# Small Town Development and Rejuvenation

# A Study of Moate

**MA in Rural Sustainability, Discipline of Geography, NUI Galway**

**In association with Irish Rural Link**

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## FOREWORD

It is against a backdrop of economic difficulty, unemployment and general concern for the long-term sustainability and development of the town of Moate that this research report has been crafted. The capacity to absorb change generated from outside, and to initiate it from within, to make space for what is new and different, but to also protect and celebrate elements of the past have contributed to the defining characteristics of Moate as a place. This publication celebrates and challenges Moate as a place that has over time established itself as unique, with its own distinct mix of characteristics and attributes, while at the same time embracing ongoing change and development. Since places cannot exist without people, this publication is a reflection of the people who have been and who are today a part of Moate, who feel an association with it in a variety of ways, who have shaped it from within and from outside.

Moate is a moderately sized rural town situated in the heart of County Westmeath. The town has a resident population of 3,046 while including its hinterlands raises this population to 7,863 (CSO, 2011). Moate and its broader rural hinterland experienced a 40% rise in population between 1996 and 2011 (CSO, 2011) albeit this was counterbalanced by a significant downturn in its rural economy in the years following 2008. While it has been an important transport route historically as the Midland Great Western Railway passed through the town, which connected Dublin and Galway from, 1951-1987 its geographic location accounts for the rise in population, as it is a significant commuter town for the greater Dublin area. Moate like many of the small towns of Ireland has moved from a largely agrarian based economy to a service based one with the town itself offering an array of services and amenities such as supermarkets, cafes, libraries and a hotel. The town boasts a robust educational structure, with two primary schools (St. Bridget's Private School and Oliver Plunkett Boys' Primary School), a secondary school (Moate Community School), and quite significantly a further education college, the Moate Business College. The Business College was established in 1991 and has evolved to cater for over 500 full-time students. As a medium sized rural town however, Moate, similar to many other rural towns in Ireland, is faced with high levels of unemployment and migration.

This Report then sets out to explore the challenges that Moate faces as a small to medium sized rural town undergoing economic, social and cultural adjustment that impacts on its people, its environment and its future sustainability. Drawing on empirical evidence gathered

during a short study period, this Report illustrates the potential that exists within the town for future development, which builds on indigenous industries, heritage, tourism, education and most importantly the local people themselves.

This project was supported by Irish Rural Link and carried out by the students of the Masters in Rural Sustainability programme in the School of Geography & Archaeology, NUI Galway. It is based on a number of surveys carried out within the town of Moate and a series of interviews and focus groups and individuals who have been involved with projects, activities and other contributions that have brought additional and defining dimensions to Moate as a place. It is acknowledged that the individuals who were approached to take part in this project represent only a fraction of the population who contribute to the sustainability and development of Moate, and a larger and more ambitious project that would include many more voices might take place at some point in the future.

As students of Geography, we hope this publication goes some way to drawing attention to the importance of small and medium sized towns in rural Ireland and how economic, social and cultural development of such places is imperative for the sustainability of rural Ireland.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

## 1.1 Introduction

The proliferation of small towns across rural Ireland is perhaps one of the most enduring characteristics of the Irish landscape. While much of our current discussion centres on the all-pervasive nature of globalisation and its ever-expanding reach, it is important to realise that the reshaping of our rural economies and societies presents us, not only with challenges, but also more importantly with huge opportunities. We can travel further and quicker than ever before or that we can hear of events, ideas or the use of new technologies from any corner of the world almost instantly, which makes for a very large audience and market place. Indeed as things become ever more advanced, in an equal sense the 'phrase 'it's a small world' has become more relevant now than ever before, 'Our world becoming more integrated, interdependent and connected across a whole series from scales – individual, community, national and international' (McDonagh et al., 2015, p. 1). That small town's make up a major part of the population in many regions across the EU makes their sustainability in this era of globalisation all the more imperative. While there is a proliferation of studies and reports on urban areas, and in the case of Ireland, an abundance of strategies for growth and development of the large urban centres, particularly Dublin, it is the remit of this report to draw focus on the needs, challenges and opportunities of small town communities and their significance in terms of quality of life, economy, environment and society. The recent CEDRA report is certainly to be welcomed in this context and particularly in the context of specifically targeting small-towns in terms of their rejuvenation. In particular, the CEDRA report highlights the fact that 'locally-led, place-based development is critically important' (p. 38). The following report is built on helping to support this process in the context of Moate.

## 1.2 Our Focus

More than two decades ago, the European Commission published a booklet on employment action and local development in Europe (1991). While things have invariably moved on, many of the principle components of this manual remain valid. Perhaps even more so now than at the time, the emphasis on the 'local' and the importance of developing the 'local' has increased hugely. The need to build capacity within local and regional economies and the recognised spin-offs in terms of job creation is now continually championed. The additional need to develop a concerted effort by individuals, community groups, business interests and

public organisations in order to instigate and progress change is paramount. It is this type of collective effort, already evident in Moate, which can be developed further, (for example in our recommendation for a Moate Community Forum), in terms of ensuring a rejuvenation of the town as a whole. The recent economic downturn and the two-speed recovery that we now see evolving increases the necessity for local people to take their futures into their own hands and help shape it in a way which not only sees economic recovery but also one where social progress goes hand in hand. The CEDRA report goes some way towards this in that it brings to the fore the challenges that rural Ireland faces, including broadband, service provision, transport and infrastructure deficits, as well as highlighting the complex mix of social, economic and political stakeholders that are involved and the many scales, local, regional, European and international, that must be negotiated.

In terms of what this report tries to do, while being conscious of the limited timeframe in which the research was conducted, we are keen to highlight the importance of building a process of development for Moate and ensuring that as many voices can be heard in this process as possible. To that end we see a pathway involving an initial scoping exercise in terms of what is available in Moate, the employment and local economy, infrastructure and resources. In particular, we are asking questions around what makes Moate different, what would attract more visitors or investors to the town; has it something unique that could be used as a catalyst for development? Secondly we recognise the importance of the local population, their interest in and passion for Moate and ensuring its future sustainability. The importance of mobilising this resource in a more cohesive and integrated way could perhaps be the most important tool available to the town, albeit getting everyone on board with a shared vision is rarely an easy or straight forward operation. The third step in this pathway is all about vision and potential future actions to be taken. Here we see the need, following on from the last process, of developing a strategy for the town in terms of its 5 and 10 year goals. Such a strategy would, we believe, provide not only a framework for sustaining the town but would allow all groups and individuals to see the reasoning behind decisions being taken and equally allow for greater buy-in to the process. Our recommendation to create a brand name or identity for the town, (our suggestion is 'ProMoate'), might be a useful starting point. Obviously to progress any possible directions chosen there would need to be an overseeing group or Community Forum, which could report on progress. Last but not least, we would see the need to ensure that there is always time for reflection in terms of

decisions made and that a willingness to adapt and change would always be an option and an acceptable outcome.

Finally, it is also crucial, that the evidence we gathered and the recommendations we make are robust and informed by theoretical underpinnings. To this end the next sections of the report will briefly explore some of the conceptual elements as they relate to small-town sustainability and how these might be thought of in the context of the potential opportunities that exist in Moate.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW (PART ONE)

## 2.1 Rural Sustainability

Many theories and concepts have been proposed to explain how one can both sustain and develop the economic and social equilibrium of the rural environment. This project focuses on six major topics which became manifest during the research process. To understand the project findings, contextualised as they are by the multi-level process that is rural development, a brief résumé of the topics are presented as follows; rural development and its contribution to achieving viable rural communities; social capital; networking; rural society and the importance of services; the synergies within education and lifelong learning in addition to the viability and potential for cycle tourism. Of the themes discussed, social capital and networking in particular are intermeshed with rural development, and their importance in establishing viable rural communities should not be disregarded. However, it must also be borne in mind that the topics relating to the three study areas of this project are also facets which collectively aid in achieving the objective of rural development, as each are encompassed within the process to improve the rural dweller's livelihood in a sustainable and equitable manner (UNESCO, 2003).

## 2.2 Rural Development

Rural areas have rarely been as prominent in terms of political, economic, social and environmental discussions as they are currently. Lauded in terms of 'opportunity, as engines of growth in a world of economic uncertainty' or challenged in terms of providing safe and secure food supplies or indeed being chastised in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on climate change (McDonagh, 2012, p. 712), the take home message seems to suggest that rural areas and the activities therein are of major importance. Where or what the rural actually is and who gets to decide what happens in the rural has long been a difficult issue to resolve. In terms of rural development the picture gets no clearer bar recognising that rural development should result in some form of 'an overall improvement in the economic and social well-being of rural residents and in the institutional and physical environment in which they live' (Jasma et al., 1981 in Keane and Quinn, 1990, p. 2). It is thus a complex, yet vital arena for discussion impacting as it does on economic, social and environmental contexts. Some of the fundamental aspects seem to be an integrated approach, a need for

subsidiary and a need for partnership between state and local actors. Certainly while this is the theory, enabling this to happen in practice is far from straight forward.

McDonagh (1998) proposes that undertaking rural development produces a wide range of benefits and opportunities for both rural and urban areas, resulting in economic and social efficiency, equity and environmental protection, enabling rural areas to contribute to the wider global economy and arena. Thus, sustainable economic growth is of fundamental benefit to the social sustainability and development of a region (Woods, 2011). Further, it must be appreciated that rural development is not without its difficulties and usually faces a number of challenges, predominately due to the lack of stakeholder participation, internal strife as a result of conflict of interests, in addition to the unwillingness of governments to involve local action groups. Consequently what we draw on here to give a solid framework for our proposal is the concept of van der Ploeg's rural web (Figure 1) which, put simply, is the pattern of 'interrelations, interactions, encounters and mutualities that exist between actors, resources, activities, sectors and places within rural areas' (van der Ploeg et al., 2008, p.7). The six intersecting dimensions woven within the web, dimensions such as endogeneity, social capital and novelty production, can be utilised as Vantura et al., (2008) propose, as a means to analyse and measure the development trajectories of rural regions, furthermore to explore the potentialities and limitations of rural development. Equally as Van der Ploeg et al., note when dealing with the rural development process one can experience an unfolding 'into a wide array of different and sometimes interconnected practices' (2008, p. 394) all of which can have their own legitimacy. Consequently what we have tried to do here is to bring together our academic expertise with that of the expertise of the Moate residents in an effort to develop a potential pathway for development that might be considered by Moate as its residents look to their future and the sustainability of their town.
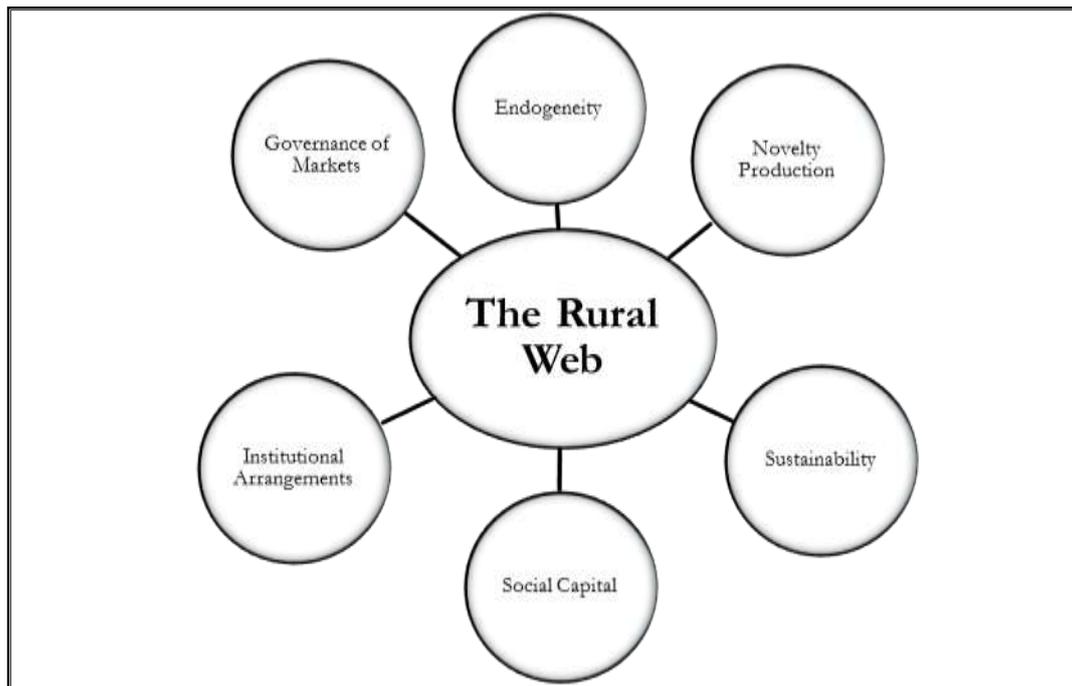
**Figure 1:** Theoretical Dimensions of the Rural Web (Source: Van der Ploeg et al., 2008).

As part of this process, an element which brings together all of the theoretical constructs of rural development and allows them to play a part in a sustainable rural development process is the example of creating a 'brand' or 'identity' for places or regions. This we believe can be particularly important in terms of the rejuvenation and future sustainability of small rural towns like Moate. The concept of creating an identity is largely bound up in answering questions about why certain places expand and prosper while others decline; why people want to visit certain areas and not others; why investors might want to locate in certain places while others are overlooked. Undoubtedly there cannot always be something unique or exceptional about every place, but one thing that does emerge from the literature is that increasingly the notion of been 'known' and 'talked about' is as important as any particular feature on a landscape or historic building (see Urry 1995). Making a contemporary link, the recommendations of the CEDRA report relating to the creative industries, food industry and recreation spaces are prime examples of this, as is the success of concepts such as the Wild Atlantic Way. However, creating a brand or identity is not an easy task bound up as it is in relations between the social and physical environment. In 2015 Ireland, the restructuring of rural place, its towns and villages, sees rural areas not only as sites of production but also

ones of consumption, from goods and services to places themselves been consumed by the eyes of both residents and tourists alike (Urry, 1995). Consequently the creation of a distinct or recognised identity can be very important in prompting development and driving rejuvenation. The key aspect of following such a path will be the buy-in and support from the bottom-up. Without this and the involvement of the local community at large, the success of any town branding will most likely be short lived. In some of the recommendations listed later in this report the unrivalled potential of Irish tourism and culture forms a major part of what we see as been much an underutilised asset in Moate. Allied to the strong environmental, educational and social dimensions of the town, the potential to evolve and ensure long term sustainability would seem to be very much dependent on how well these entities can be moulded together. A successful outcome would, as argued by McDonagh and Steele (1998) help promote and legitimise a cohesive area; allow common problems to be dealt with more easily rather than on an individual basis; provide a more attractive image to inward investment, while also encouraging endogenous development; providing a bigger pool from which to draw skills and entrepreneurial ability and allowing better linkages to be developed with others outside of the town.

The following section of this literature review relates to the manner in which this project was divided into three distinct segments relating to rural society, rural education and rural tourism, with a key focus on cycle tourism.

**CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW (PART TWO)**

## 2.3  Rural Society

### *2.3.1  Social Capital*

Social capital can be defined as "features of social organization - such as networks of secondary associations, high levels of interpersonal trust and norms of mutual aid and reciprocity - which act as resources for individuals and facilitate collective action" (Lochner et. al., 1997, p. 260). The term was employed to distinguish between the temporal and permanent stocks of physical capital, in the light that these were the norms of cooperation need to guide market transactions (Woolcock, 2008).  Therefore, human and social capital have been recognised as being vital for functioning markets and economic activity for centuries and as the German social critic Adam Muller argued "a communities stock of social and entrepreneurial capital largely determines its economic fortunes" (Woolcock, 2008, p.153).

### *2.3.2 Networks, Networking and Social Capital*

A network is a structure made up of nodes or actors that connect for a variety of purposes (Lynch and Morrison, 2007). The network is based around relationships between entities such as organisations or people (Scott et al., 2008, p. 1).  Historically networks have their origins in mathematical theory, economics, transport and logistics and sociological theory (Scott et al. 2008). They are now transferred in to many schools of thought including geography and rural development. Networks promote sharing of knowledge and information along with innovation (Costa et al. 2008). This allows for the passing of knowledge and information between members (Curren et al. 1993).  Networks have been found to exist in a number of formations including horizontally, vertically and diagonally (Michael 2007). Local level horizontal networks have been discussed in terms of their role in local development and getting all relevant parties involved (Dredge, 2006b).

Networking is the process of communication and information exchange, which can occur within a network or independent of it. Networking refers to communication in order to reach certain goals (Lynch and Morrison 2007; Conway and Cawley, 2012). Networking is an essential way of developing social capital (Tolstad, 2014). Michael (2007) associates networking with social structures that build trust and reciprocity between small businesses;

relationships such as these reinforce their capacities to learn from one another as sequences of direct and indirect ties, which connect them to a collection of other entities, expanding the effectiveness and resiliency of the network. Messely et al. (2013) contend that the lack of social capital and institutional arrangements are the principal flaws of the rural developmental process, as there will be a lack of connections and therefore lack of common interests on a regional level. The preceding statement highlights the importance of developing networking capacity as part of rural development.

As Scott et al. (2008) stress, there is an importance of first identifying the actors of a network to infer the diversity and density of the linkages and thus, the overall health or effectiveness of the network. From this, it is possible to arrange connections in order to build up the socioeconomic value of a particular destination and produce reciprocal knowledge-intensive relationships between local actors (Scott et al., 2008). Broadening networks also comes by virtue of local actors and assets being established outside of a single, local community. Disembeddedness entails that a group of a local area looks outside their own and promote other areas within the same region as a way to establish other forms of socioeconomic support from a diversity of sources. The CEDRA report (2014) indicated that niche markets can lead to fragmentation of a common purpose which inhibits local development; cooperative approaches and industry led partnerships are required for the effective co-ordination of all public, private and community interests.

### 2.3.3 Rural Services

Services have a 'pivotal role' to play 'in ensuring quality of life and developing the rural economy' (Missingham et al., 2006, p. 134). Woods argues rightly that the 'services available greatly influence the performances of the rural' (2010, p. 838). Unfortunately, the lack of services and indeed the closure of services are an international rural challenge (Farmer et al., 2012) and one, which greatly affects many rural areas throughout Ireland. Services are a 'necessity' for 'ensuring vibrant and sustainable rural communities' while also playing a 'significant role in supporting the social fabric of fragile rural communities' (Graham and Underwood, 2012, p. 1233). Services include the "broadly defined sectors of transportation, communication, employment, public utilities, wholesale trade, retail trade, finance, insurance, real estate services and public administration" (Mardsen and Adriansen, 2004, p. 488). Indeed there are many ways of experiencing the rural, but such experiences are greatly structured by what services are available to the members of society (Matthew et al., 2000, Vias 2009

Farmer et al., 2012). Perhaps one of the biggest challenges currently facing many small rural towns across Ireland is the ongoing closure of services such as banks, post offices and Garda stations, with rural areas being powerless to prevent such closures. Equally challenging has been the recent curtailment of Bus Eireann services on certain rural routes with current difficulties around privatisation of other rural routes pointing to further struggles ahead for rural areas. The importance of service provision within rural areas cannot be overstated and one area which perhaps receives little attention is the importance of services for the quality of life for rural residents and particularly as it impacts on rural youth.

### 2.3.4 Role of Services in Ensuring Quality of Life for Youth

The literature on services ensuring quality of life in rural areas is numerous and comprehensive. Despite this there is very little literature emphasising the importance of services to the youth in rural communities. The concept of quality of life is difficult to define as it "is based on individual perceptions of the place which are not preconditioned by specific aspects of the environment (Rogerson et al, 1989, p. 1658). Services, which provide a high quality of life is an essential requirement for the youth of an area as it allows for a positive outlook of the 'rural' while also sustaining a happy and vibrant location.  Quality of life can be assessed by looking at the services available which are seen to greatly "affect the satisfaction within a rural community" (Sirgy et al., 1998, p. 92).

### 2.3.5 Role of Services in Developing the Rural Economy

Throughout the literature, there is very little evidence of what particular services might distinguish the development of the rural economy. Farmer et al. acknowledges the "dominant services available to both rural and urban communities for developing an economy include healthcare, schools, banks and shops, all of which have been suggested to contribute to communities beyond their primary function" (2012, p. 1905).  Vias (2009) acknowledges how the services ensuring quality of life can be 'interlinked to the development of the rural economy'. This is evidently seen through the 'utilisation of shops, healthcare facilities and schools' within a rural community (Farmer et al., 2012).  As noted in Bosco and Moreno (2009) the 'sustainable use of services', e.g. 'shop local campaigns', provide 'stability and quality of life in rural and small town places, something which in return provides a strong base for attracting economic activity, retaining residents, and maintaining communities' (Graham and Underwood, 2012, p. 1236). It is also imperative to acknowledge that such

practices are modelled to suit the distinctive setting of rural communities, which often motivates locals to feel 'pride' within their community.

## 2.4 Rural Education

### 2.4.1 Strengths of Education

The delivery of education is a fundamental facet in sustaining the rural milieu (Goddard, 2010; Sterling, 2014). The production and acquisition of knowledge generated through the educational system has led to education being viewed as a catalyst for both economic and social development. The implementation of a robust educational structure within a region, which subsequently draws from its well-educated population, ensures that rural communities become adept at addressing the endemic problems which continually challenge rural regions. Furthermore, instilling independence into rural populations through furnishing individuals with relevant skills and knowledge that are necessary in terms of rural entrepreneurship are particularly important in achieving any type of rural rejuvenation or long term sustainable development (Woods, 2005). Thus, education is closely correlated with economic development, and particularly endogenous economic development. In fact Keane and Allison (1999) argued that education is often viewed upon as a fortification to the thin and unevenly developed economic fabric that is inherent in the rural environment

The economic impacts of education are however, overarching. Education within any given rural area is part of larger monetary benefits such as spin-offs for local business, economic stability and the creation of employment. Both Keane (1998) and Keane and Allison (1999) explain that the generation of new income streams and economic restructuring through the introduction of diverse rural enterprises, is a pivotal issue associated with rural education. The availability of a highly skilled and educated workforce not only draws in industry to an area to generate employment, but these 'learning regions' more notably "provide a dynamic basis to foster innovation and creativity" (Keane and Allison, 1999, p. 901). Education can thus be seen to encourage entrepreneurial activity within the rural, as 'a well-educated labour force is a critical component to the economic climate conducive to the development, attraction, and retention of entrepreneurs' (Beaulieu and Gibbs 2005, p. 11). Education endows the relevant skills, knowledge and self-assurance to the rural innovator that is needed to establish a small-to-medium enterprise. While monetary benefits are often correlated with the implications of education, its social impacts should not be disregarded. Education through its accumulation of knowledge often results in the development of social capital

within a region, as it encourages social interaction. Though education is often emphasised within the context of a younger demographic, recent challenges particularly in the guise of the global economic decline has seen the number of adult learners increase significantly in rural educational structures. The decline in employment opportunities and the demand for new skills has led more and more mature adult learner to invest time in developing their knowledge and skill sets.

### *2.4.2 Life-Long Learning*

The concept of lifelong learning has garnered broad, social, governmental and corporate support, which is often linked to market orientation as a means to upgrade vocational and professional skills. Lifelong learning can demarcate those who are successful and those who are not (Gouthro, 2002). Rapid advances in technology means that change will continue, thus intensifying the need for lifelong learning (Gouthro, 2002; Longworth and Davies, 1996). Lifelong learning that is defined by the profit oriented goals of industry and governments are increasingly visible in academia. This exhibits the need for continuous upgrading of skills, which demands certification. Discourses in lifelong education often focus on connections between adult education and the paid workforce and are based on the assumption that the value of learning is largely determined by how useful it is training people to successfully participate in and adapt to the evolving marketplace. Therefore third level institutions are under increasing pressure to attend to the needs of the marketplace (Goutro, 2002) and within this context, it is often conflated to mean lifelong training. However as Gouthro, (2002) states, increased participation in adult education is deemed to be required within a globally competitive economy.

### 2.4.3 Conclusion

The educational bodies are held in great esteem by the people of the area. Their educational social and economic significance gives the area a huge advantage in terms of development and growth of the town. The accomplishment of MCC in music and academic attainment is a source of pride for the community. MBC is regarded as a great asset for such a small town and indeed plays an important role in post-secondary, third level, lifelong learning and entrepreneurship in the area as verified by numerous courses available. Its links to other third level colleges are of immense importance as the findings highlight. Unfortunately, its funding is capped and therefore its growth is restricted, which is something that can be addressed.

Education in Moate is to the forefront of its uniqueness and is therefore a very important selling point of the town along with contributing to the social capital of the area. The town of Moate is therefore well placed and equipped in terms of educational structures essential for sustainable rural development.

## 2.5 Rural Tourism

### 2.5.1 Cycle Tourism

An increasing interest in cycle tourism and cycle touring holidays reflect a potentially relevant and sustainable platform for social, economic and environmental development in any region. Moreover the development of cycling tourism can stimulate demand in adjoining communities for a market that accommodates cycle tourism with associated social and economic spin-offs. Defining exactly what 'cycle tourism' is challenging. Lamont (2011) proposed a definition of cycling tourism as: trips involving a minimum distance of 40 kilometres from a person's home and an overnight stay (for overnight trips), or trips involving a minimum non-cycling round trip component of 50 kilometres and a minimum four hour period away from home (for day trips) of which cycling, involving active participation or passive observation, for holiday, recreation, leisure and/or competition, is the main purpose for that trip. Cycling tourism can be socioeconomically utilised and developed to expand upon a tourist base that has been rapidly growing and is accessible to those who are independent recreationalists and tourists. The business itself can expand the commercial possibilities within communities be that through adopting a new form of cycling culture, accommodation or using the influx of cyclists to promote local culture and business.

### 2.5.2 Viability of Cycle Tourism

The economic viability of cycle tourism has been researched and developed into models of implementation in various international locations. According to Cheng-Fei et al. (2014) bicycle tourism and its associated leisure components have enticed planners and policy makers in various communities in Taiwan to develop bicycle related tourist infrastructures. According to the author, the cyclist population has grown over 112% in the last 3 years. In a related study, Cheng-Fei (2014) determined that Taiwan had a cycling population of approximately 950,000, indicating the emergence of cycling as part of a larger economic industry, one of environmental significance, with not only health benefits but also low costs

for participants. Lamont and Buultjens (2011) discuss cycling tourism as a niche market with potential to enhance competitiveness in the global tourism market as they believe that independent cycle tourists potentially yield relatively high returns. Deenihan et al. (2013) found that international cycle tourism in Ireland had reached approximately 173,000 participants in 2011with an estimated €200 million spent by cycling tourists in Ireland in 2009.

### 2.5.3 Promotion and Policy

Promotion of cycle tourism is a significant market for establishing a strong socioeconomic network comprised of local community elements that can help support the industry. Promoting cycle tourism is established by understanding the client base and their motivations for participating in such a form of tourism. There are of course differences between the types of cyclists, for example those that cycle for recreation and holiday cycling and are part of a more 'tourist' conglomerate of participants and those who use cycling as a form of transportation and adopt a dedicated 'cyclist' lifestyle (Ritchie 1998). Promoting cycle tourism to both groups means promoting the conveniences of the cycling tourist infrastructure which cater to more specific 'tourist' conditions as well as the transport support services, accommodation and alternative routes that appeal to the more ardent 'cyclist' who is more attentive to the practicalities of traveling long distances. Institutional support can help develop stronger infrastructures that aid in the promotion of cycling tourist destinations. Cheng-Fei (2014) for example, noted that Governmental initiatives in Taiwan facilitated the implementation of racks affixed to trains so people could travel to areas further away from the major cities. Other practical supports were highlighted by Dickenson and Robbins (2009) who focused on the physical infrastructure and maintaining routes based on the availability of old structures such as disused railway lines. Ideas such as these that is the reusing of physical attributes to develop a physical infrastructure of cycle tourism is relevant to the geography of Moate, where steps could be taken to look at the possibility of using attractions such as their railway station as a tourist attraction along the Greenway.

### 2.5.4 Services (Accommodation)

Ritchie (1998) found through research surveys that people who were cycling for greater distances, 'stayed longer in the eventual destination site." (p. 571). Meschik (2012) in his research determined that while there was competition amongst businesses offering tourist attractions and accommodations – most cycling travellers choose villages or towns along

their route.  Meschik (2012) for example highlights that there is a necessity for distinguishing between two types of excursions of cycling tours, the 'same-day' and the 'overnight'. Meschik (2012) also notes that these two distinctions have their respective tourism 'market requirements'; the 'same day' cyclists rely on the knowledge of local actors in the region and tend to bring more supplies with them and the 'overnight' cyclists plan their trips in advance and spend more money in the local tourist attractions, restaurants and accommodations along their route.

Cheng-Fei et al. (2014) for example, suggests that essential accommodations for cycling tourists would include sufficient bicycle repair shops along specified routes, information on transport support service linkages, information on alternative routes to main route ways, routes with adequate safety and environmental considerations, pavement quality, bike paths, bicycle maps, cafes and restaurants, rest places, restrooms, convenient stores, affordable accommodation, racks and lockers provided, bicycle rental provided and friendly residential support along the way

**2.6 Conclusion**

This section has tried to weave together  some of the theoretical underpinnings that informed both how we went about conducting our field-based data collection and indeed how we devised our recommendations based on this theoretical and empirical work.  It has illustrated the significance of rural development to rural society, whilst also highlighting the key topics central to our overall thesis that is one of exploring aspects of small town development and rejuvenation. It must be emphasised that this study was conducted in a very short time frame and was part of a broader learning process associated with our Masters course and as such the above section is by no means an exhaustive list of the facets which should be considered in the planning, execution and evaluation of local social and economic development within the rural milieu. We would argue however that what we have presented does set out some of the relevant issues that need to be addressed and are ultimately important in terms of the future sustainability of the Moate community. The following section will address the methodology utilised in this study and furnish the reader, on both a practical and theoretical level, with how data was accumulated and analysed during the research process.  The section pays particular attention to mixed methods and thematic analysis.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

The project was carried out in Moate as it was deemed a town with immense potential for educational services, tourism opportunities and social occurrences. There was a great source of knowledge available in the town and great community spirit visible when conducting the project. As Geographers, regardless of our methodological approach or philosophical stance, it was essential that we embarked on common processes before undertaking this research project. Preparatory work, which included thinking through the practicalities of data collection, how the data will be managed and analysed, and how it will be presented were all taken into consideration when embarking on this project. In terms of primary data, desk research was carried out at the preliminary stages of the project to assess what primary data would need to be collected later. The desk research highlights the various methodologies suitable for carrying out research in rural areas and provided a general history of the culture, heritage and services in the Moate region. The collection of primary data was through a variety of means including interviews, focus groups and surveys as they were portrayed as the most beneficial methods to obtain information (Bosco and Moreno, 2009). The following section engages with the theoretical framework and methodological approaches adopted to collect the data.

## 3.2 Theoretical Framework

Philosophy is important in human geography research (Graham 2005). It focuses on how things in society are, the way they are, and how people are. It reflects how we consider our relationships with others or with objects and as such is essential in considering human Geography research. This research engages with the postmodern research paradigm based on the need to understand the perspectives of individuals relating to social, education and tourism potential in Moate. Postmodernism is based upon the view that there is no one answer and there is no truth outside of individual interpretation (Kitchin and Tate 2000). Jamal and Hollinshead (2001) discuss the connections between postmodernism and interpretivism. Interpretation engages with understanding of phenomena and moves away from a positivist approach (Reilly and Love 2000). The researchers were interested in the 'situated knowledges' of the group of people they engaged with (Rose 1997, p. 305) and as such sought to gain insights into the lived experiences of participants in the study and it uses an interpretive approach to achieve this and applies qualitative methodologies.

## 3.3 Mixed Methodology

The project uses a mixed-methods approach where both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were employed. This type of methodological approach has many advantages, namely it enhances the credibility of the research; helps to broaden the research; brings forth ideas that were perhaps not thought of previously; views inconsistencies in findings when looking at the different outcomes using various approaches. Additionally, such a method can allow an explanation to be sought, as something that is visible in one outcome may not be seen in the other. Mixed methods is favoured by many researchers as it frequently provides a more comprehensive understanding compared to studies based solely on either quantitative or qualitative data alone (Frentling, 2002). Furthermore, as McKendrick (2009) would suggest credibility and clarity of findings is enhanced substantially through the use of mixed methods and data triangulation.

This project carried out in Moate involved the administration of one hundred questionnaires, three semi-structured interviews, and one focus group during the duration of the project. Each of these data collection methods examined the themes of society, education and tourism through a set of pre-defined semi structured questions (Appendix). The focus group and the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

## 3.4 Ethics and Anonymity

The National University of Ireland, Galway requires that all research comply with the ethical principles that it has developed. These research guidelines were consulted at http://www.nuigalway.ie/research/vp_research/ethics.html. Participants were also asked if the interview could be recorded and only when they were agreeable was the voice recorder engaged. Transcripts of the interviews and focus groups could be forwarded to participants if such a request was made. Participants were also assured that the data they provided was treated in the strictest confidence and their names would not appear on any report or document arising from the research. The interviews and focus group were anonymised in order to comply with this assurance, the approach used relates to the standards set down by the UK Data Archive through the use of pseudonyms, and access is limited to the researcher.

## 3.5 Identifying Participants

Participants are identified using a numerical identification system to protect identity. Those who answered the questionnaire are identified as survey participants 1,2 excreta as SP#1, SP#2. Focus group and interview participants are identified in a similar way using Focus Group (FGP) with interviews being related to the themes such as society interview is SI#1.

## 3.6 Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and for the qualitative data a thematic analysis was chosen. SPSS is a comprehensive and flexible statistical package that analyses and manipulates complex data with simple instructions for interactive and non-interactive use (http://www.spss.co.in/index.aspx).

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method of "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis requires the researcher to create conceptual tools to categorize and understand the phenomenon being studied. This is achieved through the process of coding, which is the term used for categorizing data: taking sections of text and labelling them as fitting into certain categories (Marks and Yardley, 2004). Under instances in which similar ideas emerge from the participants and certain themes and patterns of behaviour are visible, a thematic analysis helps to focus on these factors. Boyatzis (1998) outlines thematic analysis as a way of enabling scholars, observers, or practitioners to use a wide range of types of information, using a systematic approach. According to Anderson (2010), numerous advantages can be seen when using this method. This increases accuracy and sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations, and organizations. According to Marks and Yardley (2004), a theme refers to a specific pattern uncovered in the data gathered.

## 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the theoretical framework and methods used in this study. An interpretive approach was adopted and qualitative and quantitative methodologies supported the approach. Three sets of respondents were sampled, 100 survey participants, focus group participants and three professionals working in the three thematic areas. The ethics protocol of the university was followed and anonymity was guaranteed to respondents. Interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and an extensive thematic analysis was conducted.

# CHAPTER 4:  RESULTS AND FINDINGS

## 4.1 Introduction

The following section contains the results and findings of the data collected in Moate.  This chapter is discussed in three different sections in keeping with the separate research topics, which included the social, educational, and tourism aspects of Moate.  The most significant findings that were established from the various methods utilised shall be illustrated in this chapter. The findings were compiled using a mixed methodology as discussed in the preceding chapter. The key results have been identified, analysed and are presented below. The various themes that emerged from the data gathered are subdivided and found under their respective headings and are described accordingly.

## 4.2 Rural Society

### 4.2.1 Introduction

It was evident from the surveys and focus groups that the youth of the community are an important resource for developing rural towns, a notable and valid concern for a majority of the respondents and participants of the data collection. Therefore, there was a concern regarding the diversity of community groups and facilities available to assist the engagement for the youth of Moate. However many respondents stated that Moate had a vibrant community spirit and a cohesive respect for amicability of the town's residents and the services relating to grocery shopping and in general were satisfactory. Entrepreneurship is strongly encouraged in the town through the business school and the space that is available in the town for businesses. The unique selling point is a main finding that emerged in both the social and tourism aspect of the study; Moate being a town rich in culture, history and heritage boasts many advantages.

### 4.2.2 Community Involvement

Community participation and involvement is evident in Moate. There are a vast number of community groups and organisations operating in the town. These include, The Tidy Towns, Moate Action Group, GAA Club and The Choir. These among other groups are active in the area which shows that involvement in the community is a main priority. One interviewee remarked "*Even though we're a small community we try our best to improve for ourselves and for outsiders*" (SI #1). Local people want to attend and participate in events as it is "*for*

*the good of the community*". It is evident that the local people of Moate believe there is a strong community spirit in Moate and when asked to describe Moate in five words, the most common answers were Friendly, Close Knit, Community, Wide Streets, Good Schools, Music, GAA and Quiet. These results showed the positive perception the locals have towards the community and the involvement within. This social capital is a competitive advantage over other rural areas and should be taken advantage of to create an endogenous rural development plan. However, a slight issue was raised among those interviewed, it was stated that some groups have been individualistic in their running and this has to be addressed. (FGP#2) elaborates on the fact that community groups are not integrated and need to "*come together as one to allow for positive growth within Moate*".

### 4.2.3 Youth Involvement

The youth are an important factor of every community. It was evident from the surveys, interviews and the focus group that the involvement of youth in community development and participation was a concern of the community. Many respondents stressed that there are little facilities for the youth. The youth are seen as significant for the future of the town, therefore, there should be more facilities and activities available to them. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was highlighted and praised for its involvement with the youth. It provides them with structure and motivates them to be active and develop their social skills. However, the focus group expressed the need for "something more for kids", other than soccer, rugby and GAA. According to FGP#1 in the focus group "if you don't play football, you have nothing". Other participants cited dance classes, other sport activities and Foróige events as being evident, but many felt that GAA and Rugby were to the forefront. Foróige is a great organisation for teenagers but there is very little promotion for the group in Moate. Their Facebook page is not updated regularly and survey results illustrated that many people did not realise there was a Forógie group in the town.
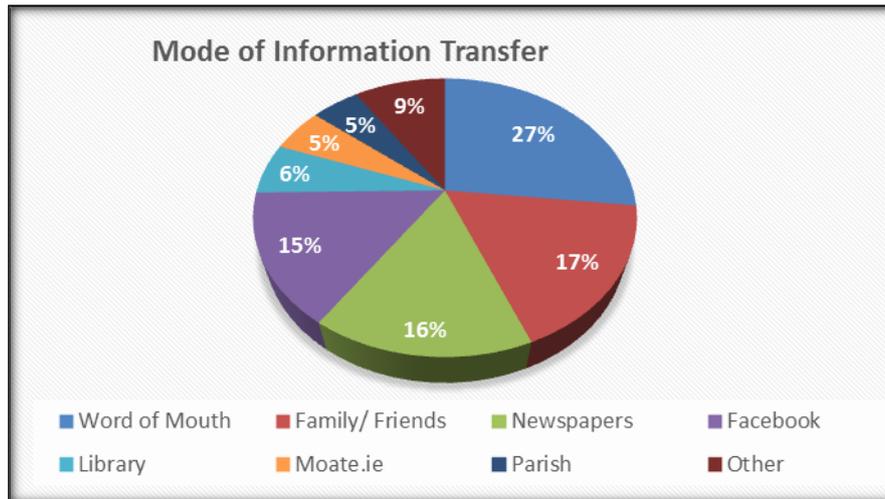
**Figure 4.1:** Mode of Information Transfer

### 4.2.4 Entrepreneurship and Business Development

Findings from both the focus group and the questionnaire revealed that there is a sufficient supply of office space available in Moate to encourage entrepreneurship. The business school provides the relevant skills to allow students to establish their own business or venture but it was stated that many lack the confidence to do so in such a small town. Results showed that many budding entrepreneurs leave and move to larger towns such as Athlone due to better services such as the availability of broadband. Throughout the focus group the wealth of talent in the area was acknowledged, however, it was stated that they are not being 'harnessed' which is in some sense failing their potential as individuals and the potential of the town. It was also noted that *Studio 93,* a graphic design studio was one of the only entrepreneur businesses set up in the town, and has proven its success thus far. The importance of links and networks with other towns and individuals as key tools for successful entrepreneurship was also highlighted throughout the focus group.

### 4.2.5 Networking

Networking activity was cited as a relatively new occurrence in Moate. The focus group participants stressed that it has increased recently as there is a greater cohesion between community groups in the area. These groups who were once stand-alone bodies have come together to collaborate on many different projects all with the hope of furthering the town of Moate.

One Moate based group and a group from a neighbouring town have both expressed interest in forming a partnership to develop the potential of cycle tourism in the midlands. As stated by a member of the focus group *"Moate needs to be packaged as a tourist destination"* (FGP#3). Another focus group respondent also mentioned that an awareness of resources outside the town boundary was needed, highlighting the importance of linking with those in other towns and villages.  It is hoped with the issuing of this report; other midland towns will show interest and become involved which may result in a 'Midlands Cycle Tourism Network'. Cycle tourism has become very popular around the world in recent years especially in Ireland with the development of the proposed Greenway from Dublin to Galway. Moate is an ideal location for a connection point to this cycle laneway.  Fáilte Ireland will be promoting and marketing this throughout Europe, therefore there is a great opportunity for the locals of Moate to promote their town and its assets. There will be a need to network with the restaurants and accommodation services in the town to provide the suitable and affordable amenities that cycle tourists require. If successful, this will help to promote rural tourism in general, provide a new atmosphere to the town and possibly enhance the lives of many locals.

The close proximity of towns and the low tourism rate of these areas mean that networking and collaboration will be the key to increasing tourism numbers, and as one interviewee stated "local businesses need to come together to build a tourism network" (FGP#4).  It was also noted from the focus group that service providers are more willing to work together in recent times. This co-operation will be necessary if tourism is to grow in the town. A strong community of services working and promoting one another will strengthen the ability of Moate to maintain tourists in the town for longer periods. This in turn has the potential to enhance the economic activities throughout the town.

### *4.2.6 Conclusion*

The young people of Maote have a huge role to play in the development and sustainability of the town and surrounding areas.  Additionally, they are a key element in the sustainability of the local economy.  The research findings noted a lack of youth facilities and indeed a lack of advertisement in relation to services and facilities that were availability.   The one organisation which appears to show great initiative and progress in relation to youth involvement and participation is the local GAA; it was also noted however by one participant that "you don't play football, you have nothing" (FG#1), which again signifies the limited

scope of facilities for youth within the area.  In relation to local networks in Moate, there is a need for further development to increase integration within the town and reduce tunnel vision and an unfair pressure being placed on individuals to become too involved in community development, which was alluded too as a central barrier to the development of community groups. Throughout the research, there has been evidence of positive networking taking place in recent months as our interviews and focus groups revealed increased collaboration between neighbouring towns to enhance the viability of tourism in the area.

The results of the data collection reveal that the people of Moate have great "pride" within their community.  Despite this, however the community groups need to work together in order to future enhance and develop Moate. This could be achieved by increased advertisement and awareness of local community groups and events, which is a key element of development and sustainability of a town.

## 4.3 Rural Education

### 4.3.1 Introduction

From the educational aspect of Moate, many factors became known.  Educational skills and knowledge were apparent in light of the collaborations that exist between Moate Business College and the many educational bodies in surrounding areas.  Cultural factors were evident in examining how the children interact with the diverse cultures. Economic advantages of the educational bodies were considered as stable.

### 4.3.2 Education

The results highlight that education has a huge role to play in the economic, social and cultural factors of the town. The results of the questionnaire highlights the importance the school and the education system has within the town and the surrounding areas.  The town benefits from a range of education facilities including two primary schools, a secondary school and Moate Business School. The secondary school is recognised as being the "sixth largest rural secondary school in rural Ireland" and is acknowledged for its music talent after winning the "All-Ireland Schools Choir in Belfast last fall"(FGP#2) this achievement brought Moate to the national media which helped boost the locals pride of the town. The business school provides a range of services to the youth and elderly with the variety of courses

available both part time and full time which provides the local with the opportunity to delve to new horizons and perhaps entrepreneur ones skills and talents.

### 4.3.3 Skills and Knowledge

Moate Business College Was cited as having an important role to play in promoting vibrancy in the town. Its links to Athlone Institute of Technology, Galway Mayo Institute of Technology, Dublin Institute of Technology, Carlow Institute of Technology and Moate Community College provide the bridge to further mainstream third level colleges. However, respondents also indicated a lack of knowledge on what MBC has to offer.

The focus group highlighted a lack of knowledge in the community and as (FGP#1) suggested "*it is only now that I think we are educating ourselves to educate them*" It was acknowledged that people gained skills from FÁS and indeed identified wood turning and painting classes as examples of skills available in the educational bodies in Moate, which has surfaced in the community.

### 4.3.4 Cultural Factors

Many respondents expressed satisfaction to the exposure of the children with other cultures, which they argued fosters understanding and acceptance. This helps the children interact and experience other ethnic groups and cultures through the schools and events. It is not just restricted to the youth but transcends across all age groups. According to one respondent regarding the Spanish students who visit "*they bring authenticity with them and while learning English is the purpose of their trip, they also engage with locals in teaching the odd Spanish word*" (SP #21). The football fields in Moate foster interaction and are responsible for bringing together different cultures in a sporting context. However, one respondent held the view that the educational bodies do not promote social and cultural events enough.

### 4.3.5 Economic Advantages of Educational Bodies

Regardless of the economic climate, the educational bodies are regarded as being stable economic entities within the town. The spin-offs for local businesses and employment is un-measurable, and as one respondent put it "if the school wasn't there we would about it" (SP #72) (Figure 4.2). While each body has a unique economic influence, employment in these institutions is vital for the local economy. Robust educational structures, such as found in

Moate, imprints upon a well-educated workforce and instils relevant skills and knowledge necessary to achieve sustainable development (Woods, 2005).

Student lodgings appear to be a robust economic factor closely correlated with the students of MBC. The need for rental accommodation has increased in recent years. As FGP#2 stated, "*students, who rent here, spend whatever bit of money they have and the odd student would go to the pub*". Annual graduations are particularly important for the town as they bring an influx of people who fill local hostelries and eateries. Furthermore, local businesses tend to employ students from the college "*you would often meet students who are working in solicitor's offices and that kind of thing*". Foreign exchange students who visit during the summer months generate further economic streams for local residences who provide room and board and the other associated spin-offs to businesses.
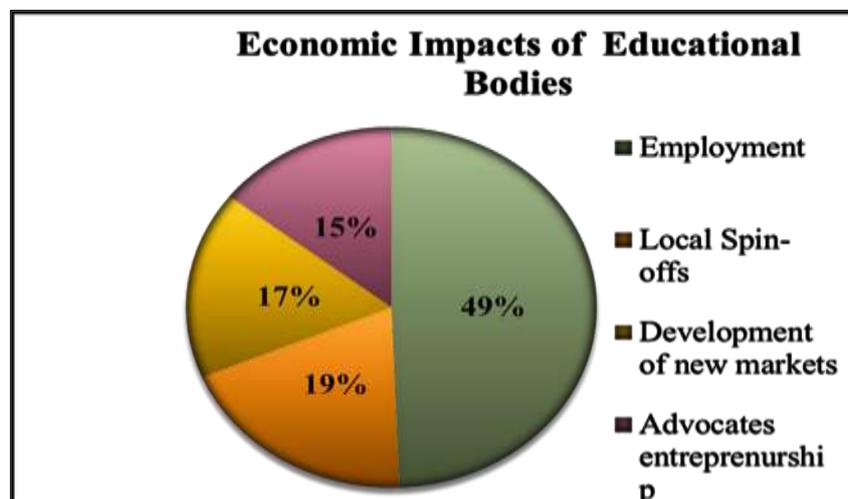


**Figure 4.2:** Economic Impacts of Educational Bodies

*4.3.6 Services*

In general, the town is regarded as being well serviced in term of shopping and general grocery. However some respondents said they had to travel outside of Moate to get more competitive shopping. The FGP's expressed the need for more competition in terms of grocery shopping, and this might entice more people to shop in Moate to obtain better value. The lack of fitness centres, gym's and an evening restaurant necessitated travel to other towns as well, some respondents revealed (Figure 4.1)

The proliferation of fast food outlets is a concern to some respondents, but it also represents a growing trade in general, while catering for the outpouring of students from the local schools.
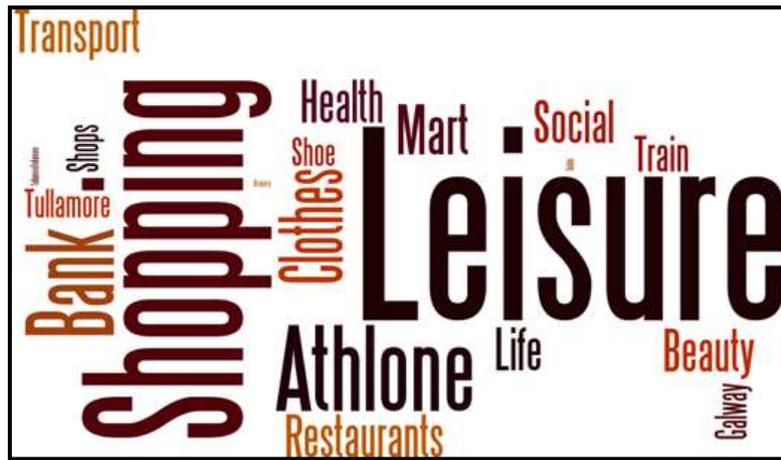
**Figure 4.3 Services and Facilities Sought Outside Moate**

*4.3.7 Educational Bodies*

There was a growing consensus among those who participated in the study that the educational bodies have a strong bearing on the town. The educational bodies have huge spin offs for the local business, they provide employment and they draw people in from neighbouring regions. They are seen to be a somewhat stable economic entity to the town, regardless of the economic climate: "but as far as education it hasn't dampened the enthusiasm for education it's still very much a hope" (FGP#1). They are imperative to the town and were embraced positively among the participants owing to their economic gain: "If the school wasn't there we would know about it" (SP#46). While each individual educational body has a unique economic influence, each provide employment to the town, moreover the staff and students in each educational structure spend a certain amount of money in Moate, regardless of them being a resident or not.

**4.4 Rural Tourism**

*4.4.1 Introduction*

Sustainable rural development has become a key focus of international, national, regional and local policy across the EU since the late 1980s (Storey 2009). Tourism has been highlighted as holding a role in this context (Hall et al. 2003; Urry and Larsen 2011). Tourism has also received particular attention in the European Union Leader programme (links between activities for the economic development of rural areas) since the early 1990s.

As Edensor (2009) states tourism is the largest industry in the world. In Ireland it is also a significant economic contributor with receipts totalling €5.9 billion when the overseas and domestic markets are combined. As highlighted recently in the CEDRA Report, tourism in rural areas often is not utilised to the best of its potential but can generate significant income to the economy and create numerous jobs. In relation to Westmeath, it had 95,000 tourists in 2013, which was worth 43 million to the local economy.

### 4.4.2 Tourism

Tourism has not pertained to be a notable economic driver in the midlands region with only 268,000 holidaymakers in 2013 and this is evident in the literature as the South, West and East Regions have often attracted most of the country's tourist numbers (Failte Ireland, 2013). Respondents believed that the Midlands had been lagging in terms of tourism and that this area has been often looked at as "a stop off point" where tourists would merely possibly stop to eat and continue on their journey (Figure 4.2). Moate is a town that has ample tourism services but these services are not regarded by local people as tourist based due to the low number of tourists that travel to the town.
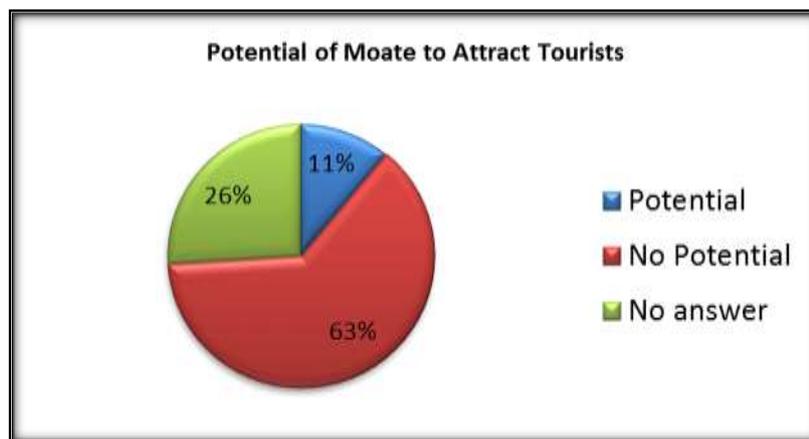


**Figure 4.4:** Potential of Moate to Attract Tourists

### 4.4.3 Advertising, Promotion and Marketing

Advertising, promoting and marketing are three of the most fundamental business strategies that organisations must undertake in order for growth to occur in rural towns in Ireland. This not only pertains for solely economic purposes but for social, cultural and heritage importance. As the tourism sector in Moate is relatively new and only coming to being, it is important that this area is concentrated on over the coming years.

The promotion of Moate as a tourist destination was evaluated in the study of 100 surveys. There was a varied response from the questionnaire in that 8 of the respondents declared that the town was heavily promoted, while the remainder of the people surveyed stated otherwise; 17 stated it was somewhat promoted and 39 believed it is not promoted at all. One participant declared, "there is plenty of things going on in the town but people are just not aware of it" (SP#8) and this statement was backed up by the mere result of 23% of survey participants believing that groups and activities in the town were 'well-advertised'.

It was received that greater promotion is necessary in the town and that "*we need to package Moate as a destination*" and due to its location, this is necessary "*because we are so near Athlone and Mullingar and we need to be promoted more heavily*" (FGP#3). Moate must be able to showcase their amenities on a national scale as they are in competition with two larger urban centres.

The local group that took part in the focus group has actively looked at various best practice examples of development. A particular best practice example as mentioned by FGP#1 (a male in his 50s with long term involvement in the town) was that "*the French are very good at advertising their history and their heritage*", and as Moate is a town full of unique history and heritage, priority should be given to such ideas addressed in section 3. Westmeath County Council's heritage officer and local community groups are currently working on producing various plaques and information signs around the town displaying economic, environmental, social, educational and cultural information. Overall there are numerous projects and issues currently being addressed by various groups in the area with the potential to achieve sustainable growth in the town.

The community groups from the surrounding areas expressed that disembeddedness from their local town would be necessary for tourism to flourish in the midland region. Disembeddedness means to look outside the group's local area and promote other areas in the midlands region which could have an overall positive influence on the region. There is a clear understanding that a "go it alone approach will not work" (FGP#3) and that they must all support and promote one another (this is spoken of in more depth in section four).

### 4.4.4 Unique Selling Point

Moate is a town that has a number of unique selling points, which are not fully understood by some members of the public. In terms of social value, people believe Moate is a "friendly

place with high community spirit" (SP #88) (Figure 5). It is a place with unique products and a strong heritage and historical background. Its location comes through as one of the strongest advantages of the town based in the heart of the country with easy access and it is close to Mullingar and Athlone.
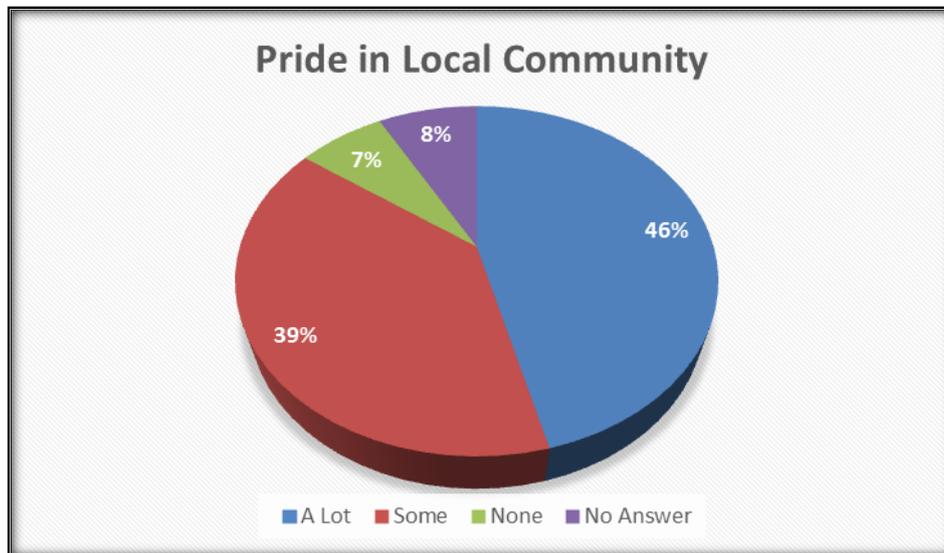


**Figure 4.5:** Pride in Community

### 4.4.5 Dún Na Sí Amenity and Heritage Park

Dún Na Sí Heritage and Amenity Park is a centre of music, dance, history and genealogy for the entire midlands area. It contains a museum of agricultural implements, a traditional fisherman's cottage, a bohain and a hedge school. It also consists of a series of paths, children's playground, a wetland reserve and planted parklands which includes native species and bird hides. The Dun Na Si Midlands Heritage and Amenity Park is situated in close proximity to the access point to the proposed greenway at Ballynagarby. This 27 acre wet land site has the great ecological, environmental and aesthetical value which is very important to cycle tourists. It has the potential to take in 300,000 cyclists per year.

It has been heavily commended by all members of the community that Dún Na Sí Amenity and Heritage Park is the most valuable and extensive selling point of Moate. The official opening of the park will occur in the coming weeks and it is hoped that its inauguration will herald a new chapter in Moate's longstanding tradition and as it may develop as a tourist destination into the future. It has the potential to be one of the main tourist attractions in the midlands area as it has the only turlough east of the River Shannon which is unique in its own right.

### 4.4.6 Music and Culture

The town has huge musical history, which has the potential to be exploited as its tradition and music culture is strong. There seemed a great presence of pride as people talked about the various musical artists that visited over the years including Michael Jackson and those who dwell from the area such Foster and Allen and Ray Lynam and The Hillbillies. During the focus group, it was eluded that there is potential for future development of music schools and activities. Tuar Ard has the capacity to run a series of events such as these throughout the year and has the capacity to cater for large crowds that may be drawn to such events. The development of Tur Ard brought a new and different dynamic to Moates employment industry. It was seen as a positive development as it provided the opportunity for people to use the facility to sell their own crafts and food.

### 4.4.7 Dublin-Galway Greenway

The Dublin-Galway Cycle Greenway is believed to have the potential to be the unique selling point of the town in the future. Its capacity to bring people to the town will be a great advantage if marketing and promoting is worked on properly by relevant local and national bodies. It is hoped that the proposed Greenway will bring upwards on 200,000 people to Moate (Athlone Advertiser, 2014) and if this comes to pass it will provide a huge influx to the local economy. Cycle tourism numbers are on the rise year on year (Failte Ireland, 2013) and this new gateway to the Midlands may be the key to unlocking the areas tourism potential. The survey results showed that 80% of Maote residents were aware of the proposed Greenway.

**Awareness of Greenway**

- 6% No answer
- 14% Not aware
- 80% Aware
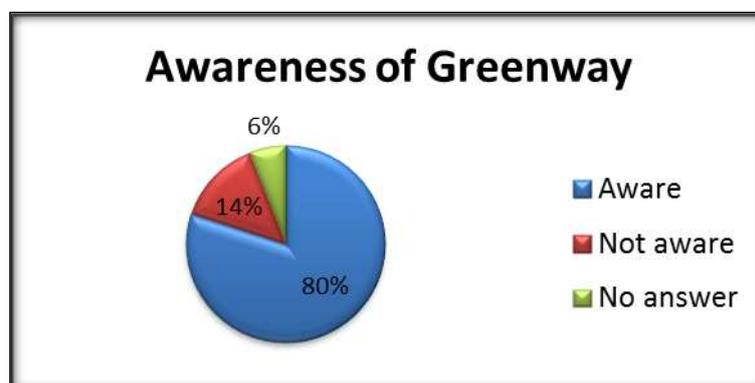
**Figure 4.6:** Awareness of Greenway

### 4.4.8 Quaker Town

Historically Moate was been known as a Quaker town, in fact one of Ireland's first Quaker settlements, which itself may hold massive tourist potential. The Quakers were an order of people who pulled away from the church, took care of the poor, and provided for widows and the fatherless and established industries in the town. It was reflected in the focus group that "*the whole country, not alone Moate has learned from the downfall in the economy and now we are willing to sell things that they would never have thought of selling*" (FGP#4). The Quaker history had vanished but there has been a renewed interest in the heritage of town of the last number of years.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Tourism in general is seen to be lagging in the Midlands; however, with the Dun Na Sí Park it is believed by numerous respondents that this is an advantage to Moate. Other factors that will aid in the development in tourism are the music and culture that is readily available in the area and the new Greenway; also, the fact that Moate is a Quaker town is a huge advantage. A possible networking between the neighbouring towns in relation to regional promotion may be necessary to create an identity for the region as a whole.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Similar to many rural towns in Ireland, Moate faces challenges and opportunities relating to its economy society and environment. How Moate responds to these challenges and opportunities will ultimately determine its future sustainability. There is no doubt that any type of successful and sustainable rural development requires creative, innovative and inclusive type developments. This research project provides evidence of this as it explored the town of Moate through the themes of: Tourism, Rural Society and Education. This chapter divided its findings into three distinct sections, which is believes are relevant for the social, cultural and economic development of Maote. Drawing on these findings, the following chapter will identify a series of recommendations, which they feel are relevant for the development and sustainability of Moate.

# CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies recommendations identified by the researchers in relation to their research findings. As with previous sections of the report, recommendations will be divided into the three relevant headings, society, education and tourism.

## 5.2 Rural Society

### Recommendation 1

The project recommends the development of a promotional strategy for Moate. Advertisement is lacking, word of mouth is the most common method of passing local information. This strategy should capitalise on existing groups, social capital and networks.

### Recommendation 2

Stakeholders should develop a local network that would increase the level of integration within the community. This would reduce tunnel vision and individualism which was mentioned as a central barrier to the overall development of Moate.

### Recommendations 3

The research findings point to a lack of diversity in relation to the social groups available within the community, over and above the sports groups (GAA). There is potential to develop further social groups in particular those which do not have a sporting focus.

## 5.3 Education

### Recommendation 4

The findings highlight the importance of Moate Business College not only to the town of Moate, but also to the midlands region. Its expansion is stunted due to lack of funding from the Department of Education. We recommend the Moate Business School should be assisted in attemting to form a lobby group to secure additional funding for expansion and further development.

**Recommendation 5**

The future of Moate lies with endogenous 'bottom up' development. The educational structures in Moate highlight the strength of existing local endogenous educational structures and should be examined in any branding/future development of the town.

**Recommendation 6**

Networking and communication is crucial for successful development and marketing of the area. The findings indicate a lack of knowledge on what the educational bodies in Moate have to offer.  The researchers recommend the development of a communication forum to raise the level of awareness of the training and education opportunities available in Moate.

**5.4 Tourism**

**Recommendation 6**

Establish a 'Moate Community Forum'

While what follows are a set of recommendations that might be considered in terms of future opportunities for Moate it is the view of the research group that in order for these recommendations to be implemented there is a need to establish a 'Moate Community Forum' or complementary body which would consist of all relevant groups and organisations in the area.  It is important that all community bodies are considered and that each group is received within such a forum where all can have an input towards a strategy for the town.

**Recommendation** 7

As with many tourism destinations, a brand is an essential part of a tourism package. For instance, "The Burren Eco Tourism Network" logo is "stay a little longer" and "leave nothing behind you but your shadow". These phrases catch the attention of tourists and may result in them spending more time in an area. ProMoate is promoted here as a possible brand name for the town. The ProMoate logo could be used to market cycle tourism in the town and to develop Moate as the primary stop off point along the Mullingar to Athlone route. Failte Ireland (2007) believes that designing routes around particular themes is extremely important.

Figure: Designed by MA student, Cathal Brennan and creation supported by all MA students

**Recommendation 8:**

Having examined the 'National Cycle Policy Framework' and Fáilte Ireland's, 'A Strategy for the Development of Irish Cycle Tourism', it is evident that there is a need for the midlands region and the towns along the Greenway to develop a tourism strategy. A strategy will 'address the imbalance in the development of the visitor economy and the associated need to engage in long-term planning for the development of rural areas' (Failte Ireland, 2007). Strategies implemented with regard to other national and international cycle routes have been very successful in assisting with growth in destinations along the routeways.

**Recommendation 9:**

There is need for the town of Moate to work in conjunction with national and governmental bodies such as Fáilte Ireland and Discover Ireland. These organisations must market and promote the midlands area, as it has been underdeveloped in the past. The Cycle Greenway needs to be as heavily promoted as The Wild Atlantic Way, Great Western Greenway and Irelands Ancient East. These initiatives have been extremely successful throughout the country in raising tourism numbers and a similar strategy must be implemented for the Midlands. The town has a number of amenities that could be marketed that have historical and contemporary importance such as the Quaker Town, The Railway Station, The Greenway, The Dun Na Si Amenity and Heritage Park and a Music Week.

**Recommendation 10**

There has been an expressed interest from local groups in numerous towns throughout the midlands to network and work in tandem with one another. It is proposed that rural towns along the Greenway work together in promoting the region as they will inhibit growth in the

area if they are to be in opposition to one another. It is hoped with the publication of this report that other community groups will come forward and network with the present groups which, may develop a "Midlands Cycle Tourism Network". A network will give these groups a stronger foundation towards accessing funding alongside greater voice in promoting and marketing the region on a national and international basis. Failte Ireland has alluded that there is a need to "vary the Irish cycling product and spread the network".

**CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

Moate is a small town with a strong social and community base. Located in the heart of Ireland almost half-way between Dublin and Galway Moate it very accessible and has huge capacity and potential for development. Principally, a residential town, Moate has some major challenges but equally some great opportunities in terms of moulding its future in a holistic and sustainable way. In drawing some conclusions from what this short piece of research has uncovered and indeed recognising the strategic geographic location that Moate occupies it has been evident to the research team that the large scale social capital that the town possesses gives Moate a great platform from which to develop going forward. The surveys, interviews and focus groups all revealed a friendly and close-knit community with a huge appetite to improve quality of life, social and economic well-being for all the residents of the town.

It is important to stress also that Moate is not any different to many rural towns throughout Ireland. As such, it is our view that Moate should look to moving beyond mirroring what other towns are attempting and while looking to learn from these places, should attempt to add further value to what Moate can offer. To successfully pursue such an ambition there have been a number of issues highlighted in this report under the thematic areas of rural society, rural education and rural tourism. While each of these has specific recommendations, one overarching determination of the report is that Moate should look to build on the very strong element it possesses in terms of the enthusiasm, energy and dedication that local groups and residents convey in abundance. It is our contention that the mobilising of the people of Moate in a coherent and structured way might possibly be the greatest asset that the town enjoys. Indeed, it is argued in much of the rural literature that the involvement of local people and a bottom-up approach in gaining insight to problems but also in developing solutions and opportunities will always stand a better chance of success with this local buy-in. As has been stressed in our report this development of collective endeavour is not an easy or straightforward process. It is in fact a very demanding and often conflictual one, but a process nevertheless that needs to be part of any long-term sustainable development. To this end our recommendation of a Moate Community Forum is put forward as a starting point in allowing Moate to take stock: of its context and culture of its economy and employment opportunities of its environment, infrastructure, local heritage and other resources. It is from this point that we feel meaningful progress could then be made in the areas we have examined and which all yielded opportunities for future development. The provision of

education in Moate for example, is hugely significant, not only in terms of its quality and the links it makes between the young people and the future of Moate but it is also one of the town's largest employers. In all, the educational realm provides strong economic and social stability for the town with even more room for development in terms of acting as a catalyst for entrepreneurial activity, a support for local businesses through internships and indeed as a magnate for inward investment in that, it confirms a well-educated workforce being available. Equally, the research in to tourism opportunities yielded a very positive possibility in relation to cycling tourism. There seems to be a huge opportunity for Moate to become of a growing tourist activity and one, which requires limited capital inputs. Again here however we make the point in the report that developing such a possible should perhaps be thought of in a broader sense in terms of creating a brand or identity for Moate that would get it 'known' and 'talked about'. The fact that there are so many potential resources in and around Moate and the fact that the Greenway development is underway make this an opportune time for Moate to be ready to become part of this industry.

Finally, it is perhaps fitting to finish with a reflection on the CEDRA vision statement in that just like many areas in rural Ireland, Moate can also be a 'dynamic, adaptable and outward looking multi-sectoral economy supporting vibrant, resilient and diverse communities'. From the brief research conducted for this report it certainly has all the tools at its disposal to do so.

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**Appendix**

**Student Administered Survey**

Questionnaire No.: _____

Location: _____

### Participant Profile:

1. **Gender**:     Male ❏          Female ❏
2.

3. **Age**:        0-18 ❏          18-24 ❏          25-34 ❏
                   35-44 ❏          45-54 ❏          55-64 ❏
                   65 + ❏

4. **Are you a resident of Moate**:     Yes ❏     No ❏
   0-5 km ❏          6-10 km ❏          10-20 km ❏          20+ km ❏

5. **How long have you lived in the area:**
   0-2 years ❏          3-5 years ❏          5-10 years ❏          10+ years ❏

6. **Do you work in Moate**:
   Yes    ❏ Occupation: _____
   No     ❏ Please elaborate: _____

   **Additional Comments:**
   _____
   _____
   _____

## Rural Society Questionnaire:

**We would like to gain a better understanding of your impression of Moate starting with some questions about local amenities and services.**

7. **Rate from 1 – 5: 1 being very limited and 5 being very good**

|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Grocery** | | | | | | |
| **Local Markets** | | | | | | |
| **Health and Medical** | | | | | | |
| **Petrol Station** | | | | | | |
| **Mechanics/ Garage** | | | | | | |
| **Banking** | | | | | | |
| **Restaurants/Cafés/Fast Food** | | | | | | |
| **Education** | | | | | | |
| **Childcare** | | | | | | |
| **Personal Care (e.g. Hairdressers)** | | | | | | |
| **Professional Services** | | | | | | |
| **Hardware/Agriculture Services** | | | | | | |
| **Public Transport** | | | | | | |
| **Services for Elderly** | | | | | | |
| **Public Meeting Places** | | | | | | |
| **Youth Facilities** | | | | | | |
| **Other:** | | | | | | |

8. **Do you travel outside Moate to access any additional activities or facilities?**

    Yes  ❑     No  ❑

Please Elaborate:

_____

_____


**9. Visually speaking how would you rate Moate?**

Very Good ❑       Good ❑       Neutral ❑       Bad ❑       Very Bad ❑

Please Elaborate:

_____

_____

**10. Could you give us 5 words that come to mind when you think of Moate?**

_____

_____

**11. Do you have pride in your local community?**

A lot ❑       Some ❑       None ❑

Please Elaborate:

_____

_____

**12. Moate appears to have a vibrant community life. Have you heard of these Moate based groups?**

| | Yes | Member | Level of Involvement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Moate Action Group | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Foróige Group | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Moate Drama Group | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Moate Golf Club | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Men's Shed | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Moate Cycling Group | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Moate Boxing Club | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Dun Na Si Amenity Park | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Irish Rural Link | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Moate GAA | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Moate Partnership Group | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |
| Moate Tennis Club | ❑ | ❑ | _____ |

Other _____

Please comment:

_____

_____


**13. Do you have any suggestions for additional groups that could benefit the community?**

   Yes ❑        No ❑

   Please Elaborate:

_____

_____


**14.  Do you attend these Moate based events?**

|  | **Yes** | **No** | **Participate** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Moate Agriculture Show | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| Moate Christmas Market | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| Moate Family Fun Day | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| GAA Matches | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |
| Charity Events | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

*Please Specify*: _____

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Other | ❑ | ❑ | ❑ |

*Please Specify*: _____

Please Elaborate:

_____

_____


**15. What might influence your ability to attend/participate in these events?**

   Please Elaborate:

_____

_____


**16. In your opinion, are the community groups and events well-advertised?**

   Well-Advertised ❑    Advertised ❑   Neutral ❑    Poorly Advertised ❑    Not Advertised ❑

   Please Elaborate:

_____

_____

**17.  Where do you get your information on Moate events/groups?**

Facebook ❑

Moate.ie ❑

Family/ Friends ❑

Parish Council ❑

Library ❑

Newspaper ❑

Word of Mouth ❑

Other (Please specify): _____

Please Comment:

_____

_____


## Rural Tourism Questionnaire:

**18. Do you think tourists are attracted to Moate?**

Yes ❑  Please elaborate: _____

No ❑  Please elaborate: _____

**19. Do you think Moate has potential as a tourist destination?**

Yes ❑  Please elaborate: _____

No ❑  Please elaborate: _____

**20. Do you think Moate is promoted as a tourist destination?**

Very Promoted ❑  Promoted ❑  Neutral ❑  Somewhat Promoted ❑  Not Promoted ❑

**21. How do local businesses help in the development of tourism in Moate?**

Please comment:

_____

_____

**22. What new businesses could be developed to enhance tourism in Moate?**

Please comment:

_____

_____

**23. Are you aware of the proposed Greenway Cycle Route from Dublin to Galway, specifically from Mullingar to Athlone?**

Yes ❏     No ❏

**24. What do you think are the advantages of the Greenway for Moate?**

|  | Significant | Very Important | Important | Not Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Business Development** |  |  |  |  |
| **Job Creation** |  |  |  |  |
| **Quality of Life** |  |  |  |  |
| **Social Interaction** |  |  |  |  |
| **Other: Please State** |  |  |  |  |

Please Elaborate:

_____

_____

**25. What do you think are the disadvantages of the Greenway for Moate?**

|  | Significant | Very Important | Important | Not Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Environment** |  |  |  |  |
| **Private Landownership** |  |  |  |  |
| **Financially Unviable** |  |  |  |  |
| **Lack of Support Facilities** |  |  |  |  |
| **Community Disharmony** |  |  |  |  |
| **Security and Public Liability** |  |  |  |  |
| **Other** |  |  |  |  |

Please comment:

_____

_____

## Rural Education Questionnaire:

**26. Are you aware of these educational bodies in Moate? (Tick as many as required)**

Primary Schools ❑

Secondary School ❑

Moate Business College ❑

Irish Rural Link ❑

FÀS/ SOLAS ❑

Other ❑

Please specify: _____

**27. Do any of these educational bodies contribute to the <u>social</u> fabric of Moate in any of the following ways?**

Vibrancy to the town ❑ _____

Social Events (e.g. Art Exhibitions.) ❑ _____

Development of Social Skills ❑ _____

Encouragement of Social Interaction ❑ _____

Other ❑ _____

**28. Do any of these educational bodies have <u>Economic</u> benefits for the area?**

Provides jobs to people within the community ❑ _____

Demand for Housing (Rental included) ❑ _____

Restaurants and Cafes opening or expanding ❑ _____

New Services being established (Deli in shops) ❑ _____

Other ❑ _____

**29. During the summer months, would you notice any of the following activities in the town?**

Summer Camps being run ❑ _____

Summer Schools ❑ _____

Child Care Facilities ❑ _____

Other ❑ _____

**30. In what ways do you think youth contribute to the town?**

_____
_____

**31. Have you taken part in any courses offered by any educational bodies in Moate?**

Yes ❑        No ❑

**Please Specify:**

Primary School                    ❑

Moate Community School     ❑

Moate Business College -     ❑        Early Childcare        ❑   Sports and Recreation
                                              ❑        Community             ❑   Healthcare Support
                                              ❑        Tourism and Business  ❑   Nursing Studies
                                              ❑        Computer Studies
                                              ❑        Other

Moate Business College-       ❑        Computers              ❑   Upcycling Old Furniture
(Adult Courses)                  ❑        Getting More from the Web ❑  Palliative Care
                                              ❑        Drawing for Beginners  ❑   Art Creations
                                              ❑        Other

Irish Rural Link-                 ❑        Community Development Training
                                              ❑        CPC Training
                                              ❑        Train the Trainer
                                              ❑         Other

Other (Please Specify):

_____
_____

**32. Did you gain the skills and knowledge that you hoped for?**

1- Learned Less, 3-Learned what expected, 5,- Learned More

**33. Would you consider doing a course in the future?**  Yes ❑      No ❑   Don't Know ❑

Please comment:

_____
_____

**34. Are you aware of the following connections between Moate and other educational institutions?**

Athlone Institute of Technology          ❑

Carlow Institute of Technology           ❑

Galway Mayo Institute of Technology ❑

Dublin Institute of Technology ❑

**35. Would these connections influence your decision to attend/ send your children to Moate Business College?** Yes ❑ No ❑
Please Elaborate:
_____
_____

**36. Do you think that entrepreneurship is encouraged by the educational bodies in Moate?**
Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know ❑

Please Elaborate:
_____
_____

**37. Do you know anyone who has taken part in any of the courses offered within Moate who has then set up their own business?** Yes ❑ No ❑
Please Elaborate:
_____
_____

**38. In terms of post-secondary education in Moate which groups do you think need priority?**
Secondary School Leavers ❑ Adult Learners ❑ Other ❑

 Please Elaborate:
_____
_____

**39. The educational entities are important in promoting social and cultural activities.**
 ❑ Strongly Agree ❑ Agree ❑ Neutral ❑ Disagree ❑ Strongly Disagree

Please Elaborate:
_____
_____

**40. The Teagasc office closed in recent years, do you feel this has impacted on training opportunities for the farmers in the area?**
 Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know ❑
Please Elaborate:
_____
_____

**41. What do you feel is the unique selling point of Moate?**
Please Elaborate:
_____
_____

*Thank you for participating*