committee to get the children involved in improving their towns. Many committees organise art competitions, environmental projects and litter-warden schemes to increase the interest of the children.

The final duty of the committee is to motivate the community to work by giving example. The members themselves must be seen to be working to improve their town.

Because the dedication of the Board and the Tidy Towns Committees has been so great, the scheme has become a way of life for many towns and villages.

CHAPTER 5

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT 1969-82

It is fair to say that the 1970's were expected to be a continuation of the 1960's with society gradually moving to full employment and with income levels increasing rapidly reflecting a structural shift to high-income industries under the industrialisation programme pursued by the I.D.A.(1) However, the experience was somewhat different. The social and economic changes that did occur during those years inevitably had considerable effect on the Tidy Towns Competition. Nevertheless, the Competition survived to become the success it is today.

The list of changes is considerable. One of the most important features of the 1970's was the continued rise in the standard of living, which began in the 1960's. Another important factor was population where the slowing down of emigration in the 1960's caused an increase in the 1970's. In 1971, the population was 2.9 million and this rose by an additional 390,000 to 3.3 million in the next eight years. The greatest increase occurred in the 15-44-age bracket, which gave Ireland one of the youngest populations in Europe. The emigrants who had left the country in the bleak 1950's were now returning also.

The increase in population naturally led to an increase in the labour force, which began to rise again for the first time since the 1960's. Its composition also altered with the increasing participation of working women.

The 1970's saw major improvements in urban and industrial development. Almost one third of the present housing stock was built in that decade and with that came a general improvement in housing. Industrial development not only increased but also became more advanced and factories and industrial estates became less centralised, moving to the countryside from the towns and their suburbs.

The rising standard of living brought greater affluence - the car being the best example. In 1960, car ownership was 170,000. In 1979 this increased to 683,000. The number of television sets showed substantial increases: from 372,671 in 1976 to 593,298 in 1977. This type of growth was also accompanied by major improvements in expenditure in such areas as education, health and social welfare. A new, confident and outward-looking society emerged in contrast to the Ireland which was 'cut off from the life and thought of the New Europe' in the early 1950's. (2)

Growth in the economy remained fairly buoyant until late 1973 when Ireland joined the E.E.C. The subsequent deterioration in economic performances was not of course due to joining the E.E.C.; indeed it is likely that it would have been worse in the absence of membership. The cause of the difficulty was the quadrupling of oil prices in 1973. The impact this had on the economics in the West meant that a severe recession was inevitable.

In 1974 output in Ireland was stagnant and fell sharply in 1975. Unlike the 1950's, the 1974/5 recession was not confined to Ireland and indeed, in terms of growth, Ireland did better than most. The economy improved somewhat in 1976 and by 1977

the recovery was gaining momentum. Expansionary budgets were implemented in 1978 and 1979 and that same year saw the start of yet another recession.

Overall, during the 1970's, despite international difficulties, the Irish economy experienced some growth. However, unemployment remained high ranging from 10-14%, and the growth of the 1970's caused serious problems in the balance of payments and unresolved tensions in society. Inflation was also increasing at a disturbing rate and, between 1971 and 1977, Ireland had the highest rate in Europe. This depressing trend has continued to the present day.

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With these many changes came others that altered the very structure and organisation of the Tidy Towns Competition. The winning of first prize by Tyrrellspass in 1969 caused a break in the type and pattern of winners. Only four towns had won in the first eleven years and Tyrrellspass was not only a first-time winner but also became the first winning Midland town. There have been twelve different winners since that year including eight Lakeland and Eastern region towns - the areas where the Competition seems to be strongest.

Growth in entries has also continued from 557 entrants in 1969 to over 800 in 1982. Over the years, new categories have been added. These include the *Best New Entry Award*, *Best Waterways Town or Village*, *Best Large Seaside Resort*, *Best Small Seaside Resort*, *Most Improved Town or Village near Glenveagh National Park*, *Best New Building or Buildings*, *Best Shopfront Using Irish Language and Lettering*, *Best Traditional Shopfront*, *Award to Centre with the Greatest Appreciation of Trees*, *Best Presented Sub Post Office* and the *Tidy Districts Award*. The aim of the new categories was to provide as much incentive in as many directions as possible to the growing number of entrants in the scheme.

Social and economic changes through the years presented many new challenges and problems to Tidy Towns Committees and it was by dealing with these problems that the Competition underwent a change. From 1959-69, Committees had had to deal with what was essentially an unchanging environment. It was their task and duty to generate community awareness and not only to maintain but to improve standards of tidiness in their districts. This was indeed a major task in its time but in retrospect, it seems slight compared with the problems that Committees now had to undertake.

Ireland altered in this decade more than it had done at any time since the last period of major economic and social improvement - the 25 years before the First World War. A large part of this alteration can hardly be considered beneficial to the look of towns which participated in the Competition, and the catalogue of such change is a depressing one.

Traditional shopfronts and pubs began to be replaced by the now familiar plastic, fluorescent and neon fascias. The unique pattern of colouring and lettering common to all Irish towns now became an exception and seemed to be in danger of disappearing. The spread of chainstores and of grocery groups in the provinces made this worse as their shopfronts are usually the largest and most garish in the street: Most Irish banks amalgamated into two groups and each bank building acquired a new and ugly sign

replacing or superimposed on the existing name - the original lettering usually having been a work of high craftsmanship in stone or metal.

Litter became an even greater problem. Developments in packaging led to new and even worse forms of litter resulting in cartons, crisp bags and soft-drink cans piling up in already dirty streets.' Television's popularity as home entertainment led to the closure of cinemas. These derelict buildings then became eyesores in many towns.

The increase in car ownership, greatly assisted by the decline in public transport and further boosted by the removal of road tax as an election promise in 1977, meant that cars now filled the streets and further changed the appearance of towns. Their haphazard parking alters the streetscape and, even when parking space is provided, the sites are seldom more than patches of waste ground which at night-time become derelict spaces attracting dumping. Abandoned cars have become a feature in towns and in the countryside. There seems to be no provision for their removal and rusting wrecks are now to be found everywhere. When traffic flow needs to be improved, road widening leads to trees being cut down. Seldom, if ever, are they replaced.

In the 1970's too, churches removed their iron railings and stone entrance pillars to allow their forecourts to be converted into car parks. Juggernaut container transport dominated traffic on major roads, particularly those leading from the ports. Heavy traffic led to weakened bridges, damaged roads, cracked and crumbling pavements and ruined grass verges.

Dancehalls, set in enormous unmaintained open parking areas, which recognised that their patrons would all have cars of their own, became another eyesore on the edge of major towns. So also did filling stations, which now lined all approach roads. These are prominent in themselves and are invariably accompanied by hoardings advertising petrol. These advertising hoardings also line country roads are often placed on dangerous bends, and they dominate streetscapes. Higher standards of living mean that more numerous telegraph and electricity poles are even more prominent. The original craftsmen's stonework in walls, kerbstones or on buildings is seldom employed when these are replaced, the replacement usually being in concrete.

Committees needed new approaches and even harder work to cope with the effects of these changes. They were helped by the general increase in awareness of the environment, originating in the United States and spreading to Europe. There was a realisation that environmental change could get out of hand unless it was controlled. Ecological disasters such as the series of oil-tanker break-ups, of which the *Torrey Canyon* wreck in the summer of 1967 was the first, made people more conscious of how their environment was constantly and increasingly at risk.

There were some weapons available to Committees and groups to counteract these problems. The Local Government (Planning and Development) Act of 1976 gave people the right to protest and appeal to the newly formed Bord Pleanala against proposed planning and development. They did so because they were more aware of their rights regarding the environment than ever before.

The higher standards set by the adjudicators in the Competition caused people to lobby local authorities more effectively for environmental control in their areas. These

higher standards were eventually met by higher standards in towns and villages. The detailed reports made by adjudicators effectively became a guide to the subject town's best features and a recommendation as to improvements. Various organisations also provided help and support. An Foras Forbartha, a semi-state body, influenced and assisted many County Council decisions. An Taisce formed a back-up for Tidy Towns Committees in their dealings with County Councils and other authorities concerning proposed planning and development.

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Comparison with other towns and areas provides the best incentive and ideas for rival Tidy Towns and there is no more appropriate example than that of Tyrrellspass.

Tyrrellspass, Co. Westmeath was chosen as Ireland's Special Project Village in European Architectural Heritage Year 1975. The Irish Tourist Board co-ordinated the improvements that were carried out in the town by the Board itself, the E.S.B., the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and Westmeath County Council. This led to a film being commissioned about the scheme. It was the first film to deal with Tidy Towns and, although belated, was a useful history of the scheme to date. It also provided a valuable record of community spirit in Tyrrellspass and the work of the various bodies involved in the European Architectural Heritage Year project. Made by Kieran Hickey of B.A.C. Films, the film was an example to other towns in the Competition of what can be achieved with the maximum of community and local authority effort. It was a unique project to mark a special year.

A further film by Kieran Hickey for the Board was made in 1979, *Our Tidy Towns*, like the Tyrrellspass film, was shown extensively around the country. Patrick Shaffrey was closely associated with both films and his book *The Irish Town* was published the same year as the Tyrrellspass film. It is the first appraisal of Irish towns and considers the very infrastructure, planning, growth and development of towns in Ireland, including many involved in the Competition. This book provided further guidance to Tidy Towns Committees and groups. R.T.E. also made films in the late 1970S on the need for environmental awareness and the awareness of our heritage.

About this time, the Government, for its part, introduced Civics into the school curriculum. This course, however, was more of nationalistic than environmental value. The further inflow of emigrants returning in the 1970's advanced the Competition another step as many became actively involved in Tidy Town Committees. The involvement of people associated with the arts also added fresh ideas to the Competition. People were viewing their towns and their whole environment differently and were seeking to improve and manage both themselves.

This general increased awareness matched the increase in problems. But people were more prepared and better able to tackle the many changes that had occurred. Tidy Town Committees could apply far greater force than ever before because they were better informed of their legislative rights and more inclined to use them – and they did use them to great effect. Weapons do exist to fight the increasingly difficult and numerous problems. Therefore, people must become even more aware of them and utilise them to their full extent. Because of these advances, the Competition has

gone from strength to strength and its future, although likely to be difficult, seems brighter than ever.

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CHAPTER 6

FEATURES OF THE TIDY TOWNS COMPETITION

Though the Tidy Towns Competition has a clearly defined basic structure, the different committees throughout the countryside will not be identical in all their features and will have different approaches depending on their size and on the size of the communities, which they represent.

In smaller towns and villages, committees are often made up of schoolteachers, housewives, businessmen and retired people with the main driving force being a prominent member of the community. For example, in Glenties, Co. Donegal, the first Tidy Towns Winner in 1958, it was the local Parish Priest who first recognised the possibilities of the competition for his village. This form of leadership, by cleric, bank manager, civic guard or schoolteacher for example, has proved quite successful. However, in the case of the death or transfer of such a leader, the committee may disintegrate due to lack of an equally strong successor.

In other areas the Development Association may take the entry to and the running of the competition. Indeed the Tidy Towns Committee may become the town's Development Association through an awareness of what can be achieved when a community pulls together in a common civic aim. Sometimes this leads to the growth of a small local industry such as printing Tidy Towns publicity material or the manufacture of litterbins.

As enthusiasm may be difficult to sustain for a whole year, Tidy Towns Committees may serve as social organisations during winter months, running their own fund-raising events and, later on, garden competitions and litter campaigns.

In larger towns the competition is run by the County Council or the Urban District Council. Some of these are, effectively, the Tidy Towns Committees, the leader being the Town Clerk – again a situation where the town's involvement is dependent on one man. The advantages are obvious. Lobbying for County Council assistance becomes unnecessary, something which for smaller towns and villages is often a major task. Another important leadership element is the role of the outsider as motivator. Be he or she a returned emigrant or somebody who has come to settle in a different town or village by reason of marriage or profession, this person may find it far easier to see a town's character objectively, to see what is right and what is wrong and what can be done to improve its appearance. Leadership is sometimes found to be more acceptable in an outsider than in a native-born person.

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An increasing number of towns enter each year but only a certain number succeed in winning prizes. There are many reasons for this. Lack of firm leadership is probably one of the most important reasons why so many towns do not do well in the competition. A community needs direction and a focal point if it is to pull together to

achieve results. So often it has been one person who has realised the potential in a town that previously was not aware or had no interest in what it could offer both culturally and environmentally to tourists and community alike. It is at this point that the County Council can play an important role. Some towns find it easy to get the backing of their County Council while for others it presents a major problem. However, it is often the case that when a Council sees a town or village making a sincere attempt to improve its surroundings, the Council in turn will do what it can to help. This works both ways, of course; the introduction of the *Best Town or Village in each County Award* in the competition means that the resultant prestige is shared by the County Council also.

Some towns find that year after year of repeated failure results in the disillusionment of both committee and community. In many of the less competitive towns this will lead to a decline in effort. However, there are some towns who enter the competition with no ambition to win but purely to inspire some sense of environmental awareness in their community even if this merely leads to less vandalism and cleaner streets. This in itself, they feel, is a sufficient achievement.

It is a sad fact that one or two uncooperative citizens may destroy the hopes of a hardworking community and lose the town vital marks in the competition. A derelict site, badly kept property, an unpainted house front, a garish fascia, an intrusive public house sign - all blots which people may refuse to remove and so often do, all hold a town back in the competition. It is a form of vandalism against the community. Committees in the less successful larger towns often complain that larger towns have a harder task than smaller ones who win the major awards more easily. This is true when one considers how much easier it is to motivate a smaller group of people

Finally there is cost. The provision of litterbins, tree planting and other improvements are all costly items. Where a County or Urban District Council cannot help, Tidy Towns Committees often have to struggle to raise money to carry out improvements.

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A notable feature of the competition is the uneven distribution of entries. The competition is now exceptionally strong in the Midlands and extremely weak in the West and the Southwest. The Midlands is an area of settled and confident communities with relatively few tourists; the Southwest and West are the areas, which benefit most from tourist income.

The pattern of Irish tourism was laid down over a hundred years ago by fashionable tourists, both Royal and literary, who gave their accolade to the wilder and more scenic parts of Ireland, in particular Connemara and Killarney. These in turn were followed by their imitators - organised groups of popular wrists who travelled the same routes - the 'Prince of Wales Route' from Glengarriff to Killarney, for example, and were transported first in horse-drawn and then in motorised coaches. Towns were stopping-over points, settings for hotels merely, in which the traveller could find comforts and amenities before he moved on to the next stop in a scenic wilderness.

The same situation applies today where tourists are taken from their plane to their hotel and then coached to beauty spots. Tourist Towns know that it is the surrounding scenery that is the attraction. If they feel their tourist trade is guaranteed, then the Tidy Towns Competition becomes irrelevant to their function. Thus the scheme is weakest where organised tourist numbers are greatest. The base towns are not seen as a part of the tourist attraction and no effort is made despite the fact that many complaints are made concerning the state of these towns. One could go, as far as to say that it is the pattern of tourism that causes the lack of effort by the West and Southwest of the country in the Tidy Towns Competition.

It is a factor in this argument that Tourist Towns are widely separated and that from the Western point of view the competition may simply seem more Eastern. Furthermore, this part of the country receives a great deal of government assistance, which may give people less incentive.

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Success in one town may lead to an increase of interest and entries in an entire county or in neighbouring towns and this may both inspire and heighten healthy local rivalry. A major exception is Sneem, Co. Kerry, where the town's success has led to no apparent change in standards of tidiness or increase of entries in the area. Despite local rivalry, the success of one town may also lead to local cooperation with one town asking the advice and profiting from the success of another that has done well.

CHAPTER 7

THE EFFECTS OF THE COMPETITION

In Chapter 1 it was noted that the main aim of the competition was to improve the appearance of Irish towns. The initial efforts of many centres consisted of making their towns look pretty. There was extensive use of bright floral arrangements and ornamentation. These efforts were generally a carry-over from An Tostal, which strongly promoted the use of Flowers during festival time. Community gardens, areas of floral displays fenced off with whitewashed stones or chains, sprang up in many centres. Sometimes accompanied by ornamental fountains or statuettes, the gaudy and fussy effect of these essentially suburban creations was totally, out of place in the small town environment. The early adjudicators did encourage the use of trees and shrubs in towns but also pointed out that while attention was being paid to such work, other areas were being ignored.

The early adjudicators were professional people with backgrounds in town planning, architecture, and landscape architecture. The 1959 Adjudicators' Report (noted in Chapter 2 as being important for its foresight) bears further reference here, because of the effect which this and subsequent reports had. It noted the results of poor town planning particularly with respect to re-housing. Derelict sites came in for special mention and the mis-use of open spaces was criticised.

The last paragraph of the report stated:

"The assessors deplored the disappearance from our towns of distinctive features such as windmills and other curiosities. Irish towns are so similar in appearance that any touch of individuality should be preserved."

While commenting on the results and achievements of the 1959 competition, the report also, in a subtle way, was attempting to make competitors aware of the features such as market squares, old buildings, bridges and rivers which make up the essential fabric of a town. It did not set out to tackle the problems of preservation, restoration and planning at this early stage. This was to come later as the competitors developed a more acute awareness of their own potential to effect change.

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With this increasing sophistication among participants, the adjudicators began to set out where the problems of planning and development lay in each town. The competitors responded to this advice by becoming more active in the areas of conservation, preservation, and development and planning. The scheme has promoted the use of good planning and design in new developments. A lot of attention is given to urban renewal, and a special prize is presented for the infill building, which blends best with its surroundings.

In an era, which has seen the proliferation of neon and plastic signs, the competition has promoted the retention of the traditional shop fronts which are unique to the Irish town. Old buildings, monuments and walls are restored by Tidy Towns committees. In the construction or restoration of walls, pathways or buildings the use of local materials is advocated wherever possible. An interesting effect of the

competition which was noted by the adjudicators in 1964 was that the improved appearance of towns was showing up the intrusive effect of poles and overhead wires. However, with the co-operation of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and the E.S.B. ugly wirescape has been removed from many towns. Where the work of preservation and restoration, has been carried out the effect has been to make each town stand out as an individual centre with its own special quality. To this extent the competition has gone some considerable way to fulfilling the early adjudicators' hopes

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The anti-litter campaign, a most important aspect of the competition, which has been there since its inception, continues. The packaging revolution, which produced the plastic disposable container, had not really hit Ireland in the 1950's when the competition began. It was fortunate for the country that a scheme like the Tidy Towns Competition existed to counter the rising tide of disposable bottles, bags and cans. At the beginning the scheme stood alone, but it soon had the effect of encouraging other organisations to promote and carry out their own anti-litter campaigns.

Many local authorities have carried out anti-litter drives using the competitive element as a method of getting people involved in cleaning up their own areas. However, the litter problem is still serious and, to a certain degree, is getting worse. To many it seems that to the Irish, 'dirt' is not a dirty word. The competition has achieved much in fighting the litter problem and in making people aware of it. The fight continues, and will be helped enormously if the new Anti-Litter Act is effectively implemented by those who claim to have concern. If, and when, the fight is won there is no doubt that much will be owed to all those who have been involved in the Tidy Towns Competition over the past 25 years.

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To those involved, the effects of the competition have been considerable. Not only has the appearance of their hometowns improved, thus giving a better quality of life, but also a whole new spirit of community co-operation has developed. The way townspeople have organised to achieve a common goal through the medium of the Tidy Towns Competition is almost without precedent in Ireland. That such a spirit of community co-operation has developed has, no doubt, surprised many. To achieve this the scheme had to overcome apathy, unconcern, scepticism and in some quarters, ignorance - attitudes which so often greet new innovations in Ireland.

The element of pride of place and competition are the stimuli for community involvement. A major feature of community involvement in the Tidy Towns Competition is that social, economic, political, and religious and age barriers are transcended as everyone works together to prepare their town for the competition. Even people from outlying rural districts have been known to help out with the work. The involvement of children and young people is important. Through the scheme they learn of the practical benefits of working and co-operating with their friends and neighbours to protect and improve their towns. It makes them aware of their environment and of the responsibility they will have in the future to protect it for their own children. The competition has had the further effect of instilling a certain element of discipline into community life. If a town or village is to have any success in the

competition, all the necessary work must be completed before the adjudicators visit the town. The ensuing sense of punctuality which has been created among competitors by this very fact, must be seen as a major effect on Irish people who have long believed that 'when God made time, he made plenty of it!'

The Tidy Towns Committee has become a major element in the life of many towns. These committees, elected by members of each town, represent democracy in action at 'grass root' level. Committees reflect the ideas and feelings of each community on the major issues, which affect them. More importantly, they can lobby politicians and local authorities, and use the Planning Acts to effect planning and development decisions in their towns. It can therefore be seen that the knowledge and experience gained from the Tidy Towns Competition has provided many communities with the ability to control the future of their towns in a way never known before.

The effect of the competition on tourism is unquantifiable. However, there can be no doubt that the improved appearance of most of the towns that participate has given a better image of the country to the foreign traveller. The effect of the competition in tourist orientated towns has, as noted elsewhere, been minimal, a situation which will hopefully change in the future.

CHAPTER 8

THE FUTURE OF THE TIDY TOWNS COMPETITION

The Tidy Towns scheme is one of the success stories of the past 25 years. It began in 1958 with 52 entries and has since reached 800. It is countrywide in operation, its appeal is proven and its results evident. The Irish Tourist Board who initiated the competition have reason to be proud. Ireland badly needed such a scheme when it was first introduced and the country has responded wholeheartedly to the Board's ambitious and farsighted planning in bringing it into operation.

What of the future? What form should the scheme take in the next 25 years? There seems to be no reason to alter radically what has worked so effectively up until now. The emphasis on litter control is unfortunately still all too necessary but it should never be at the expense of reminders that committees should be aware of the preservation and conservation of their environment and of the threats of indiscriminate development, bad planning and pollution. The question that remains are how can the scheme best be extended.

The name 'Tidy Towns' is no longer expressive of the scheme's comprehensiveness and has too little relevance to the community spirit and environmental consciousness, which the competition has engendered over the past 25 years. However, to change it would be difficult; it is familiar, widely understood, usefully and memorably alliterative and, furthermore, fits neatly into newspaper headings. It is perhaps too late to wish that a stronger title was not chosen in the 1950's.

A recognised weakness of the scheme is the lack of response from tourist areas. Towns in these areas appear to feel that they have little to gain by putting valuable time and money into improving their immediate environment when it is the surrounding scenery that attracts the tourists. Dirty tourist towns are a major source of complaint from Ireland's visitors. These towns cannot be forced into changing their attitudes any more than the non-participating ones can be forced into joining the scheme but they can be strongly encouraged by even better promotion on the part of the Board.

Irrespective of their local scenic charms Irish towns can be an attraction to tourists and there is no reason why tourist towns should be an exception. Perhaps as a further inducement to those who are holding back and so presenting such an unfortunate image, a special prize/category for tourist towns could be introduced.

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Since its inception in 1958 the competition has flourished beyond all expectation. It has given its entrants a sense of community involvement and of social and economic renewal. It has made towns and villages throughout the country increasingly aware of their architectural and environmental heritage given to them in trust, theirs and only theirs to protect for future generations to enjoy. It has shown

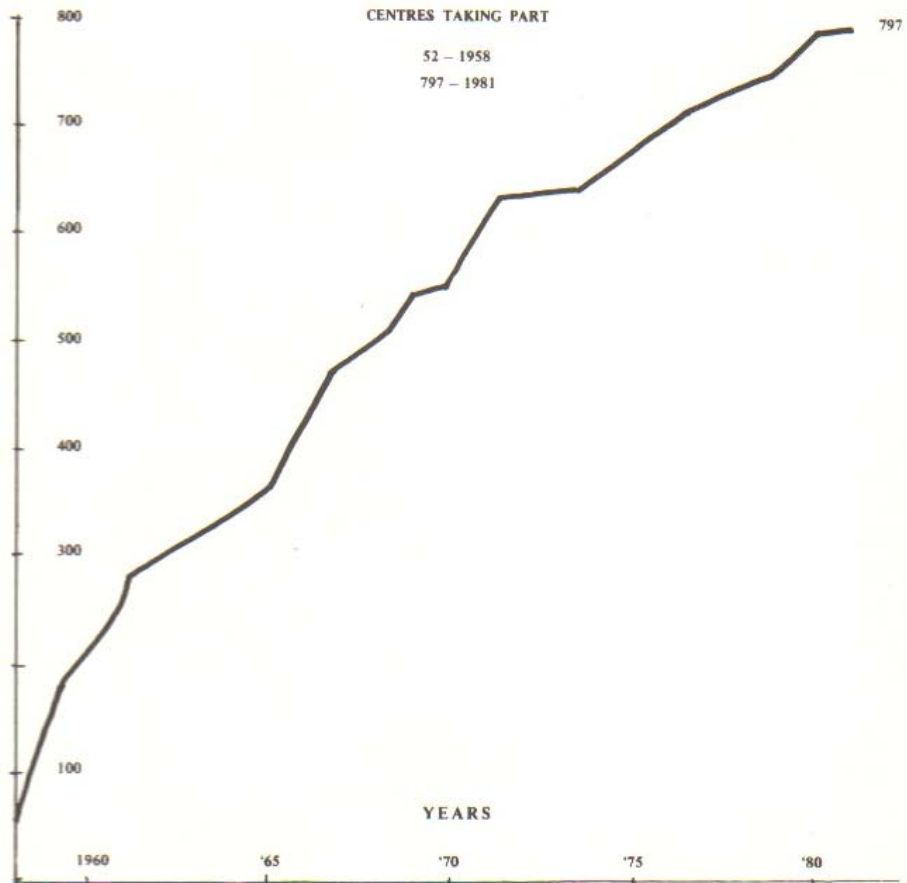
what can be achieved through community spirit and has acted as an educative force. Or as one participant put it:

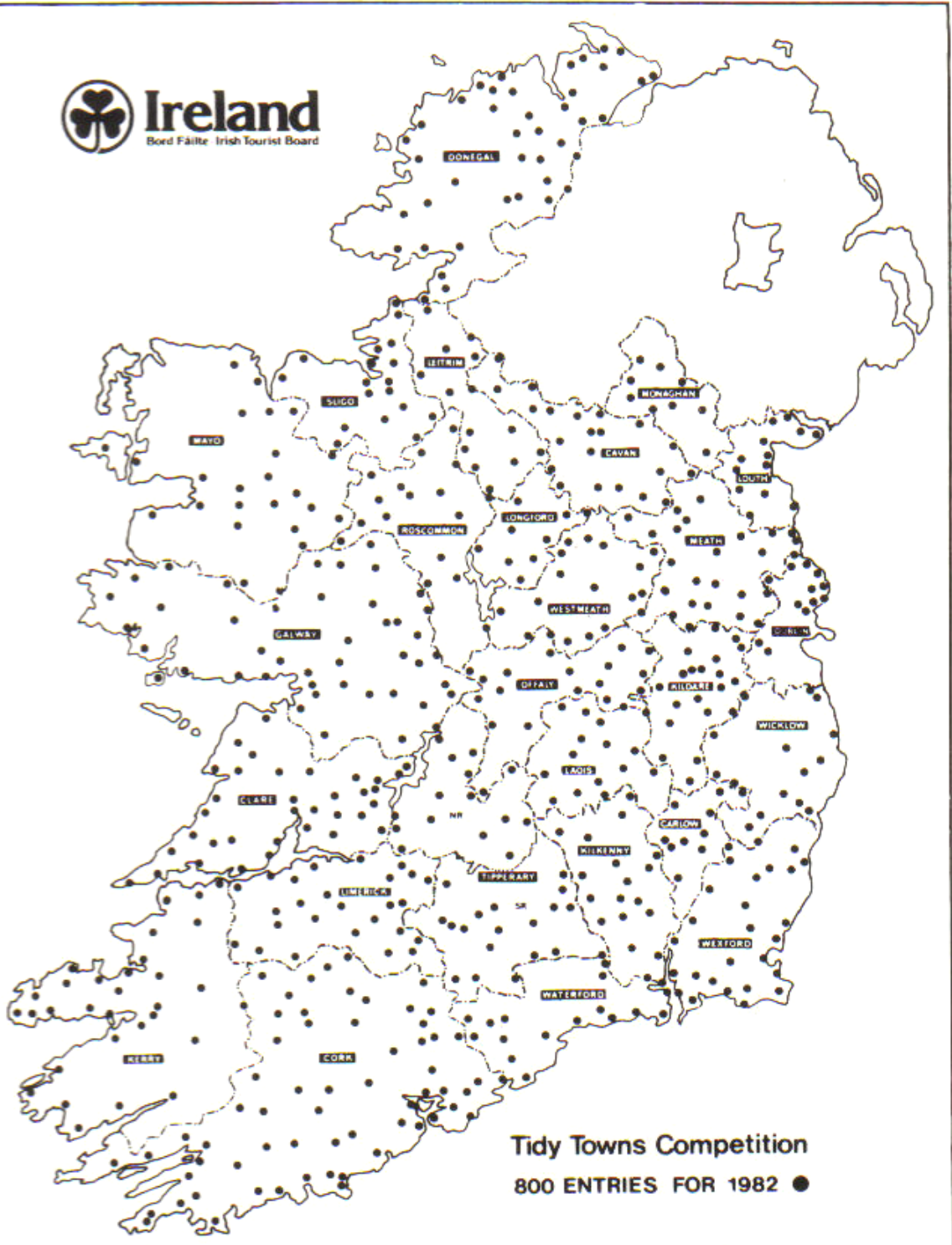
'We learned about town planning without knowing it, we knew how we wanted the village to develop, what we wanted to keep. We learned that we had every right to object to what we didn't like and that our voice would be heard.'

The more the country progresses the greater the problems tidy towns will have to face. In these days of rapid development, pollution and environmental decay, the Tidy Towns Competition will have an increasingly important role to play in the preservation and conservation of the country's environment.

TIDY TOWNS

1958 - 1982





Tidy Towns Competition
800 ENTRIES FOR 1982 ●