
**A report by the Public Art
Strategy Group on the future
application of the Per Cent for
Art Scheme by the Sligo Local
Authorities**

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The Per Cent for Art scheme is a heartening, occasionally alarming, example of how in Ireland we sometimes jump first and think later. When it was introduced, economic underachievement, and a lack of consensus about what public space meant, had created a place where the few existing public artworks testified to the values of a long-defunct ruling caste. They had little to do with contemporary life.

Examples available from elsewhere weren't always helpful. Yuppie economics in the U.S. and U.K. through the 1970's and 1980's generated a corporate culture around public art that resulted in many excrescences.

Two phenomena characterised the worst elements. First, the myth that big is best, quickly renamed the 'dinosaur principle' by practitioners. Hey, it's huge! (but is it smart art?) The 'turd in the plaza' became the moniker for scaled up gallery works in steel or bronze that were both huge and resolutely permanent.

People were supposed to digest these visual marvels like a rather unpleasant medicine, on the basis that they might not like it now, but the work would heal their souls in the long term. Few did. In response, some clients took refuge in commissioning works that were cloyingly sentimental or artistically no more than a three-dimensional illustration.

Growing awareness of public art as a distinct cultural practice is being pioneered by innovative commissioners such as the Sligo Local Authorities. *Placing Art*, their pilot programme, creates a space where artists, administrators and citizens come

together and risk failure in the hope of determining key principles about getting public art right.

Too many public art examples commissioned previously by local authority clients put the emphasis on safety and convenience, in both the physical and creative uses of the term. Artists, supposed to know better, did not. Quality suffered as the politics of second-best took hold.

The huge diversity offered by these six projects confirms that working from parish level up need not entail being parochial, in the sense of second guessing or pandering to imaginary lowest common denominators.

Positive visions of public space are all the more precious in a world still struggling to understand what it means when the global space of the Twin Towers Plaza lies decimated. Who would have thought that a painter like Ronnie Hughes would create so resonant a project as *Keepsakes*, at once a ritual for remembering and a starkly beautiful event on Streedagh Strand? Or that the isolation, displacement and eventual coming together as a community of the Cranmore housing estate residents could, with Imelda Peppard's intervention, become a work of art everyone found they understood?

The need for leadership in developing public art models is crucial to public art practice and to the effectiveness with which local authorities exercise their cultural remits. *Placing Art* is a leadership initiative from which other local authorities may learn. Being flexible about the form of the art project – temporary or permanent,

Positive visions of public space are all the more precious in a world still struggling to understand what it means when the global space of the Twin Towers Plaza lies decimated.

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made of memories or bronze – enables the authority to offer custom-built projects to citizens where they and their artist can make their own brand.

Placing Art stresses the benefits of advance planning by getting a team of artists in place long before the tar starts sweating on a new section of road, or the ribbons are waiting to be cut for the opening of the new library. By putting a panel together, artists, officials and citizens can get to know each other, and build a dialogue to inform every capital project they undertake.

Mainstreaming the work of the Public Art Co-ordinator within the local authority is shown to improve opportunities for a strategic approach, with outcomes integrated to other areas of local authority work. The prospect of what such an approach could generate over time is genuinely exciting, for everyone.

Placing Art identifies public art's space at community and parish levels, where it reflects and transforms the best imaginings of local people and artists in ways and places that simply couldn't have been imagined before. Most of all, it shows us that getting things right is a matter of choice. Quality public art never talks down to people: it speaks directly to them.

Preface

Tony McLoughlin,

Cathaoirleach, Sligo County Council

This report is the outcome of a pilot process begun in 1997 with the creation of a public art programme designed by the County Arts Office to test new approaches to the Department of the Environment Per Cent for Art Scheme.

As Cathaoirleach, I am proud of the achievements of the pilot programme which was successful in meeting three principal objectives. Firstly, in developing the County Council's management and administrative mechanisms to utilise the Per Cent for Art scheme on an ongoing basis. Secondly, in commissioning artworks that reflected the true range of contemporary art practice, not usually associated with public art. Thirdly, in introducing local audiences to public art and, at close range, in raising their awareness of commissioning practices.

All this was made possible by testing a strategic approach to the scheme in the pilot programme. Following a thorough review of that approach, it has subsequently been endorsed by Sligo County Council when the Members adopted the recommendations contained in this report. The recommendations were drawn up by the Public Art Strategy Group, and my thanks are due to them for this considered and coherent document.

The Strategy Group's work was made easier due to the thorough and meticulous evaluation of the pilot programme, *Placing Art*, conducted by the programme's Steering Group who produced a report of their findings. The composition of the Steering Group was reflective of many perspectives in terms of locality, occupation

and outlook, and served to strengthen the evaluation process and outcome. My sincere thanks are due to the Steering Group for their long-term and substantial commitment to the pilot programme. Their findings and the Steering Group's recommendations provided an excellent reference point for the Public Art Strategy Group as authors of this report.

The work of both groups has led to the exciting prospect of the first five-year public art plan for the County from 2002 to 2006.

This County is committed to the continued implementation of the Per Cent for Art scheme in a policy-driven and strategic manner, and I look forward to seeing those policies manifested imaginatively in the County's inaugural public art plan.

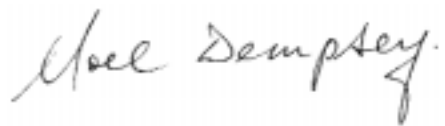


Tony McLoughlin

Cathaoirleach, Sligo County Council

In 2000, I was delighted to provide the foreword to *Placing Art*, the documentary account of the pilot public art programme jointly initiated by Sligo County Council and Sligo Corporation (now the Borough Council). Two years on, I congratulate both authorities on the information gathered and the experience gained during the course of the pilot programme and on their evident commitment to getting the very best out of the Per Cent for Art scheme.

I am, therefore, very pleased to endorse the strategic and policy driven approach to the Per Cent for Art Scheme adopted by the Sligo Local Authorities. It will, I am sure, continue to raise the quality and diversity of public art along with its appreciation and understanding by the public. I look forward with interest to the outcome of the next and final stage in Sligo's pilot public art programme.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noel Dempsey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Noel Dempsey, T.D.,
Minister for the Environment
and Local Government

The *Placing Art* programme is a result of a strategically planned and professionally implemented pilot programme of public art commissions aimed at investigating new approaches to the Department of Environment & Local Government Per Cent for Art scheme.

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Since the inception of this programme five years ago, we have witnessed and continue to see a changing and developing landscape for public art practice in Ireland. New approaches and initiatives, such as *Placing Art*, add defined and distinctive marks to that landscape. This programme has seized the opportunity to mark a place in time through artistic intervention – contemporary commissioning for a contemporary society.

The documents presented herewith serve to communicate the considerations and complexities which are inherent in the commissioning of artwork for and with the public in mind. The Arts Council is always pleased to encourage documentation, discussion and debate of this quality.



Patricia Quinn
Director, The Arts Council /
An Chomhairle Ealaíon

The Department of Environment Per Cent for Art scheme makes provision for up to one per cent of the overall construction cost of capital projects up to a ceiling of €63,486. Monies from small construction projects can be pooled in order to support viable commissions. The Per Cent for Art Scheme offers “...the opportunity to mark in an aesthetic way the significant investment in capital infrastructure taking place at the present time.” *Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 1997.*

The remit of the Strategy Group was:

- **To consider the findings of the Evaluation Report produced by the Steering Group on the pilot programme.**
- **To make recommendations on future best policy and practice for the implementation of the Per Cent for Art scheme by Sligo County Council and the Corporation of Sligo in order to generate a framework that would enable the production of best quality artwork for the rural, village and urban environments of the County.**

The Strategy Group members were:

- **Sean Martin** Senior Executive Architect and Chair of the Strategy Group
- **Lizzie Byrne** Member of the Public Art Steering Group, Artist and Lecturer
- **Pat Doyle** Senior Executive Engineer
Sligo County Council
- **Hilary Gilligan** Artist
- **Jenny Haughton** Artworking
- **Anna Jones** Finance Officer
Sligo Borough Council
- **Mary McAuliffe** Arts Officer
Sligo County Council
- **Mary McCarthy** Director of the National Sculpture Factory, Cork
- **Mary McDonagh** Public Art Co-ordinator
Sligo County Council
- **John McHugh** Senior Executive Engineer, Urban and Village Renewal
Sligo County Council
- **Camilla Smith** Public Art Steering Group, Community Development
Sligo Leader Partnership
- **Councillor Joe Leonard**
Chair of the Strategic Policy Committee on Housing Policy – Social and Cultural, was regularly briefed on the Group’s work.

12 Under the National Development Plan 2000–2006, the Border, Midland and Western Region will receive approximately €4,095 million for expenditure on infrastructure, local enterprise, agriculture and rural development, and social inclusion and childcare. This level of development presents considerable funding opportunities for public art. The National Development Plan is not only concerned with building affordable and social housing and providing a quality transport network, but with an improved quality of life and social inclusion. These aspirations are of relevance to the arts and cultural services provided by local authorities. Public art can play a part in improving public spaces and engaging audiences in new cultural experiences.

Ordinarily, the Department of Environment Per Cent for Art scheme would be applied by local authorities on a site-specific basis and these commissions would generally bear no relationship to each other. In many local authorities, total funding available under the Per Cent for Art scheme is only partially utilised. Local authorities have not had the administrative capacity to take up the scheme fully. Ad hoc commissioning has tended to result in work of a similar nature occurring repeatedly – a point that was highlighted in the Public Art Research Report adopted by Government in 1997.

More recently, local authorities have indicated a change of approach to the scheme. Since Sligo Local Authorities appointed the first Public Art Co-ordinator, Limerick and Wexford County Councils and Cork Corporation have established Co-ordinator posts and are taking a programmed approach to the scheme. In most other local authorities, the Arts Officer leads the implementation of the scheme and programmes are not yet in place, although many have plans to introduce public art policies and programmes.

A per cent for art scheme exists in the Netherlands and by order of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the scheme has been implemented by independent art agencies in every municipality in the country since the late Eighties/early Nineties. *Stroom* was founded in 1990 by the city of The Hague as an independent institution responsible for the contemporary art policy, commissioning and expenditure of public monies on art in the city. *Stroom* has built a strong reputation for its public art programme and has attracted international attention and acclaim for its successful interventions in public spaces and urban design.

Based on an approved policy plan by the city and by funnelling all of The Hague's per cent for art scheme monies into one account, a selective, and at the same time, more flexible and responsive approach to commissioning and urban design is made possible. In addition to permanent works, temporary projects can be realised and research and debate is stimulated.

Stroom commissions artists from The Hague as well as international artists, and has created an expansive and continually changing climate for art, audiences and artists.

Finance

The Strategy Group considered the Per Cent scheme by focusing on four key areas: Finance, Commissioning, Implementation and Delivery, and Audience.

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The Strategy Group reviewed the financing of the Per Cent for Art scheme and the findings of the pilot programme and, consequently, recommends that refinements are made to the financing of the Per Cent for Art scheme.

Recommendation 1

That the Percent for Art allocation is strictly ring-fenced for the production of the artwork.

Recommendation 2

The research and development costs for the design and preparation of the artwork should be factored into the consultancy design team costs/ allocation. This essentially covers the artist's professional fee in line with the service provided by the members of the design team such as Architects, Engineers, Quantity Surveyors etc.

It is important to distinguish between the cost of the artwork and the ancillary costs, which would include the following:

- advertising and recruitment
- survey work
- administration/office overheads
- design and consultancy
- artists' proposals
- exhibition
- public relations
- documentation
- insurance
- statutory obligations

Recommendation 3

That in line with standard practice in financing capital projects, capital project funds should provide for the ancillary costs for public art.

Recommendation 4

That a Public Art Office is established and funded by the Local Authorities in order to draw down, manage and implement ongoing Per Cent for Art scheme funding.

Recommendation 5

It is suggested that the Public Art Officer should be in a position to contract advisers or to convene an advisory group for specific purposes such as obtaining specialist curatorial advice.

Recommendation 6

That allocations are made within annual estimates for the ongoing maintenance of artworks as required. 'Maintenance' might also include archiving, storage and exhibition costs in the case of, for example, film, print, music recordings, photographs and paintings.

The purpose of the pilot programme was to expand the methods of procurement and the range of art practice beyond that normally commissioned under the Per Cent for Art scheme. In so doing, a variety of commissioning methods were adopted and tested. These included direct invitation, limited competition, open competition and direct purchase.

The Per Cent for Art Scheme is not open to groups wishing to commission work independently of the Local Authority, for instance, for commemorative purposes. However, independent groups can apply to the Bi-annual Award as recommended below in Recommendation 11.

Recommendation 7

That a Public Art Steering Group is established to assist in the development of future programmes with specific emphasis on the Per Cent for Art scheme, to make recommendations to the Public Art Office and to appoint selectors and agree the recruitment process (see also Recommendation 16 below).

Commissioning Modes

Recommendation 8

That subsequent programmes continue with an expansive approach to commissioning and selection. For example, that an initiative by an artist using a "public/private partnership" model might be supported.

The National Development Plan is not only concerned with building affordable and social housing and providing a quality transport network, but with an improved quality of life and social inclusion. These aspirations are of relevance to the arts and cultural services provided by local authorities. Public art can play a part in improving public spaces and engaging audiences in new cultural experiences.

The Strategy Group recognises the vital role of the community in the Urban and Village Renewal Programme and the opportunities for commissioning presented through the consultative process with the community.

Recommendation 9

That, as part of the consultative process under the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme and funded by the Per Cent for Art scheme, communities are encouraged and supported in developing proposals for the commissioning of artworks and are more closely involved with the commissioning process.

The Strategy Group noted that in many instances the budgets are insufficient to fund a viable quality artwork. As an alternative to pooling funds, the Strategy Group acknowledged the success of direct purchase as a model in utilising small-scale Per Cent for Art scheme budgets as in the case of the pilot programme's People's Purchase.

Recommendation 10

That direct purchase continues to be considered as a potential model.

Recommendation 11

That, in order to respond to direct approaches from artists and the public to initiate public art projects, a Bi-annual Award is established. Applications should be adjudicated by a panel of independent arts professionals appointed by the Steering Group.

Recommendation 12

That the Steering Group may invite curatorial direction in the development of future public art programmes.

Brief

The brief content is vital to the successful outcome of a public art project.

Recommendation 13

That each artistic brief should contain a standard corporate preamble which details the environment in which the artist will work. The preamble should set out the core values and objectives of the public art programme from the local authority perspective.

Siting

It is recognised that 'site' is a fundamental element in informing a commission. The site may generate the funding for the commission but may not be the actual location for the artwork.

Recommendation 14

That a flexible approach be adopted to the selection of site/location.

Recommendation 15

That, where appropriate, the artist is involved in the selection of the site/location in consultation with the commissioners.

Selection

Although the management and implementation of the Per Cent for Art Scheme is an executive function of the Local Authority, in keeping with the findings of the evaluation, the Strategy Group advocate the use of a partnership model in supporting and delivering future public art programmes. Partners would include: elected public representatives, local authority officials, arts professionals, non-governmental organisations and community representatives.

Recommendation 16

That public representatives would sit on the Steering Group and have a say in the nomination of selectors and the recruitment process. Selection criteria would be agreed between the selectors and the Steering Group.

Recommendation 17

That in the case of selectors' meetings, a quorum is not formed without the presence of an artist/arts professional.

The Strategy Group recognised the complex set of relationships involved in the implementation and delivery of a commission as recognised by the evaluation report.

Recommendation 18

That a team approach is adopted to project delivery. For example, in a site-related project, the team might consist of the project architect/engineer/resident engineer, clerk of works, landscape architect, finance and administrative personnel, the arts officer and a community representative.

The Strategy Group recognised that team formation will vary from project to project.

Recommendation 19

That the Arts Office provides a programme of training for local authority staff to increase awareness of public art practice and, specifically, of the Per Cent for Art scheme, and for the purpose of promoting a new area of service delivery.

The Strategy Group noted that the Per Cent scheme is available to other government agencies for the development of capital works, such as the Departments of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development; Education; Health & Children; Justice; and Social, Community and Family Affairs.

Recommendation 20

That the experience gained from the pilot programme, by way of the evaluation report and the Strategy Group recommendations, be made available to government agencies locally for the purposes of advancing the implementation and delivery of the Per Cent for Art scheme in County Sligo.

The Group recognise the potential of the Per Cent for Art scheme in engaging audiences with contemporary art. Audience engagement could be through specific and targeted interventions or through embracing the wider public.

It is acknowledged that awareness of public art and of the Per Cent for Art scheme needs to be addressed in a proactive way.

Recommendation 21

That a broad information campaign is developed and co-ordinated by the Public Art Office and Arts Office, which would specifically address public art and the Per Cent for Art scheme's purpose, framework and delivery.

Recommendation 22

That information on the Per Cent for Art scheme should carry a clear definition of the difference between community-based public art projects and community art.

A community-based public art project is where the artist works with and is assisted by the community in the preparation and realisation of his/her work.

Community art is where the community is facilitated by an artist in the making of work by and for the community themselves.

The beneficial effects of engaging an audience with the art-making process were recognised by the Strategy Group. Audiences can be challenged; social bonds can be created; greater cultural inclusion can take place and quality of life can be enhanced.

Recommendation 23

In order to continue to develop benefits for audiences, it is recommended that a series of strategic linkages are promoted:

- **Between the artist and, for example, education bodies from primary to tertiary level, Sligo Leader Partnership, the County Development Board, FÁS, etc. in order to raise awareness of public art and the Per Cent for Art scheme with a view to maximising local resources and contacts.**
- **Between the local authority and government agencies, art agencies and the Arts Council in order to share information, knowledge and resources both nationally and internationally.**

In three short years, subsequent to the creation of the County Arts Office, Sligo Borough Council and Sligo County Council have in partnership capitalised on the Per Cent for Art scheme, sponsored by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, and the significant opportunities it presents to develop and promote excellence in art-making and procurement.

The Sligo Local Authorities view the Per Cent for Art scheme as presenting opportunities for enhancing quality of life through an enriched environment and through cultural inclusion for rural, village and urban communities in County Sligo.

The establishment of the Placing Art pilot public art programme for the Per Cent for Art scheme was a bold and necessary step in preparing the ground for the implementation of future schemes. The process of the pilot programme was not without difficulties and setbacks but the subsequent work and findings of the Strategy Group, the Steering Group, artist and audience feedback, and the international colloquium have demonstrated the unique process which was undertaken by Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council. It is hoped that this process can contribute at a national level to the development of the Per Cent for Art scheme in the future.

In *financing* the Per Cent for Art scheme, it is critical that the per cent allocation generated by projects is strictly *ring-fenced* for art-making with additional funding provided for research and development of projects by way of normal consulting fees associated with project

design. Finance is also required for a permanent post of *Public Art Officer* with adequate support structures and personnel to guarantee a co-ordinated programme of delivery. Finally, that the Local Authorities set aside funding for the maintenance and exhibition of artworks when approving Annual Estimates Expenditure.

In *commissioning* projects under the Per Cent for Art scheme, the critical areas for development would be the continued *expansive approach* to commissioning; the establishment of a *steering group* to support the Public Art Officer; the promotion of *artist-led public-private partnerships*, and the development of opportunities presented by the Urban and Village Renewal Programme 2000–2006 for *community initiative* and involvement. The development of a *Bi-annual Award* fund under the Per Cent for Art scheme would offer opportunity for submission from a wide range of practitioners. *Curatorial direction* and expertise could be utilised from, for example the Model Arts and Niland Gallery, Sligo, the Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, the Crawford Gallery Cork, or independent curators. Finally in preparing project briefs under the scheme, a *flexible approach* needs to be adopted to siting. In the selection process, the steering group would have the authority to nominate selectors/panels and, importantly, in order to have a selectors quorum an artist/arts professional must be present.

In the *implementation and delivery* of the Per Cent for Art scheme, a team approach should be fostered within the Local Authorities, together with their partner organisations and state agencies. To this end,

...presenting opportunities for enhancing quality of life through an enriched environment and through cultural inclusion for rural, village and urban communities in County Sligo.

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in-house training of Local Authority staff should be developed to raise awareness of the programme and its delivery.

Finally, *audience development* should continue through an imaginative and expansive approach. This may be achieved through a *targeted information campaign* about public art and the Per Cent for Art scheme together with *linkages* created locally, nationally and internationally to develop the aesthetic, educational and cultural potential of the scheme.

