

From Colonialism to Catholicism to Carbon Student Nightclub

A qualitative study on the decline of nightlife culture in Galway, Ireland.

Student name: Milla Gordon

Student number: 696342

Supervisor: Dr. Donagh Horgan

Master Cultural Economics & Entrepreneurship

Faculty of the Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication

Erasmus University of Rotterdam

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Abstract

Nightlife culture has been at the heart of many city's culture for many years, and provides economic, social, community and cultural benefits. Galway used to be a city with a varied and defined nightlife culture, but this changed in the early 2010s following the 2008 financial crisis. This research focuses on the reasons for this decline and the consequences felt by the city as a result. To gain insights, data was collected from twelve semi structured interviews with various stakeholders in the Irish nightlife scene. From the data, it is clear that the historical context of Ireland has resulted in Galway's nightlife decline. This is mostly through the lasting impact of colonialism and the Catholic Church on the mindset and activities of the Irish people. The impact of colonialism is felt through the fact that Ireland has developed a culture based on alcohol due to the wiping out of indigenous culture at this time, which leads to an overall negative perception and link to alcohol culture acts as a barrier to further nightlife development. Another key contribution to nightlife decline is the impact of the Catholic Church on legislation regulating nightlife spaces. Other key factors identified were the financial dependency on alcohol sales, lack of appreciation of nightlife culture as a legitimate culture form, overall negative perception of nightlife and lack of care of the Irish government. The major consequences of nightlife decline in Galway is that the city has only one purpose built club venue. The economic, social, community and cultural benefits are also not realised to their full potential due to nightlife decline. Despite the issues the development of nightlife culture faces in Galway, the scene shows a strong resistance through the use of alternative venue spaces to throw parties in, as well as the strong communities that form alongside such parties. This study contributes to the understanding of nightlife culture in Galway, as well as the industry surrounding it. It also highlights the importance of nightlife and its associated benefits within the city of Galway.

Key words: nightlife decline, nightlife culture, colonialism, catholic church, alcohol, community, lack of cultural appreciation, planning, legislation, space, ownership, commercialisation, infrastructure, touristification

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview of nightlife in Galway

Nightlife culture has been at the heart of culture in many cities for decades, with nightclubs acting as centres of self-expression, connection, escape and community (Nofre, 2020). However, the world is currently facing a global nightlife decline. Dance floors are increasingly empty, and club venues are closing at an alarming rate (Davies, 2024; Salamone, 2025). This research will focus on the decline of nightlife culture in the city of Galway.

Galway is a city on the West Coast of Ireland that is known for its cultural scene, being awarded the European Capital of Culture in 2020 (Galway 2020, 2020; Meany, 2020). Despite this, Galway has experienced extreme nightlife decline in the past few decades. In the 90s and early 2000s, Galway was the place to be when it came to dance music events, both underground and mainstream. During this period, multiple venues were open every night of the week both in the city centre and the seaside suburb Salthill (McCarron, 2024).

During the glory days of Galway's nightlife culture, many partygoers frequented the famed club the GPO, the journey of which sums up the state of nightlife in Galway well. When the GPO closed at the end of 2010, this venue space was turned into a commercial student club called Carbon. When Carbon closed in mid-2023, there were talks of turning the space into a Wetherspoons (Telford, 2023), which is a famously soulless, overcommercialised English pub chain. Since these plans fell through due to complaints from neighbours about potential noise nuisances (despite the venue's history as a club space), the venue has been left empty (Telford, 2023), collecting dust in the centre of Galway city.

The closure of the GPO marked just the beginning of nightlife in decline in Galway, which got significantly worse in the 2010s. More recently, the closure of Electric nightclub in 2021, following financial difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, marked the beginning of a period where Galway had no nightclubs at all (McGrath, 2021). This changed last year, with the reopening of the venue, but one nightclub is only marginally better than zero. This decline in nightlife culture is an issue, especially for the local population, as nightlife culture is an

important part of a city's identity (Nofre, 2020). Nightlife is an underdeveloped form of culture in Ireland as a whole, and people involved in the community are campaigning to fix this, central to this being the work of the organised group Give Us the Night (Give Us the Night, 2025).

1.2 Social relevance

This thesis aims to provide an explanation for why Galway's nightlife has ended up the way it has, and will therefore cover elements that are a central part to the urban structure of the city as a whole. It will also extract insights from a range of stakeholders involved in the nightlife community, which can be useful for improving elements of Galway's nightlife and the culture scene as a whole. It is important to note that Galway is already a part of a pilot scheme which involves the implementation of a nighttime economy advisor, implying that the city is already taking steps to improve nightlife. A thriving nightlife scene is a crucial element of a city, and this paper aims to be useful in identifying what needs to be informed or improved to allow Galway's to thrive.

1.3 Academic relevance

While many newspaper and magazine articles have chronicled nightlife decline it is underrepresented in academic literature. While some papers exist exploring the phenomenon globally, such as the work of Nofre (2018; 2020) and in Ireland, such as that by O'Sullivan (2024), there is a gap in the literature. This is especially true for Galway, where there has been little research conducted. The lack of information on this post-party era of Galway is an indicator of the importance of this research. This is important as it is necessary to gain a better understanding of the current cultural landscape of the city, but also to keep the memory of what was once great alive.

1.3 Research question

This thesis aims to provide readers with a theoretical framework designed to define nightlife, exploring its role in a city, an overview of nightlife decline and a contextualisation of this in Galway. With reference to the theoretical framework, the author will aim to answer the research question

What factors have led to the lack of nightlife culture in Galway and what are the consequences of this?

To provide the necessary context for the research question to be answered, a detailed theoretical framework will first be presented.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.0 Summary of theoretical framework

Chapter 2, the theoretical framework of this research, will first provide a distinction between nightlife and nightlife culture. It will then explore the overall benefits of nightlife culture, with an emphasis on social and cultural but including economic. An overview of global nightlife decline and the reasons for this will then be provided, before zooming in on the situation in Ireland, with a focus on pivotal historical events. Finally, the overarching issues associated with nightlife decline will be elaborated on.

2.1 What is nightlife?

It is important to differentiate between nightlife and nightlife culture. Of course, every city has nightlife, whether this can be observed or it is a private matter. Often, the nightlife of a city is a central part of its experience (Nofre, 2020). Every major city has its own distinctive nightlife experience, and is often a talking point with locals and visitors alike. However, for the purpose of this thesis, it is important to differentiate between nightlife experience and nightlife culture.

Nightlife experience relates to the act of visiting and socialising at any venues or businesses that operate within the nightlife economy including pubs, late bars and nightclubs (Lee and Lee, 2024). **Nightlife culture** relates to a separate, defined culture in the nighttime, which is more closely connected to rave culture and the values associated with it. This is a bit more nuanced and there is no one definition that encompasses it. In recent years, the word rave has come to describe a certain style of partying associated with electronic music (Witt, 2023). Rave culture started out as a subculture that formed at underground gatherings, often at repurposed venues such as warehouses and abandoned buildings, which often had illegal aspects, such as a lack of licensing laws or the use of illegal substances (Witt, 2023). While such authentic rave experiences still exist, the subculture, and as a result the word itself have been co-opted and commercialised, and the word rave has come to mean any event focused around electronic music with a slightly more relaxed attitude towards its associated hedonism. In 2024, a now deleted Reddit account states, in the middle of a larger rant about the commercialisation of electronic music, on a forum post titled 'What is a Rave?' that *raves are events thrown by the dancers for the dancers. No DJ worship, no corporate sponsors, and absolutely gatekept to keep the vibes*

pure. To those in the nightlife community, in today's world of late stage capitalism and constant economic and legislative issues, this feels to be the best definition of what real nightlife culture is in 2025, as this ideological basis is what separates nightlife culture and just nightlife.

2.2 Role of nightlife in a city

2.2.1 Social and cultural benefits

Nightlife culture is central to the social and cultural life of cities. According to Nofre (2021), it is an essential part of community and wellbeing. It also acts as a source of memories, as such memories connected to music and identity are formative, especially when focused on subculture (Laughey 2006).

At their core, music venues act as meeting spaces for people to socialise and obtain a sense of belonging (Whiting, 2021). This is especially true in the case of nightclubs, in which strong communities often form on dancefloors. The practice of partying is seen as a way for people, usually young adults, to temporarily deviate from the mainstream and their day-to-day life in order to express peace, love, unity, and respect and connect to one another (Cordes, 2012). Such events allow the fostering of connection, celebration of diversity, respect for difference, and musical enlightenment (Anderson, 2009), factors that create a strong sense of community. For such members of these communities, dancing to electronic music is a centre point of their identity within them, embodying the values of independence and connection (Anderson, 2009). Anderson (2009) and Cordes (2012) both explore that these communities can be made of various people from all walks of life, coming together in harmony on dance floors. This was proven to be true during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many people continuing to party despite health risks and lockdown requirements, throwing illegal raves in houses, warehouses and abandoned buildings (Ashford and O'Brien, 2022; Ravens, 2021).

Nightclubs also assist with overall wellbeing due to their role as third places, meaning that they act as places of refuge that are not home or work (Oldenburg and Brisset, 1982) where people can regularly visit to come together with friends, neighbours or even strangers (Mehta and Bosson, 2010). Third places are essential for individuals as they provide a way of fostering community and collaboration. This also allows space for energy release, which is especially

important in modern cities, where people often live together in high-density, precarious living situations. The cultivation of third place creates an asset for a city's culture (Oldenburg and Brisset, 1982). Nightclubs are especially important third places as they facilitate the community aspects of nightclubs and act as a safe space for night centred communities to express their identities and subcultural aspects, but they can also have economic benefits.

The social benefits of night culture are closely linked to the cultural benefits, which are centred around the formation of identities. Often, night culture is focused around various types of music based subcultures. Affiliation with music and attitudes surrounding music often lead to personal beliefs, which in turn inform identities (Cordes, 2024). Subcultures, especially those focused around music, are often associated with unique beliefs and rituals (Cordes, 2024), which further construct individual identities and the sense of community within the culture, while also leading to overall cultural value. According to Lobato (2006), nightlife offers individuals *a potential space in which identities may be formed and reformed, tried on and discarded*. Such spaces also provide an environment for creative collaboration and the fostering of ideas, and the networks formed in these venues should not be undervalued. Nightlife spaces act as cultural incubators in which creative people from all industries come together and share ideas, a process that has viable effects, especially in the music and fashion industry (Codrea-Rado, 2019). As put by Codrea-Rado in a (2019) *Guardian* article, *nightlife is like an angel investor in pop culture, silently incubating grassroots movements and social moments, and since the first iterations of the disco, clubs have been a breeding ground for cultural experimentation*. Recognising such societal and cultural significance of nightclubs and nightlife venues and implementing the measures necessary to protect and sustain them is essential. This is important as the social and cultural benefits stand on their own, but also have a role in contributing to a city's overall development in a way that serves both locals and visitors (Nofre, 2021). In addition to this, there are economic benefits associated with nightlife culture.

2.2.2 Economic benefits

There are also a number of economic benefits associated with the nightlife culture. Of course, the night time economy presents an opportunity for job creation and revenue for a city, and the more flourishing the nightlife culture the stronger these factors are. Nightlife has the capacity to contribute to various sectors such as hospitality, entertainment, and tourism (Lee and Eun Hak

Lee, 2024). The financial benefits of nightlife are also closely connected to the social and cultural benefits. When it comes to the presence of nightclubs and venues as third places, arguments have also been made that they are beneficial to economies as they can facilitate economic development of urban areas through spillover effects, as well as acting as a way of attracting people and investments (Cilliers, 2019; Beck, 2009). It is also important to consider the economic benefits of the cultural innovation that happens in nightclubs as discussed in the previous section. Not only does nightlife culture have a direct role in stimulating local economies through revenue and job creation, but also an indirect role in stimulating economies through facilitating art and art networks and therefore contributing to the cultural economy.

2.3 Nightlife decline

2.3.1 Global nightlife decline

Currently, the world is in a state of nightlife decline (Jordi Nofre and Eldridge, 2018;). The past decade has seen the mass closure of many venues and an overall lack of appreciation for the culture globally. Central to the decline of nightlife is the ongoing negative media narrative that has been present since the emergence of electronic music events. During the expansion of such rave culture centric nightlife in the 1990s, what can be described as an international moral panic emerged in response (Petrilli and Biagi, 2024). This led to media narratives shifting away from any economic benefits of this emerging culture and focusing on its negative effects, such as binge drinking, public nuisance and violence (Hadfield, 2015). At this time came a significant change in nighttime government, which shifted from a hands-off approach to what Crawford and Flint (2009) deem a 'hyper-innovation' of surveillance and control all over the world, and resulting in stricter policies and legislations.

In today's world, nightlife decline can be observed all over the world, especially in recent years. This is a result of financial difficulties, the above policing and legislative issues, and, most recently, the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the UK, three quarters of nightclubs have shut since 2005, with Sacha Lord, Manchester's first Night Time Economy Adviser and advocate stating there '*won't be any left come 2030*' if action is not taken and current trends continue (Davies, 2024). London is a city heavily associated with a vibrant nightlife heavily focused on rave culture, and yet 3000 clubs and pubs have closed between the onset of COVID

in March 2020 and December 2024 (Lawrence, 2024). While a major contributing factor, the nightlife scene's deterioration precedes the pandemic and current cost of living crisis. According to Davies, 2024, the trouble faced by the UK's nightlife scene is due to '*a powerful cocktail of cultural, economic and legislative factors*'. Intervention helped to slow this decline, with a 2017 plan by the mayor of London calling for and implementing action to assist in the rebuilding of the nighttime music industry. The presence of such an initiative begs the question, why do some country's governments put an effort into preserving the nightlife culture and others leave them to steadily decline.

In fact, despite techno's status as a cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2024) and the city's glowing reputation as a party place, Berlin's nightlife industry has also faced collapse in recent years. According to Davies (2024), in 2025 venues have only begun to recover from one of their '*worst ever years*' in 2023, with major clubs such as Watergate announcing their closing (Oltermann, 2024). Even with Berlin's famously lax rules and licensing laws, techno's cultural heritage status and the overall appreciation of rave culture as legitimate culture, clubs in Berlin are facing huge problems due to financial issues such as skyrocketing rent and property values (Baur, 2025). In fact, such conflict with the real estate industry has become one of the most common challenges facing the nightlife industries, but for cities where nightlife is developed under the definition of culture it is less of a death sentence. In such cities, where policy makers see nightlife not just as drink, drugs and dancing but creativity and community, there is more scope for compromise and progress in this regard (Davies, 2024). This is seen in Berlin, with lobbyists and authorities cementing a strong relationship. While this has not mitigated the financial issues faced by clubs in Berlin, it allows for greater funding for research and advocacy, which extends to soundproofing of venues, safety training, and curbing of illegal raves (Davies, 2024). With this research and more extensive data, Berlin is aiming to publish a holistic nighttime strategy in June 2025 that will include the involvement of stakeholders across the government to save its nightlife.

Nightlife decline is an international issue that can also be observed outside of Europe. In Montreal, the major issue with the survival of a nightclub is its relationship with its neighbours, which is often complicated (Davies, 2024). Policymakers are deemed '*hypersensitive to noise complaints*' by Mathieu Grondin, Canada's first nightlife commissioner. He states the policy

contains the word cohabitation close to 75 times, while the word artist is only there once or twice (Davies, 2024). This highlights one of the issues in the perception of nightlife culture, it being seen as a leisure based nuisance rather than a legitimate art form. This decline has been felt heavily in Ireland, with the country's history having a strong impact on this, which will be explored in the following section.

2.3.2 Historical context of nightlife decline in Ireland

The rich history of Ireland has greatly informed its nightlife development and can be defined according to five Cs: Colonial History, Catholicism, Celtic Tiger, (financial) Crash and the COVID-19 Pandemic.

2.3.2.1 Colonialism (12th to 20th century)

From the 12th to 20th century, Ireland was a colony of the British empire. This is a dark time in Ireland's history, with the Irish people experiencing heavy oppression at the hands of this colonial rule. Irish natives were characterised by settlers as savages who were '*indolent, complacent, cowardly, brash, violent, uncivilised, and incapable of hard work*' (Metress, 1996) and overpoliced as a result. In addition, there was what has come to be known as a cultural genocide, which involved the British attempting to destroy the culture and institutions of the Irish people (Metress, 1996). In Ireland, this means that the Irish language was forbidden, and laws were directed against Irish customs and institutions. It is also important to note that before British settlers invaded the country, the indigenous Irish people were either pagan or a part of their own specific branch of Christianity largely influenced by Celtic beliefs. Sacred dance was a central part of such pagan societies, with people being involved in dance circles and dance rituals both as a form of worship and as a form of leisure (Ezzy, 2013). This, in a way, can be considered one of the earliest forms of nightlife. In fact, some argue that the ancient Irish were a nocturnal people, with their 'daytime', meaning the time at which society would operate, starting at dusk (Hopman, 2024). The arrival of the British came with the arrival of Christianity, which largely wiped out such beliefs and rituals. Ireland gained independence from the British in 1921, but the impact of such cultural genocide and stamping out of the country's unique religious culture is still felt in the country today.

2.3.2.2 Catholicism (20th century)

Catholicism and colonialism in Ireland are closely linked, with the period of British colonial rule being intertwined with the oppression of Catholics. Imperialism in Ireland not only sought out to control Irish land and stamp out Irish culture, but also aimed to transform Irish beliefs and practices (White, 2010). Despite such efforts, including the enactment of Penal Laws, which stripped the Catholic Irish of their religious freedoms in addition to nearly all of their holdings, including land (Campbell, 2008; Kelly, 2011) the Irish people stuck to their beliefs and practices and as a result the religion transcended faith and instead became a symbol of identity and resistance against oppression (White, 2024). While this represents a society staying strong in the face of imperialism, the presence of Catholicism has had a lasting effect on the conservatism of the Irish people. To give an example of this in the context of nightlife, consider the history of the Dance Halls, and resulting legislation that targeted them.

In post-colonial Ireland, during the late 19th and early 20th century, Ireland started holding dance events in public spaces such as community centres (Ní Fhuartháin, 2019). Often, these dances were attended with the idea of finding a suitor in mind, and in their earlier years were a liberal place, where drinking, dancing (and flirting) went hand in hand (Morgan, 2025). In their early days, these dances were encouraged by the Catholic Church, who often financed their building or events. However, the overall conservatism of the catholic people got the better of the dance halls in the late 1920s and 1930s, and the Church began to associate such Dance Halls with *occasions of sin*, and worried that such drinking, dancing and flirting would lead to sexual misbehaviour (McLaughlin, 2004; Wulff, 2005). This was largely informed by the Anti Jazz Movement by the Catholic Church and Gaelic League of 1934 (O'Sullivan 2024). Both parties aimed to prevent the emerging jazz movement from entering the local dance halls, often held in GAA clubs, as it was deemed indecent and corrupting. As a result of this, new licensing laws were brought in to target the dance halls, the most significant of which being the Intoxicating Liquor Act 1927 and the Public Dance Halls Act 1935 (O'Sullivan 2024).

In 1927, the Intoxicating Liquor Act was established and, still in 2025, regulates Special Exemption Orders (SEOs). An SEO allows the owner or operator of a premise with an alcohol license to apply to their local District Court for an exemption from prohibited hours, meaning they can serve alcohol until later than usual in the case of special occasions. Such special

occasions are usually related to dancing, which must be licensed under the Public Dance Halls Act 1935 (O’Sullivan 2024, Gurdiev 2009). The Act states:

Subject to the provisions of this Act, any person may apply to the Justice of the District Court exercising jurisdiction in any licensing area for a licence (in this Act referred to as a public dancing licence) to use a particular place, whether licensed or not licensed for the sale of intoxicating liquor, situate in such licensing area for public dancing, and such Justice may, if he so thinks proper, grant such licence to such person. (Irish Statute Book, 1935).

A separate SEO is required for any venue for any night that wishes to stay open past 12:30 AM. This legislation is a large barrier to the development of nightculture in Ireland, and is considered by many overly conservative and outdated (O’Sullivan 2024).

Despite the fact that in contemporary Ireland, the direct control of the Catholic Church in nightlife is much less present in nightlife, its influence can still be felt in such legislation and policy measures. However, in 2025, it seems its influence is seeping back in via the ideology associated with the US led culture wars, targeting immigration and LGBTQ+ rights (Hartman, 2015). This has the potential to perpetuate further nightlife decline in the coming years. Perhaps the only time the influence of the Church was *not* felt was during the Celtic Tiger era, a time when the people of Ireland experienced a previously unprecedented and uncharacteristic opulence (Duke, 2019).

2.3.2.3 Celtic Tiger (21st century)

The Celtic Tiger was a period from the 1990s to early 2000s where Ireland was exceptionally rich, especially compared to Irish standards following periods of extreme financial difficulty (Breathnach, 1998). This means that living standards in the country exceeded the average of the EU, and as a result the Irish people, for likely the first time in history, allowed themselves to embrace a culture of opulence. In addition to this, it is thought that the Celtic Tiger period was what finally ended the hold that the Catholic Church had on Irish policy (Maher and O’Brien, 2014), or at least represented the fact that the already waning control had come to an end (Maher, 2014). In this period, the Irish people let themselves go in a way previously unseen, and for a few years it is as though their impactful history of control through British rule and the Catholic

Church never existed. This translated into nightlife culture, with the rave and clubbing scenes exploding in both major and rural cities during this period. Irish nightlife used to have something for everyone, being '*simultaneously underground and commercial, niche and mainstream, grass-roots and corporate*' (Power, 2022). This was especially true in major cities such as Dublin, Cork and Galway, where the development of this varied nightlife culture began in the 80s and exploded with Ireland's economy in the 90s. While it is difficult to find publications on this time in Galway, forum posts and closure notices give us an authentic picture of the glory days of Galway club culture, both in the city and the seaside suburb Salthill. In a 2022 post reddit user Fun-Pea-1347 responds to a prompt calling out a lack of night culture in Galway with

Salthill in the 80's and 90's had a vibrant nightclub scene. You'd have a few hundred people down Salthill out clubbing in spots like CJ's, Vagabonds, Oasis, downstairs in Trends, Castle and the Warwick to a lesser extent. Few places were renamed and changed hands over the years. But it slowly died out as the 00's came in. There were attempts to resurrect Salthill as a night time destination, but it never worked out.

It seems up until the 2000s, there were venues present in Galway to appeal to every music taste, open seven nights a week. It is also noted that, during this period, youth culture was prioritised and nightlife culture and the act of clubbing was recognised for its cultural importance (Power, 2022). However, this booming period came to an end with the collapse of the Irish economy and the resulting 2008 financial crisis.

2.3.2.4 Crash (2008)

It is no surprise that the 2008 Financial Crisis, which hit Ireland harder than a lot of other countries, had an impact on its nightlife culture. The fact that the country was experiencing an economic recession, of course, meant people did not want to go out, which led to negative revenues for nightclubs and a lack of further growth for the industry. At this time, the cost of insurance for nightclubs also increased significantly (Coors, 2022), creating a heightened financial burden. Perhaps the most severe change following the crisis was the increase in the cost of SEOs. In 2008, an amendment to the Intoxicating Liquor Act almost doubled the fee for SEOs from €220 to €410 for each order (O'Sullivan, 2024). This had a major impact on the sustainability of the club scene in Ireland, and such increased costs are a massive disincentive for

operations to operate. Financial issues lead to venue closures, and because of this there has been a decline of 83% nightclubs in Ireland since 2000 (McGuinness, 2023). In times of economic downturn, music becomes more commercialised, with genres such as 'recession pop' gaining popularity during such eras (Palomeque and de-Lucio, 2024). Recession pop is a hyper commercialised, dance oriented genre (Palomeque and de-Lucio, 2024). This music style acts a stark contrast to the authentic electronic genres that fueled the 90's club boom. In the years following the recession, the financial issues combined with commercialisation and lack of authenticity means that nightlife culture in Ireland never recovered when contextualised through this 90s high. The culture shifted away from this more official, facilitated nightlife culture to one of houseparties and DIY venues (Ryan, 2022).

Another impact of the 2008 financial crash and its resulting commercialisation was the shifting of Ireland towards tourism and appealing to visitors. While Ireland was always a major tourism destination, following the crash the tourism industry became a central part to the plan to rebuild and tourism began to act as a way of driving socioeconomic development (Kaul, 2012; Namberger et al., 2019). This has led to a new form of gentrification known as touristification, defined by Cocola-Grant (2018) as the shifting of the city from one that aims to cater to tourists rather than residents, providing visitors with sanitised areas, consumption opportunities and a middle-class sense of taste. This means, despite the overall positive economic impacts of tourism, tourism has a negative impact on the cultural industries, especially when it comes to nightlife as it waters things down to appeal to non-locals. In addition to this, financialisation of real estate, a massive issue in Ireland, and touristification of nightlife spaces leads to higher rental prices and resulting closure of clubs and other venue spaces, which are replaced by new commercial premises aimed at generating income, usually through tourists (Nofre, 2021). Connected to this, the financial crisis also gave way to the housing crisis, which is still a major issue in Ireland. Since this period, the government has been actively dismantling social housing structures, and promoting financialisation of housing and prioritising commodity values of housing over the basic need for having a home, leading to a decrease in affordable housing (Hearne, 2023). This housing crisis has only become worse in recent years, and is a massive talking point in the Irish media, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3.2.5 COVID-19 Pandemic (2020-2022)

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown had a significant impact on what remained of the Irish nightlife scene. At this time, many venues closed their doors, never to reopen. This global crisis largely coincided with the explosion of Ireland's housing crisis, and resulting overall lack of available spaces for residents and business owners alike. This means, not only that it is hard for those living in Ireland to find affordable housing, but also that existing businesses are failing due to property prices, with no way to open new ones, which hits the cultural industries harder than purely profit fueled spaces. This was summed up in the context of nightlife in a 2020 quote by Claire Byrne, in a Dáil meeting [Irish parliament] in response to venue closure in Dublin (Byrne, 2020; Deegan 2020):

We have already witnessed an excessive erosion of our club culture in the city in particular over the past few years, mostly to make way for hotels and student Accommodation... we are running out of places to dance.

While there was previous research conducted on the downward spiral of nightlife culture in Dublin, which was partially attributed to a lack of space (O'Sullivan, 2024), this issue was increased exponentially during the pandemic. This lack of space is also closely linked to the housing crisis, which, as mentioned in the previous section, has only gotten worse since the pandemic. Access to space is largely politicised, with this being especially bad in major cities, with properties being left vacant despite rental prices soaring and residents being unable to find somewhere to live, and the government facilitating this (Boland, 2025; Towey, 2025). At the end of 2024, 81,000 properties in Ireland were left vacant (Weston, 2025). This is inherently linked to nightlife decline, as not only represents the lack of access to nightlife spaces themselves, but also the fact that this housing crisis largely affects the younger population, who are essential to nightlife culture. If young people are homeless, or living in houses with rental prices they cannot afford, clubbing becomes a luxury that is not prioritised (Smith, 2025). This is a result of a neoliberal urban governance employed in Ireland, which promotes the interests of elites over residents, and has a resulting negative impact on regular residents (Baffoe, 2023). A commodification of the built environment and resulting housing crisis is a consequence of this,

and planning becomes exercise of market facilitation rather than something that serves residents and allows for social change (Baffoe, 2023).

However, despite the detriment of the pandemic to the Irish nightlife scene, the lockdowns changed the outlook of many to the importance of nightlife. For the first time, globally, access to social spaces and spaces for dancing was taken away, and the social and cultural benefits were realised as a result (Nofre, 2021; O’Sullivan, 2024). For the first time since the early days of rave culture, the need for physical spaces for dancing and congregating became something that people, especially young people, mobilised and fought for in a type of cultural activism (O’Sullivan, 2024).

2.3.3 Thoughts and criticisms on nightlife decline

One issue with the state of nightlife decline is its link to the desire to control citizens operating in the night as a response to the moral panic discussed in the previous section. This is a reflection of the fact that nightlife decline is not just an economic issue, but also has an ideological basis.

These ideals closely relate to Ireland’s colonial history and the impact of the Catholic Church, which manifests in the neoliberal urban governance style that results in the commodification of space and therefore lack of availability. This relates to the concept of the capitalisation of space, which is explored by Lefebvre in his 2008 critique of everyday life. In this, he explains how the need to have space is not just an abstract principle or means for both ideological and material control but that it should be treated as a blank canvas in which every day life can create meanings, values, signs and symbols (Zieleniec, 2018). With nightlife in Ireland, the lack of access to space means that this cannot occur.

With this, coupled with the overall economic issues faced by the industry comes the fact that nightlife has had to become commodified and has to rely on forces of financialisation (Bottà, 2025). This is especially true in Ireland, where financialisation of events depends on alcohol sales and appealing to tourists. While underground events can facilitate the development of alternative cultural practises, such as what is seen with rave culture and other counter culture focused nighttime events, this is difficult to sustain (Bottà, 2025), especially due to the country’s financialisation and politicisation of space which results in the housing crisis that consequently leads to the closure of venue spaces. In fact, overall capitalistic beliefs have increased their

domination beyond the economic sphere and spilled into the cultural sphere within the consumer society, invading other spheres of life such as leisure and rest (Petrilli and Biagi, 2024). This results in a distinct lack of culture that is flat, repetitive and homogeneous, especially when it comes to nightlife and its resulting decline (Petrilli and Biagi, 2024). Such colonisation of urban space leads to cities that are not for those who live there. This is especially true in the case of Galway, which this study aims to understand by use of the following methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research design

This thesis aims to answer the research question: *what factors have led to the lack of nightlife culture in Galway and what are the consequences of this?*. Due to the nature of this question, a qualitative research in which interviews were the main method was implemented to gain an understanding of the related socio-cultural contexts and allow the examination and interpretation of the participants (Bryman, 2016). Due to the more informal nature of the industry, it is also noted that there is a lack of formal data on Galway's nightlife, so it is necessary to receive verbal information and therefore gain knowledge about phenomena from the perspective of insiders. This aligns with Lapan et al's (2012) justification for the use of qualitative methods. The data collected from these interviews is analysed through a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is regarded as the most popular way to analyse qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is a particularly useful tool to analyse the way people experience, perceive and understand things, which is especially important when considering the nightlife sector.

3.2 Aspects of qualitative research

Seeing through the eyes of the participants, the first point of emphasis, means understanding the social realm through their perspective rather than assuming their incapability to create their own reflections (Bryman, 2016). To observe the relevant aspects of the participants' knowledge and experiences, the author did her best to adopt the perspective of the participant when interviewing them and analysing data. The second point is description and context. This involves having an understanding of the social, cultural and historical factors that shape individual experiences and behaviours. Having grown up in Galway, the author believes herself to have a good contextual understanding, but she was sure to take further steps to gain contextual understanding of the behaviour and opinions described by participants through non academic research. Identification and explanation of processes is the third point of emphasis, and this involves keeping the dynamic, evolving nature of social processes in mind. It is for this reason that a semi-structured interview was employed as a research method to gain information.

Bryman (2016)'s fourth point of emphasis is the flexibility and lack of structure in qualitative research, which highlights the fact that research can be dynamic, with the possibility for researchers to adjust their research question or methods. In response to this, the author adjusted the research question during this process, shifting from focusing on club culture as a concept to overall nightlife culture.

The final of Bryman (2016)'s points of emphasis is the development of '*concepts and theory as outcomes of the research process*'. As a part of this research, a detailed theoretical framework was developed, which was kept in mind throughout the process. However, this study was also carried out in order to develop new insights and recommendations on the nature of the nightlife industry in Ireland and obtain a better understanding of it.

3.3 Limitations of qualitative research

The main limitation associated with qualitative research is the fact that it is subject to the risk of subjectivity. Data collected through interviews will be interpreted by the researcher, who has their own characteristics, thoughts and opinions, and may rely too heavily on their own often unsystematic views about what is significant and the fact that they may have a personal relationship with the people studied (Bryman, 2016). The author is a 25-year-old woman who grew up in Galway but is now based in Amsterdam, where she has a heavy involvement in the nightlife scene. Having spent her childhood and adolescence in Galway, and, like many interviewees, had been experiencing the city's nightlife since she was 16, this was a limitation that was considered and the author made herself acutely aware of this limitation in data interpretation. Keeping this in mind, it is also important to note that, in practice it is difficult to switch off such the way one interprets things due to their experiences and to obtain true neutrality. For this reason, the author acknowledges this work to be interpretive while simultaneously aiming for impartiality when it comes to the interests of the participants by keeping an open mind to both different perspectives and experiences of her own.

Another notable challenge associated with qualitative research is fairness and partiality. To combat this, the author ensured the participant sample was diverse enough to obtain a range of experiences and perspectives. Because of her characteristics and connection to Galway, the author took active effort to distance herself from the opinions and relations obtained through

my own experiences and instead aimed to take a standpoint of neutrality.

3.3 Selection of participants

3.3.1 Table

Table One contains an overview of interview participants, their roles within the nightlife and overall cultural industry, and the length of their involvement within the scene.

Alias	Role	Based in	Involvement in nightlife scene
Áine	DJ, Promoter, runs event with John	Galway	± 5 years
John	DJ, Promoter, runs event with Áine	Galway	± 15 years
Sean	DJ, main campaigner at Give Us the Night	Dublin	± 25 years
Sarah	Nighttime economy advisor	Galway	± 1 year
Cillian	Long time party-goer, ex DJ, runs radio show	Galway	± 30 years
Emily	DJ, promoter, booker at Electric	Galway	± 20 years
Finn	DJ, promoter, ex club worker	Berlin	± 5 years
Owen	Runs most successful late bar in Galway, works with Galway Arts Festival	Galway	± 30 years
Rory	Party goer	Amsterdam	± 5 years
Connor	DJ, promoter	New York	± 5 years
Jack	DJ, promoter	Berlin	± 10 years

3.3.2 Explanation

The above participants were chosen to ensure a diverse sample of interviewees and therefore a comprehensive understanding of the nightlife scene in Galway and the factors affecting it. Both people directly involved in the scene and people deemed to have a knowledge of Irish nightlife as a whole were selected. It was also deemed important to interview participants with experience in both Galway and cities with more defined night culture.

3.4 Data collection

The data was collected through conducting and recording interviews, which were all held online except for one. The interviewees gave permission for recording and verbal consent for their inclusion in the paper beforehand. Following this, the interviews were transcribed, with the help of the built in Microsoft Teams transcription service, but carefully corrected. This interview data made up the data used in the data analysis. It is important to note that the word *nightlife* was used as a blanket term and assumed to mean the culture surrounding dance music and its culture in a way that is similar to rave culture when interviewing people involved in the scene, as this is the overall understanding of the word. When this was not the case, such as when interviewing the nighttime economy advisor, it was specified that this was meant for relevant questions.

3.5 Data analysis

To analyze the data, a thematic approach was used. According to Bryman (2016), this is one of the most common approaches to data analysis. He identifies four main criteria for working with themes: a theme is a category identified through the data by the researcher, these themes relate to both the research focus and the research questions, themes build on codes identified in transcripts, and themes provide a basis for a theoretical understanding of the data.

Analysis was carried out by first reading all transcripts and identifying themes discussed in interviews, after which core themes were analysed. Transcripts were read multiple times during this process to ensure a complete overview. It is important to note that, as *nightlife* can be a subjective term, this was taken into account during the analysis process. It was assumed that those involved in the scene believed nightlife culture to be that explained in the theoretical framework, and if this was not the case it was specified in the interview. Coding was done by

hand, first on paper and then on a computer. Relevant sentences were copied from the individual transcripts and then put under theme headings tagged with the interviewees name. Tones were also taken into account. These themes were then analysed as a whole side by side with the theoretical framework to identify the reasons for nightlife decline in Galway and the consequences of this. In the following chapter, the results of this process will be discussed on the basis of themes included in the theoretical framework, as well as themes that emerged from the interviews themselves.

Chapter 4: Findings

This section includes the results of the interviews. The findings have been analysed, compared and separated into the following sections: *Importance of Nightlife in Galway, Historical Context, Impact of Alcohol, Lack of Cultural Appreciation, Overall Perception of Nightlife in Galway, Major Issues Facing Future Nightlife Development and Future of Galway's Nightlife* and are organised with consideration to themes raised in the theoretical framework. The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of what led to Galway's decline in nightlife culture and the consequences of this.

4.1 Importance of Nightlife in Galway

Throughout the duration of the interviews, a clear understanding of the importance of nightlife to the city of Galway was obtained, with emphasis on the economic, social and community and cultural benefits of nightlife being the most significant.

4.1.2 Economic benefits

While nightlife itself is not a profitable endeavour, it still provides benefits to the economy. Connor and Finn both comment on the secondhand benefits to adjacent businesses, such as late night food shops and taxis, which of course provides a boost to the economy. A thriving nightlife scene also draws visitors to the city. Owen notes the importance of this, stating

What you want is something where people say, oh, let's go to Galway for the weekend because we can go see this and this and this.

Jack also points out how a thriving nightlife scene creates jobs, which has a positive impact on the country's economic growth. By continuing to allow the decline in Galway's nightlife, these economic benefits will not be realised as there will be no purpose built spaces to go out, and therefore no spaces to provide jobs and secondhand benefits.

4.1.2 Social and community benefits

The social benefits of nightlife in Galway were emphasised as one of the most important aspects of nightlife in Galway. Almost every interviewee stated that nightlife was where they met most of their friends over the years. The social benefits of nightlife also extend to strangers, with

interactions occurring on dance floors not found anywhere else. Cillian states (nightlife) is all about:

Experiencing with somebody else at the same time and, you know, smiling away to yourself and somebody catches you smiling and they look to you to smile back. And that's the essence of it, really, that it's it's human connection that you wouldn't be making on the street or in a bar or at any of those kind of scenarios.

Galway's nighttime economy advisor also comments on the social value of nightlife, crediting it for *reducing social isolation*. Nightlife settings give people a setting to meet people in a cultural setting, or to maintain existing friendships. According to John, the social role of nightlife is one of the foundations of its culture, stating:

Humans are social creatures. We like music. We put those things together and we kind of try and make a space so we can hang out with each other and socialise and talk about music and dance. And that's probably the fundamental thing that drives it, especially in the absence of money or financial rewards.

He also sweetly claims that *we're all involved because we like hanging out with each other*. The fact that, to be at a dance music event, you already have one thing in common strengthens the connections on dance floors, with Connor crediting such events as *the easiest entry point to find people that you know you have a common ground with and that you connect a level above*. It is for this reason that such strong communities usually form around nightlife settings. Galway is a smaller city, with an inherent sense of community, but Áine specifies that there is a specific community that has formed around its nightlife. John notes that the size of Galway keeps this nightlife community strong, as the industry is too small to fall out with people. Perhaps this mindset is how his and Áine's event has such a strong community surrounding it. Áine seems to get emotional when talking about this, stating:

That community is such a big deal, but it's not just me. Like we've had so many people approach us. Just being like we made these friends on your night out and we've gone for

coffee or this is a night where I actually feel like I can do whatever and it's just so, so nice.

As the world today currently operates in such an individualistic way, community spaces such as the one Áine and John have created are an essential outlet for society, and nightlife spaces are some of the only that facilitate this to such an extent.

The strong sense of community in Galway's nightlife scene is apparent in the fact that multiple interviewees referenced the others during their interviews in a positive light. It seems that everyone involved aims to uplift each other. It is also notable that Sean made more than one reference to *our community* in a way that clearly included the author, during his interview, which was the first meeting between them. The fact that the author was immediately welcomed into this community despite the interviewee's lack of information on her speaks to the strength and openness of the Irish nightlife community. This represents the resilience of the nightlife community despite challenges faced, and the importance of such community within this resilience.

While the way the interviewees talked about their community within the nightlife scene in Galway and its strong social role in a glowing light, this is bittersweet when considering the nightlife culture of Galway in its heyday and how much stronger these must have been at the time. With an underdeveloped scene, such benefits cannot be realised to their full potential, which may be the case when it comes to Galway's nightlife scene. These social and community benefits are closely linked to the culture and creativity that stems from nightlife culture.

4.1.3 Culture and creativity

Nightlife in general fosters culture and creativity in a way not so present in the day time. Connor describes the nightclub spaces as *essentially a cultural incubator* and such spaces, according to Rory, act as a *melting pot of people and expression*. He also comments on the importance of lower cost venues, because when people can't afford to go out, they do not become inspired to make music or become a DJ, which is a loss for creative communities. Galway has a reputation as a city focused on culture and creativity, as can be observed in the city's status as European Capital of Culture 2020. It would be assumed that in such a city, the importance of such spaces are considered, which is not the case. Such free spaces as nightclubs are important to the creative

industries, even with their negative connotations, as it is known that a healthy dose of hedonism is good for art (Iszaj et al., 2017; Wang, 2020).

Given the large student population of Galway despite its small size, the identity development aspects of culture explored in the theoretical framework are also an important aspect of nightlife culture in Galway. Younger adults need spaces to develop their identities, both on a personal and creative level, which they currently cannot to their full potential in a city with just one nightclub, which is a result of the below factors. The historical context of the Irish people has been a barrier to young people in Ireland developing their identity. Such historical factors have also had a negative impact on nightlife development overall.

4.2 Historical context

The history of Ireland, as explored in the theoretical framework, has an impact on Galway's nightlife development. This has resulted in Galway being a post-colonial society experiencing a lasting impact of the Catholic Church.

4.2.1 Post-colonial society

As discussed in the theoretical framework, Ireland's colonial history has had a major impact on the development of its nightlife culture, which sets the foundation for Galway's lack. Rory has a passionate view on the connection between the cultural genocide perpetrated during British rule in Ireland on the development of nightlife culture, stating:

Irish culture is rich and deep and there is a lot of folklore and nice kinds of stories and stuff like that. And it was almost erased by the Brits and I think that that's why nightlife had such a hard time getting started was because, you know, on top of trying to, you know, trying to fight for our identity, Irish identity, you know, clawing it back from the Brits after 800 years.

This reflects a lack of acceptance of new culture forms and wariness to foreign influences, especially in the earlier years of the free state of Ireland, as, in a way, the Irish people still lack access to their own. This relates to Sean's statement about Ireland's overall hesitation to accepting foreign music and culture, which both relates to colonialism and illustrates the conservatism of the Irish people:

The fact that we had gained our independence, at least with the 26 counties, I think you know, the Irish state, the Free State were now under this pressure to strengthen what they had to keep foreign influence out. And now some people were fearing that our culture was now going to be hijacked by other, you know, forces, including music.

It can be argued that an extra level of aversion to dance music culture during the 90s was the fact that the UK was a centre point of this new developing culture. Not only would the acceptance of dance music culture mean accepting foreign music types and the negative influences that come with this, but would also mean accepting a culture developed by the country that took away Ireland's.

The stamping out of Irish culture by the British also played a part in creating the perception that Irish culture is so heavily focused on alcohol, as explored further in section 4.3.2. As described by Jack, Irish culture should be focused on folklore and traditional music, but has over time become eclipsed by cultural moments such as 'splitting the G', referring to a drinking game involving drinking enough of your pint in the first sip that you 'split the G' of the text that reads Guinness on a branded pint glass. This also links heavily to the over policing experienced by the Irish people. This is born from a culture directly linked to post-colonialism that reflects a lack of trust of partygoers and dance music events by governmental bodies, local authorities and arguably the general public. This was summed up by Sean, who stated:

The culture of control, the culture of intimidation... They're the things that are actually more familiar for a lot of people rather than having this great night life that is unfiltered, where there's trust shown to the community and where we can go and do cool things without worrying about somebody coming in to shut and shout us down because that's essentially how night life ends every night, you know it's in in Irish nightlife settings.

It seems that in a post-colonial society, the Irish people still have a colonial mindset, and it is almost as though they see themselves or others as the savages the English thought they were, reflecting that they cannot emerge past the trauma of colonisation. This is especially true when it comes to young people, and as noted by John, the fact that dancing all night is something that is *for young people* already gives it less cultural merit.

This lack of acceptance of other cultures, both due to the ongoing attempts to reclaim the country's own culture and hostility towards foreign and British cultures, coupled with the fact that Irish culture has become surrounded by alcohol and has a heavy emphasis on control have acted as factors in the absence of nightlife culture in Galway.

4.2.2 Lasting impact of Catholic Church

As explored in the theoretical framework, it can be observed that the influence of the Catholic Church on the overall development of nightlife culture in Ireland. Sean explores their initial financial involvement with and resulting overall overseeing of events in the dance halls of the 20th century, going as far as to call them the *promoters of the day*. While this is a historical fact, his references to this and exploration of its relevance highlights that, although the Church now has no direct involvement in nightlife, its influence is still felt today.

This largely manifests in the fact that the outdated conservative legislation put in place by the Church is still in place. Sean explains that the creation of the Dance Halls Act 1935 and the Intoxicating Liquor Act 1927 were designed in response to social issues such as children being born out of wedlock and illegitimate children. This means that legislation was designed with targeting the dance halls, which were the dominant nightlife spaces of the time, in mind. The fact that such legislations still stand illustrates the impact of the Catholic Church on the decline of nightlife culture in Galway. Despite their direct involvement, influence lingers through policing policies and legislation.

Closely linked to this is the overall conservatism of Irish people due to the long history of the influence of the church. This conservatism stems from the lack of agency that was felt in Catholic Ireland. Sean states there was *a lot of fear around foreign music and how it made young people behave*, which hindered the development of defined modern music cultures within the country such as those found in the UK or Berlin. This is substantiated by Finn, who claims that *Ireland in general is just always stuck 20 or 30 years behind* and, when it comes to electronic music, Ireland's residents act as *an ageing population of boomers* who think nightlife is an excuse to *get wasted, take drugs, wreck the place, start trouble, and start fights*. This overall conservatism leads to such negative perceptions of nightlife, but also to its lack of development. Áine states, frustratedly, that if you don't work a 9 to 5 *the world doesn't stop at like 10:00 PM*.

Not everyone gets to just go to sleep... There's a whole other world at night time, which is currently not being facilitated in Galway as it is in other cities, which is reflected in Emily's statement that there's a mindset that everyone needs to be up early and working too. This is especially true for younger people, who seem to share this mindset in the country. Connor comments nightlife culture in Ireland vs New York, and how older people are much more willing to stay out late dancing, while in Ireland, the norm is that there is an early twenties expiration date on this.

In fact, the conservatism of the Irish people can be seen in the way they dance. Sean states:

If you look at how we dance, even Irish dancing, it's very controlled where you're dancing, where you're on by your side ... I think that in itself, you know, captures or symbolises a lot about the, you know, the control that you know, society or the church or whoever had over young people.

This quote illustrates how the influence of the Catholic Church can still be seen on Irish dancefloors, despite the fact they now have no control over dance events. Connor notes that in New York, people *really dance* to a point where he's *exhausted after* and that *outside of the clubs in Ireland, you definitely escape that rigid structure*. This can be seen as a reflection of the Catholic past of the Irish, through the remaining conservatism, as well as a post-colonial shame of letting go, due to the overpolicing of the Irish people under British rule. Both these factors hinder the development of the Irish dance music scene and surrounding culture, which is observable in the city of Galway.

4.3 Impact of alcohol

4.3.1 Financial dependency

The dependency of the nightlife industry on alcohol sales dates back to the dance halls, with Sean explaining how it became a **part of the business** model over time. This has resulted in the dependency on alcohol sales being a central part of Irish nightlife throughout its whole development. The nightlife industry is funded by alcohol sales, and club venues rely on this to stay open, which highlights the fact that events are seen as commercial rather than cultural. This

also means that, in order to generate any revenue, clubs and promoters must facilitate binge drinking. Connor expresses his frustration with this, explaining how this reliance on alcohol sales has a negative impact on legislation change and perception of the nightlife industry as:

They're just pushing back into this cycle of they're messy and drinking too much and it's too much of a public order situation. And then, it's like, well that's because you have to drink there because that's the only way to keep this stuff running is to fund it by alcohol sales. And it's just a messy cycle, really.

Following periods of financial crisis, such as the 2008 financial crash and the COVID-19 pandemic, this is exacerbated, with venues having to push alcohol sales even harder to recover. This dependency on alcohol sales for nightlife contributes to the strong alcohol focused culture found in Ireland, which has negative connotations as will be explored in section 4.5 regarding the overall perception of nightlife in Galway, which further hinders the development of the city's nightlife culture.

4.3.2 Alcohol culture

The financial dependency on alcohol sales is not the only factor that created the alcohol-focused approach in Ireland. A drinking-focused culture was present before the financialisation of alcohol in the dance halls. According to Sean, here alcohol became a social crutch of partygoers, allowing them to *assault* their social anxieties. This is a reflection of the conservatism of the Irish people, which leads to what Sean describes as *a bit of awkwardness about social engagement in Ireland*. The Irish are famous drinkers, which, as discussed in a previous section, is partially due to the restriction of Irish culture under British rule, and resulting trauma of colonialisation. This reputation has become a central part of the perception of Irish culture, to people living outside of the country but arguably to the Irish people too. This is touched on by Jack, who states that culture is largely defined as *something that when someone says your city, you instantly go oh* and with Ireland, this is *oh, pints of Guinness*. This focus on alcohol culture, according to multiple interviewees, has been detrimental to nightlife development in Ireland, summed up by the quote by Connor in the previous section. This also relates to legislation, with Jack stating that the Sale of Alcohol Bill, explored in the theoretical framework, *just encourages binge drinking* because partygoers see 3:00 AM as a deadline in which to get as drunk as

possible. This binge drinking culture was identified as a reason for the continual delaying of the late hours extension bill, due to the impact being in a club for only three hours has on Irish party crowds. To illustrate this, Finn states, in reference to Galway partygoers

*They need to expend so much energy in that four hour window from 10:00 until 2:00 that, like every single moment, if something happens on the dance floor you have like *screams*.*

He then explains when the clubs close and everybody spills onto the streets at one time, it gets messy because everyone has drunk such a large volume of alcohol in a short period of time. This is not just reflective of the rowdiness associated with alcohol culture, but also of poor planning, largely resulting from this negative perception. Multiple interviewees, in the context of the late hours extension bill, referenced this fact that all clubs close at 2:00 AM, and therefore push out their patrons at once is a massive issue, and that this should be staggered to avoid rowdiness. This represents a vicious cycle, that Irish partygoers are perceived to be too rowdy due to this alcohol focused culture and early closing times, but because of this rowdiness nothing is done to change anything. This is related to the negative perception of nightlife, which will be explored in a later section.

Áine states that the predominant focus on late bars in Galway, rather than nightclubs *makes the alcohol thing a bit worse*. This is because late bars are just that, bars that are open late, rather than nightclubs, which focus on music. This viewpoint is confirmed by the fact that Owen, a late bar owner, is frustrated with the fact that people aren't drinking as much as they used to post-COVID. Finn calls this kind of focus *senseless drinking* and in other cities he's lived in that have a more defined nightlife culture, such as Amsterdam and Berlin, the consumption of alcohol is for a greater purpose, due to its link to culture. This is a reflection on how in Galway, the commodification of nightlife is more important than the culture.

According to Sarah, the nighttime demands of the market in Galway are moving away from the alcohol focused culture, stating that the development of the nighttime economy is

No longer a focus on the standard Irish alcohol driven approach to experiencing the

night time. It's.. people want so much more. They want quality time, they want nice things, they want experiential stuff.

With this, she seems to imply that this represents a shift away from going to clubs and other nightlife venues, as there seems to be an inherent link to her. However, clubs are the very places in which 'quality time' and 'experimental stuff' can thrive. The issue is not with clubs and dance spaces themselves, but with Galway's current dominantly late-bar and alcohol-focused nightlife. This alcohol focused culture is, in part, what has led to the lack of cultural appreciation for nightlife culture in Ireland. This is largely a result of the overcommercialisation of towns and cities in Ireland. As money is such a priority, cultural value often falls on the backburner, which creates a vicious cycle resulting in lack of cultural appreciation.

4.4 Lack of cultural appreciation

The lack of cultural appreciation of nightlife was an important theme within this research. Each interviewee with ties to electronic music in Ireland, when asked if they believed nightlife was viewed as a legitimate form of culture, agreed it was not. John summed up the general consensus well, stating:

I think there is a kind of a cultural snobbery thing that happens there that's, you know, it is for going out dancing all night. And it's for young people. So it's seen as being frivolous and perhaps not as valid a form of culture as going to the theatre or going to see an orchestra or something like that.

Sean states that part of the reason nightlife culture is not seen as a legitimate cultural form is that definitions within the arts industry in general are quite open ended, with no proper definition of a cultural space. For this reason, nightclubs are viewed as commercial venues rather than cultural institutions, and as a result do not receive support in the ways that spaces like theatres do, meaning they have no choice but to rely on alcohol sales. This is a result of the neoliberal governance style explored in the theoretical framework, which prioritises capital over culture. As explored in the previous section, it is nightlife's heavy association with alcohol, and additionally drug use that furthers the lack of appreciation of nightlife as a legitimate culture

form. As Jack puts it *people just assume nightclub equals yokes* [Irish slang for ecstasy pills] *and pints*. In the eyes of the Irish general public, it seems that the artistic value of nightlife is canceled out by its association with substances, which is a direct reflection of the conservatism of the population explored in section 4.2.2, as well as the culture of control associated with being a post-colonialist society, explored in section 4.2.1..

When nightlife is viewed in such a lens, it devalues its importance massively, when the reality is that there are many important aspects to nightlife appreciation, most importantly the social benefits. As Cillian puts it:

It's just as important as going to the opera and it's been around for so long... I mean how some techno go back almost 50 years. But we're always going to communal venues to dance. And probably a lot more people than ever went to the opera.

Owen also expresses that he had to fight to get an electronic music event included in the Galway Arts Festival, and that it took him a few years to get this accepted. This represents the fact that Galway can be quite close minded when it comes to what is considered culture and what isn't.

This lack of cultural appreciation for nightlife is much more prevalent in Ireland than in many other countries. Berlin is seen as the pinnacle city of nightlife culture, with the techno music scene being a part of the UNESCO cultural heritage list since 2024. This acts as a way of legitimising electronic music culture, which is an important step in both development and maintenance of nightlife culture. Supportive measures have been taken in other cities such as Manchester, which Cillian notes is his favourite place to dance as an older partier, expressing how part of the reason they support this culture so strongly is their pride in it. While nightlife culture is not as central to the history of Galway as in these cities, such cultural legitimacy is still important within any city with a night culture. Connor expresses his frustration with Ireland's lack of such measures, stating:

*Having things recognised as a cultural institution has done wonders for these cities that it makes sense.... we're seeing all these clubs wiped out and all this sh*t, it's because we have no structural legitimacy behind it.*

However, both Berlin and Manchester are experiencing nightlife decline, as explored in the theoretical framework. Finn expresses his frustration with this in Berlin, implying that the presence of the UNESCO heritage site is performative, as the city still allows landlords to *raise the rent on clubs until all of them are gone*. This illustrates how this lack of cultural appreciation and associated issues is international, even occurring in cities famous for their definitive nightlife culture. This implies that nightlife culture in smaller cities is at a major risk. If this is such a pressing issue in Berlin and Manchester, it is a matter of urgency in cities with less cultural appreciation.

The lack of cultural appreciation for nightlife in Galway specifically can be observed in Sarah's response to the question of whether she thinks dance music culture is legitimate. Her tone shifts from friendly to uncomfortable, and she states:

I don't know why this question keeps coming up and why it's it's in, not that it comes up, but it's... I don't know why people are making such a thing about electronic music. Who cares? It's culture. I don't really get why it's been identified and really kind of... I don't... It's a music form. Who cares? I don't know.

Following this, she explains the fact that it seems it is the arts grant that dictates what makes something a form of culture in Ireland, which dance music is not currently a part of, which in a way answers *why this question keeps coming up*. She very clearly has an issue with this question, which is perhaps due to the fact that members of Galway's nightlife community are putting pressure to improve the existing nightlife institutions, which she does not see value in. She follows this up with the fact a new grassroots music fund has been launched recently, which includes *DJs* and *electronica*, both terms that she misuses, showing a further lack of understanding. She notes that this is due to the campaigning of Give Us the Night, who *see a dance floor equal to a theatre*, a statement that she disagrees with. As such a central part of the development of night life in Galway, her lack of respect for the culture surrounding dance music is an issue and it is clear she does not consider it a priority, which is a reflection of the greater overall perception of nightlife culture in Galway.

4.5 Overall perception of nightlife in Galway

The overall perception of nightlife in Galway is central to its decline. This has a direct connection to alcohol culture and the lack of cultural appreciation, as explored in the previous sections. From these findings, it is clear that contemporary nightlife development in both Galway and Ireland as a whole has been hindered by a negative perception held by the general public. Nightlife is seen as a hindrance to public order, with Sean stating that authorities seem to view nightlife as a *threat rather than an opportunity*. Such negative connotations have always been a barrier to nightlife development, with both Áine and Emily stating *negative connotations with drugs* as a major reason venues refuse to run electronic music events. There has always been a moral panic when it comes to the drugs associated with nightlife culture, and this was always reflected in the media, as mentioned in the theoretical framework section 2.3.1, global nightlife decline. Today, the media still portrays nightlife in a negative way, though with less panic and disapproval and lack of understanding. The current media portrayal was summed up by Finn, who stated

There was a good cover on RTE news about the Give Us the Night campaign and this is talking about nightlife being open longer so that people can enjoy it more and have more opportunities for artists. And then you have RTE on the six o'clock news. The first thing you see is a pint being slammed down on the table and it's like Ireland's Give Us the Night campaign and we're talking to Sean Sharpe and they're showing these shots of people drinking in a pub. And it's like, no, why not show people dancing?.

From this, it seems the narrative has shifted more to be around alcohol, which is more of a reflection of the dismissal of the cultural value than a moral panic. This sums up the way the general public seems to have separated the idea of nightlife as a cultural product, instead seeing it as an excuse to get drunk. This overall negative perception of nightlife culture is a large factor in the diminishing of nightlife culture in Galway, and acts as both a direct cause and a factor in maintaining the major issues facing the development of nightlife culture.

4.6 Major issues facing future nightlife development

4.6.1 Economic and legislative

The economic and legislative issues facing the overall late night industry and maintenance of purpose built clubs in Galway was one of the most important themes present in both the theoretical framework and interviews.

One of the most pressing of these is the financial struggles that both club owners and promoters face. As John when asked about the importance of planning states *I think this is a marginal issue compared to the economic issues that venues face staying open*. He also states that one of the biggest challenges facing nightlife spaces is the fact that there are more economic things to do with them, such as building hotels or office spaces, which he claims is *fundamentally the main issue*. This is closely linked to the concept of ownership, which will be explored further in the section 4.6.4 regarding space and ownership. There is a common consensus that the business model of the nightclub is not attractive to business owners, largely due to the fact that nightclubs often only open on the weekends for a few hours per night. Galway's sole nightclub Electric operates from 11:00 PM to 2:30 AM Thursday to Saturday, with the occasional Sunday programme. Income potential is further reduced by the fact that nightclubs are not often a place people show up to on time. This has always been an issue, with Cillian, referring to the Galway nightlife scene in the 90s, explaining how nightclubs would open at 10, but no one would come until 12. As the industry is so dependent on sales of alcohol, only three hours to generate revenue is a major issue that affects the sustainability of the nightlife scene in Galway.

Profitability for nightclubs is made even more difficult by legislative issues explored in the theoretical framework. Multiple interviewees stated this as an issue with regards to the development of a nightlife scene. Sean claims this is a core issue, stating

What we're missing now in the absence of a reasonable business model which we don't have in Ireland based on a number of factors, particularly around licensing, is we don't have many investors now who are queuing up now back in the day.

These financial issues also have an impact on the integrity of the scene, which is an important part of the counterculture associated with defined nightlife scenes, and identity development, as explored in 2.2.1, social and cultural benefits. This happens through venues refusing to explore music genres or overall dance music events that are out of the norm, with Emily stating that there is a lack of want to take risks, instead a desire to keep everything commercial in order to keep up and running. This results in a weak culture, and as a result a lack of opportunity for the previously explored cultural benefits relating to identity and taste formation and resulting creativity.

In addition to the economic issues venues face, promoters organising events in non-club venues also spoke of the high costs associated with organising individual parties and club nights. Jack goes as far as to claim that if he runs an unsuccessful party he will not be able to pay his rent. It can be inferred that organising parties is not a profitable endeavour, with Connor claiming

*No one is making a hundred thousand dollars a year running f**king club nights. It's a passion project for everyone.*

While this comment initially seems negative, it speaks to the resilience of the scene, with people who know they will not make any money running parties because they care and wish to share their love of music with like minded partygoers, reflecting on the community and cultural benefits of nightlife culture. Promoters still choose to organise parties and take risks despite financial difficulties. However, with the current cost of living crisis, it becomes more and more difficult to take such risks, which would greatly reduce the number of parties born out of passion, further eroding Galway's nightlife culture. Governmental support would assist in mitigating these issues, but another pressing issue is the lack of consideration by those in power.

4.6.2 Lack of consideration of Irish government

Another recurring theme in this research is the Irish government's lack of consideration for the nightlife industry. This can be largely attributed to its negative perception explored in section 4.5. This mostly came up in the context of the late night hours extension bill, which Sean revealed he has been campaigning for since 2004. This alone highlights the slow pace of the government when it comes to the consideration of the nightlife industry, but is hammered in when Sean states that there were *trailblazers* campaigning for this change from the 70s to the 90s. This puts into

perspective how long people have been campaigning, and yet it still has still not been changed by those in power. Multiple interviewees referenced the fact that this bill very nearly got passed after the world reopened post-COVID, but when Ireland's Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, resigned in 2024 and the government shifted the plan was once again put on a back shelf. This change in power has caused frustration, with Emily stating she has no hope the current government will change anything. According to Jack, this also happened in 2008, stating that the change was *literally pen to paper*, but the financial crisis caused the government to shelve the bill. Of course, during periods of worldwide catastrophes such as an international financial crisis and global pandemic, nightclub opening hours become more irrelevant, but the lack of care due to the government having bigger issues to deal was also a recurring topic, and has seemingly spanned the decades people have been campaigning for this change. Áine specified the housing crisis, specifically the price of rent in Galway, the cost of living crisis and the far right view on immigration as the three current most pressing issues, putting an emphasis on the cost of living. She notes that this is also a reason nightlife is struggling in Galway, as people do not have money to go out. She also stated that the slow pace of legislation reform and passing of bills means that such actions do not have as much public backing as it would have three or four years ago, which further slows things down.

One change that has passed is the implementation of night mayors and economy advisors, which Sean notes he pushed for, with nine being appointed around the country. However, Connor notes that this is a bit of a ruse by the government, stating that the mindset is

Let's get young people in by promising that we're gonna appoint a night mayor and extend licensing hours and we'll have all these young people involved and vote for us.

He voices that the Night Mayors in Dublin have done nothing to implement any change. In fact, when interviewing Galway's nighttime economy advisor for this thesis, the author got the sense that existing dance music culture and club spaces were barely a consideration for her. When asked what her plans were, she noted cafe lates and youth lates, and did not mention nightclub owners or promoters when speaking about the nighttime economy stakeholder forum. Of course this role is varied, and does not just include clubs and dance music events, but her tone when stating the nighttime economy that her job *isn't about a nightclub, that is such a basic approach to it* implies that she does not consider them a priority. She claims that *the nightclub is sorted in*

Galway despite there only being one currently open, stating that *it is really busy* and if *businesses aren't opening, there's a reason for it*. This conflicts with the narrative put forward by Emily, who is involved with the running of the single purpose built club in Galway, who claims the venue could be doing much better, especially when it comes to more unconventional events. While appointing night mayors and economy advisors is a step in the right direction, the lack of consideration for the existing nightlife scene by Sarah implies a lack of understanding and care by governmental bodies when making such decisions. Part of the way this lack of care manifests is in a lack of planning and suitable infrastructure.

4.6.3 Planning and infrastructure

The interviews make it clear that urban planning for nightlife in Galway is subpar, and there is a clear lack of consideration when it comes to nightlife. Sarah notes that planning for culture is more straightforward during the day, but when it comes to the night it is more difficult because *safety becomes much more paramount..* While this is of course a consideration, in other interviews themes like noise reduction and infrastructure issues were more paramount. She also notes that Ireland lacks the zoning areas and laws found in other countries, and that city planners only plan until around 6pm. There is also a lack of the possibility of spontaneous events in Galway, be those in the day or the night, with Sarah commenting if one wanted to put on a gig outside, planning would immediately ask a number of questions and request you get an event license three to six months in advance. Galway is a very residential city, and much planning for nightlife relates to its coexistence with residential areas, which makes such spontaneity difficult.

John also notes that planning cannot mitigate all of the issues associated with nightlife, and implies that improvements will not much improve the scene. He states

Planning doesn't help with that in terms of noise restrictions. You know, people hanging around outside and difficulties that they get into with neighbours and stuff like that.

This is an important note, as no amount of noise restriction efforts on a venue will stop people from shouting on the street which people love to do, as explored in the previous section on alcohol and people love to hate, due to the lasting impacts of colonialism and the Catholic Church.

Infrastructure issues were arguably the most common topic, with every interviewee commenting on the issues with the late night transport system in Ireland. All interviewees based in Galway said the city needs a proper late night bus system, with Owen going as far as to say it hardly has a daytime bus system. This adds a level of inconvenience and a large cost to going out in order to simply get home. Finn expresses his frustration with this in a comparison to Berlin, stating

It's completely preposterous and that it took me, even saying it out loud to realise, wait, you know, this is ABC stuff that you can facilitate for people to enjoy nightlife more in the city and this is nothing to do with opening hours.

He explains how on the weekends in Berlin transport is 24 hours on the weekends. In Galway, the last public bus runs before 11:30 pm, which is before many people would even think of entering a club, let alone leaving one. This transport issue was also noted in the context of extended opening hours, as there is no point in extending opening hours without extending the ways in which people can get home. That being said, with the current transport system, there is no public option to go home after the club when it closes at 2:00 AM either. This lack of infrastructure is not just an issue for nightlife, but also for the day to day living of those living in Galway. The planning and infrastructure issues in Galway are closely linked to the city's relationship to space and its ownership.

4.6.4 Space and ownership

Space in Galway, and the ownership of this space, was another central theme in the interviews. Sean identifies this as the nightlife community's biggest hindrance, stating *our biggest problem really is space and access to space*. In fact, space is one of Ireland's biggest issues in general, with the housing crisis being one of the most pressing issues faced currently by the Irish people, as explored in the theoretical framework. A lot of the narrative regarding space and ownership in Ireland is focused around the building of hotels, which is often facilitated by destroying cultural buildings, including nightclubs. This relates to the fact that nightclubs are an unfavourable business model, especially when compared to hotels. Cillian summarises this by saying the reason there are so many hotels is that investors would rather spend money on something you can make money off of any day of the week without having to worry about insurance and SEO

costs. Jack speaks of a nightclub in Dublin that lost its smoking area due to the fact that every building around it sold, and to lay pipes for this they tore up the venue's back. Slowly, the street around this cultural space is being converted into a hotel. This is almost poetic, representing the erosion of Galway's nightlife over the years, going from a cultural hub to a hotel wasteland.

Despite the fact that the country is allegedly running out of spaces to house both cultural events and people, Sean comments on the large numbers of buildings in Ireland that are *lying vacant until the right tenants come along*. In addition to this, he explains how the old ballrooms of the dance hall days, including the National Dance Hall had fallen into disrepair *under the watch of Dublin City Council*. This shows that, not only does Ireland not respect current nightlife culture, but also that its history is not appreciated. As a part of his work with Give Us the Night and in his interview, he calls for nightlife communities to be able to take ownership of such spaces, even if only for temporary amounts of time, to convert into short term venue spaces or throw parties in. This would not only be a way of utilising existing space, but also creating more cultural legitimacy, as it would move the nightlife culture of Galway back in the direction of rave culture as explored in the theoretical framework.

The entitlement of the people of Ireland when it comes to nightlife and the resulting air of ownership also came up more than once in the interviews. This is an issue with both investors and landlords, but also with the Irish residents as a whole. Noise complaints are a constant struggle, as is a result conservative overall attitude of the population. Jack expresses his frustration with the residents of Portobello's (a neighbourhood in Dublin) complaints about a now closed pub and music venue, claiming *you can't hear it. I lived in Portobello as well. You can't hear it like before* begging people *don't live in a city centre if you care about noise*. Áine also seems frustrated with this concept in conjunction with a lack of planning, explored in the previous section 4.6.3, in Galway, explaining how buildings are being built in the city centres without grants for noise reduction, resulting in noise complaints. Emily also notes that venues are constantly shut down or restricted because of noise complaints. Such entitlement and noise vigilantism is a direct consequence of the post-colonial nature of is a consequence of the post-colonial nature of Ireland's society, as it reflects the fact that Irish people are still trying to reclaim the ownership they lacked during British rule. This has a major part to play in the decline of nightlife in Galway.

Another issue related to the ownership of space in Galway is the fact that so much of it does not belong to those who live there. I wish to make it clear that I am not talking about the 'immigration crisis' referred to in current Irish media, but rather tourists, students and wealthy expats. The negative impact of such touristification is explored in the theoretical framework. Galway's economy massively relies on tourism, and businesses aim to cater to them instead of the city's permanent population, which explains the lack of rental properties yet abundance of hotels. You can also argue that students, both those from other parts of Ireland and other countries are included in this, as much of the city's commercial nightlife aims to cater to this population. Sean also states that property ownership in the country is becoming a *game of monopoly amongst Irish owners and international investors*, implying that many of the spaces catering to these temporary markets are not even based in Ireland. This is reflective of the fact that much of the space in Ireland as a whole no longer belongs to the people of Ireland, which is a major issue when it comes to the nightlife decline faced by Galway. Connor expresses massive frustration with the fact that culture is never considered when developing a city, but then is used as a way of attracting tourists and expats without being supported, citing Lisbon as an example

Culture is never used in the development, but it's used to draw people to places.. I mean you see this in every city, Lisbon is a big one at the minute that you're seeing all this expat kind of move to the cool cultural spot and then they just completely destroy everything that that was and then they'll have to go back somewhere else again and it just repeats the cycle.

This is especially true when it comes to Galway, which uses its reputation as a cultural city to attract visitors, without supporting the cultural industries, leading to touristification. Sarah's statement *I come from a culture background, so I would be [of the belief of] tourism as an output* reflects this. Thankfully she also claims she aims to put a focus on keeping the actual residents of Galway happy, although this is stated in relation to the following fact: if residents are happy, tourists are. The reality that authorities in Galway use its reputation as a culture-focused city to attract visitors to the city without offering support to this industry presents a massive issue to cultural development, especially when it comes to nightlife. In a way, linking back to the implications of colonialism explored in the theoretical framework, it can be argued that Galway's lack of nightlife culture is a consequence of a new era of colonialism, by tourists.

Despite the touristification of Galway, the resistance of the nightlife industry shines through, with John stating the event he runs with Áine and other underground events are cool because they are run in more unconventional venues, which tourists don't know about. It seems that an authentic Galway exists, just in a more underground sense, and the future of nightlife seems bright because of this.

4.7 Future of Galway's nightlife

Despite all of the issues explored in section 4.5, Galway's nightlife scene has displayed a strong resistance to the issues resulting in the city having only one club venue, mostly through the use of alternative spaces. There is also a lot of potential with the future thanks to the younger generation of partygoers coming in.

4.7.1 Alternative spaces

The use of alternative spaces in nightlife culture is not a new thing, with the illegal use of abandoned buildings and other spaces being one of the foundations of rave culture. However, the culture of raves never really took off in Galway, as noted by Finn, partially due to the colonial mindset and over-policing of the Irish people, as described in the theoretical framework. However, the use of legal alternative venues has always been present in Galway's nightlife, partially due to the hesitation of bigger venues to put on electronic music events. Emily notes that, in the early 2010s (post-2008 financial crisis), there was a real DIY element to club events, with free electronic music events being held in the back of *old man pubs* or bars. Sean also paints a clear picture of electronic music events after hours in the backrooms and upstairs of chinese restaurants. This has, in a way, continued in the post-COVID era of Galway's nightlife and despite the fact that there is only one nightclub in Galway, there seems to still be a lot of parties, they just occur in non purpose built venues. John notes that, since he moved back to Galway during COVID after spending some time in the UK and Brussels, that Galway has more places to put on electronic music events, despite the fact that most of the nightclubs closed in this time. Connor goes as far as to state *all the good things are not in clubs*. These include live music stages or backrooms of bars, or on the main floor of a completely redecorated pub, as with the event John and Áine run together, an underground club night with its own sound system. Áine notes that these spaces allow them to *use these spaces that we couldn't use, getting a really nice*

crowd, minimal difficulty, minimum security. And it's just good music and good sound. Both of them note that they prefer running this event in unconventional venues, with John saying this is because you can have more control over the night, with an emphasis on hiring their own security. This, similarly to the use of derelict spaces, allows nightlife culture to reconnect with the values and overall culture associated with rave culture.

This use of alternative spaces has also allowed for a fusion of what is perceived as highbrow versus lowbrow culture, with electronic music events now being run in theatres and galleries, such as Emily's Gash Collective's party in Rua Red, a gallery space in Dublin. This event was Arts Council funded, which is a big step when it comes to the cultural appreciation of nightlife culture. Emily notes that the overall shift from clubs to other spaces is a reflection of both the lack of purpose built clubs in Galway, but also because people are *becoming more open minded to electronic music in general*. This reflects a cultural shift in the electronic music scene, another of which being the fact that the nightclub as a venue may be becoming outdated. John states that *nightclubs as a kind of an institution are undergoing a bit of a rethink*. Rory also makes a similar point, stating that younger audiences aren't enticed by *dark rooms, loud noises, and flashing lights*. Appealing to the new generation of partygoers is essential in the future of Galway's nightlife, as will be explored in 4.7.3. It seems the lack of nightclubs in Galway isn't necessarily a bad thing for the flourishing of the scene, but more so a reflection of the country's treatment of nightlife culture, especially in the post-COVID-19 world.

4.7.2 Impact of COVID-19

One interesting observation from the interviews is that no one seemed to mention any major financial issues related to the pandemic, which implies that these have been mitigated in the 5 years since it began. John notes that the scene in Galway sprung back quickly after the pandemic, with a high demand and desire to be *out and about*. This, however, does not include those who were teenagers and new adults during the pandemic, which will be further explored in the following section.

Another outcome of COVID is the increase in people with a desire to DJ and throw parties. Rory says this is because, during COVID, *a lot of people realised how easy it was to DJ*. While he seems to view this as a negative thing, John seems excited about the fact that a lot of

people have picked up the art and formed collectives, the fact that Electric has reestablished itself is great as it platforms such collectives. COVID also created a new respect for venues, with Owen stating

I think post-COVID people realised how vital venues like this were, are, to the art scene.

Finn also speaks of this on a social level, explaining how COVID changed people's perspective on the importance of nightlife culture, saying the lockdowns were

All you need to look at to see what no music and no nightlife does to people... It wasn't always the case that we could say after if music didn't exist, or if night time if night life didn't exist, we don't know what we would do. Because so recently it happened and everyone saw what it was. And people were just going cracked sitting at home

While this newfound appreciation may be true, the reality is that there is still only one purpose-built club in Galway, so, likely due to the issues explored in section 4.2, this has not translated into support, yet the scene shows resistance through the use of alternative spaces. There is also a lot of hope when it comes to the new generation of partygoers.

4.7.3 Youth culture and the new generation

The theme of youth culture was the final theme identified in the interviews, which is fitting as young people represent the future of the nightlife scene in Galway. This new generation is different to those who came before, largely due to the massive impact of social media on their upbringing. This is both because of the fact that subculture communities often form online now rather than in person, and also are less strong as music is more accessible than it was in the past, so you don't have to pick a taste and stick to it. Connor explains how he believes he thinks Gen Z have a *fragmented relationship with culture* and can't engage with it as well due to this lack of defined subcultures in the world today, which is largely due to social media, and how engagement with music has become more isolated as a result. Cillian also touches on this, seemingly baffled about how dancing culture has shifted from coming together in a club to dancing alone in your room and posting it on TikTok, Of course, when it comes to what goes on in clubs, the mass presence of phones is also an issue, with Cillian saying they mean you *might as well broadcast your best gurn to the Internet*.

It is also important to note that there is a sub generation of young people whose older adolescence and young adulthood experiences were shadowed by COVID lockdowns. This has shifted their demands when it comes to nightlife. Emily believes that this is because they never had that experience of organised youth events or, more formatively, sneaking into clubs underage. These youth spaces are essential, and while the world has opened again, many youth spaces for dancing have closed down in recent years. Cillian, referencing writer Emma Warren, describes that this is an issue as they act as nursery spaces that teach young people how to dance with people and act in social spaces, so that by the time you start going to nightclubs you know how to behave.

However, Emily feels hopeful about the new generation of 18-year-old partygoers, stating that the city was full of final year secondary school students celebrating exams in a way she had not seen since the pandemic. For the future of Galway's nightlife it is essential to support this new generation of partygoers and allow power that the new generation brings to develop, and make young people stay out late again.

Chapter 5. Discussion and recommendations

5.1 Discussion

The data collected from the interviews aligns with the theoretical framework in the context of overall nightlife culture, and provides a deeper understanding of nightlife culture in Galway. It is clear that nightlife plays an important role in the city of Galway. Of course, the secondhand economic benefits and job creation are a part of this, but most of its value lies in the social, community and cultural benefits. Nightlife culture in Galway facilitates connection and friendship and reduces social isolation by creating communities of like minded people. These communities facilitate creativity, and as a result have a positive impact on the culture industry as a whole. The major consequence of nightlife decline in Galway is that these benefits are not realised.

The decline of nightlife in Galway is a legacy of the history of Ireland as a whole, with emphasis on the **lasting impacts of colonialism and the influence of the Catholic Church**. The cultural genocide faced by the Irish people during British rule resulted in the stagnation of indigenous cultural development, and as a result a wariness to foreign music as a whole, which limits the development of nightlife culture. This also resulted in the creation of an **alcohol-focused culture** instead of one focused on music, which leads to rowdy crowds and an **overall negative perception of nightlife culture**. This, coupled with the fact that there is a lasting culture of control in post-colonial Ireland, which ends up regulating this rowdy culture in today's world, is a massive factor in the decline of nightlife in Galway. The past influence of Catholicism is still felt through the remaining legislation in place to regulate nightlife venues and an overall conservatism of the Irish people, which heightens the negative perception of nightlife culture. This negative perception results in a lack of appreciation of nightlife culture as a legitimate culture form, which is another factor in Galway's nightlife decline.

The **2008 financial crisis** is also a major factor in the decline of Galway's nightlife culture. This led to a pushing of alcohol sales to recover the industry, further increasing the alcohol culture and resulting negative perceptions. The crash also coincides with the commodification of space and resulting housing crisis and resulting neoliberal urban governance of the city of Galway and lack of overall access to space. Following this period, the

touristification of Galway was also exacerbated, which has an impact on the integrity and accessibility of the nightlife scene. This impacted integrity is a factor in the decline of nightlife culture, and as a consequence has a negative effect on the reaping of the associated social and cultural benefits. The touristification of Galway also reflects the fact that Galway uses their reputation as a cultural city to bring in the economic benefits of tourism while doing very little to support culture itself, especially when it comes to the nighttime, resulting in its decline.

All of the above issues are heightened by an **overall lack of care by the Irish government**. This manifests in the slow pace of passing reforms to the existing legislation and passing of the late hours extension bill. Even the steps taken to improve the state of nightlife culture have fallen flat, with the appointment of a nighttime economy advisor that does not care or understand the importance of existing nightlife culture. The lack of consideration by the government is also reflected in poor city planning and infrastructure, especially the lack of late night (or even daytime) public transport options. This lack of infrastructure is a major barrier to any further development of nightlife culture in Galway.

However, despite all of the above issues, Galway's nightlife shows a strong resistance, especially in a post-COVID-19 world. This is mostly through the use of alternative spaces. Despite the distinct lack of purpose built clubs in Galway, there are lots of unconventional venues in which events are being thrown. This includes events thrown in other art spaces, such as galleries, and other venues such as pubs. This is not just born out of necessity, but also represents a shift in demand of today's youth. Despite their more fragmented relationship to culture and music engagement, and lack of demand in certain age categories, the young adults of today represent a promising new generation of partygoers.

The above discussion informs the recommendations to slow the further decline of Galway's nightlife.

5.2 Recommendations

Arguably the important recommendation is **legislation reform**. The Public Dance Halls Act 1935 and Intoxicating Liquor Act 1927 are outdated acts reflective of Ireland's history that massively hinder development of the nightlife industry and it can be argued it should be removed completely to allow the industry to flourish. This would reflect more consideration from the Irish

government, especially when it comes to mitigating economic issues. The passing of the Late Hours Extension Bill is also an important step. Such changes would reflect a shift away from the lasting implications of colonialism and Catholicism and putting more trust overall in the people of Galway. It must be noted that, in order for this to be successful overall, **infrastructure must be improved**. Central to this is the addition of a late night transport system in Galway. The city's overall planning is currently a major issue, especially when it comes to the nighttime, and steps should be taken to improve this.

It is essential that the government and local authorities take more of an interest in **the cultural and social values of nightlife culture** and take legitimate measures to improve the industry. This includes hiring nighttime economy advisors who align with existing nightlife culture and recognise its importance. This would be a massive step towards appreciating nightlife culture as a legitimate culture form. With this, it is also important to reform the perception of the general public and government of nightlife. This can be done through moving the focus away from the alcohol culture it is associated with, possibly through creating a narrative that emphasises the benefits of nightlife, with emphasis on those focused around socialising and community. To reform perception, it is also important to reduce rowdiness, which could possibly be done through education and social safety training. Not only would this be an improvement for nightlife culture, but also the overall perception of Irish culture and people, which would act as a way of reclaiming what was taken during colonialism and controlled during the height of the Catholic Church's influence.

Adaptive reuse as a concept is an important recommendation, and in the context of Galway involves temporary use of, for example, empty or derelict buildings, top floors and basements of hotels and office buildings after hours, or warehouses as spaces to hold dance music events. Not only would this create a higher volume of usable club-type spaces, but would also allow Galway to develop their own defined nightlife culture surrounding this.

Related to this is the **encouraged use of alternative spaces**. This would act as a way of reclaiming ownership of spaces within the country, which is especially important during this time of housing crisis and commodification of space. Adaptive reuse also acts as an opportunity to use existing spaces, which have the capacity to operate outside of being a club venue alone, to offer cheaper tickets to events and therefore allow more risks to be taken with events, be this

musically or other. This is likely to have a positive impact on community building and fostering creativity within the scene. Both adaptive reuse and the use of alternative spaces have potential to assist with cultural legitimacy as both acts are aligned with the values and activities associated with original rave culture. The use of art spaces such as galleries to create fusion events is another recommendation in regards to alternative spaces. This acts as a way of utilising existing potential 'venue' spaces and also could play a role in reforming the perception of nightlife culture through its connection to more highbrow culture forms, and increasing overall cultural appreciation for the scene. Related to this is the recognition of nightclubs as cultural institutions, and therefore allow them to avail of the benefits offered to galleries and theatres. This would reflect a reforming of the negative perceptions associated with nightlife culture and assist in mitigating economic issues.

Another recommendation is to **focus on the newer generations of partygoers**. The importance of young people when it comes to nightlife cannot be understated. This does not just refer to the new generation of legal adults, but also to teenagers who are not old enough to go to clubs (although in previous generations this never stopped them). The post-COVID teenaged generation are now adults, and according to the data ready to go out and stay out. This new market should be allowed to flourish, and if the above recommendations are taken into account this will allow for future generations of partygoers to experience a thriving scene. Youthful culture is an essential part of an individual's lives and overall society, and this should be allowed to thrive. It is important the people of Galway let go of the mindsets of control and conservatism held as a result of colonialism and Catholicism and let young people rebel. However, with this should also come education for these young party people, both through actual educational measures and through experience. The lack of nursery spaces explored in the previous section regarding youth culture is a massive issue, as not only does it not allow teenagers to develop social skills, lack of experience also often leads to lack of desire for more. This means it is also important to ensure young people have spaces to have early experiences in, be this in designated youth spaces or youth nights in adult spaces. There is a strong new generation of partiers coming in: a generation that can set the standard for years to come if given the right environment to do so.

Finally, despite the financial implications of this, to protect Galway's nightlife culture it is essential to **decentralise tourism**. Touristification is a death sentence for the integrity of the nightlife scene and represents a new era of colonisation in the city of Galway. It is unlikely that this will be a recommendation taken by the neoliberal authorities in the city itself, so this is directed towards the individual actors within Galway's small but strong nightlife community.

Conclusion

This research was guided by the question: **what factors have led to the lack of nightlife culture in Galway and what are the consequences of this?** Based on the data collected from the interviews and ensuing discussion, it can be concluded that, at the core of nightlife decline in Galway is the city's historical context, with emphasis on the lasting effects of colonialism and the influence of the Catholic Church. Being a post-colonial society, Galway experiences both direct and indirect enduring effects of this aspect of its history. This comes in the more direct overpolicing of its citizens, and indirectly in the form of the alcohol focused culture resulting from the cultural genocide of the past. The lasting impact of the Catholic Church also has both a direct and indirect effect on nightlife decline in Galway. This is evident from the reality that the legislation put in place to target the dance halls almost 100 years ago still stands, as does the overall conservatism of the Irish people.

The impact of alcohol culture is also one of the leading factors in Galway's nightlife decline. The industry's dependency on alcohol sale, largely due to a lack of cultural legitimacy, has maintained the binge drinking culture that has been present since British rule in Ireland. Following the 2008 financial crash, this dependency on alcohol sales increased, which led to a commodification of nightlife culture and therefore further lack of cultural appreciation. This alcohol culture, coupled with the limited hours Galway's partygoers have to expend energy in clubs creates a rowdiness in Galway's crowds and a negative perception of nightlife culture as a whole. This negative perception then stands in the way of any reform for the industry, and as a result a vicious cycle is created where nightlife culture is not given an opportunity to improve because of the factors that caused its decline. Any of the above issues are heightened by the lack of care of the Irish government and resulting poor planning and infrastructure issues.

The interview data also painted a picture of the consequences of Galway's nightlife decline. The lack of purpose-built clubs is a major one, as at present Galway still only has one nightclub. It is also clear that in the current state, the economic benefits, namely benefits to adjacent businesses and job creation, are not being realised to their full potential. A lack of spaces also means that the whole social impact of nightlife culture, and its impact on culture and creativity, is also not being fulfilled. However, it seems that a strong nightlife community has

formed within the scene in Galway, with the event run by Áine and John having a major role to play in this. The nightlife culture in Galway shows a strong resistance despite the challenges it faces. Central to this resistance is the use of alternative spaces to throw electronic music events, especially after COVID. This, in conjunction with the communities formed around such events and through the industry highlights the importance of nightlife culture in the city. Despite all of the forces working against them, the people of Galway will get together to dance – even if there are no clubs to do so in.

Limitations and scope for future research

Although this thesis revealed valuable insights and information, there are also limitations. The main limitation is that thematic analysis is often subjective due to the fact that it is up to the author alone to interpret it. This can lead to bias in some areas, especially as the author has a strong connection to Galway and its nightlife. This may lead to the misprioritisation of certain topics, and some being more prominently discussed in the study. Another limitation is that the sample could be more diverse. Ideally, interviewees would be involved with the policy decisions in Ireland or a part of local or national government, but due to scheduling problems this was not a possibility. This would have allowed a different perspective on the legislative issues faced by the nightlife in Galway.

This study also offers scope for further research. One example of suggested research would be the best ways to implement the recommendations discussed in the previous section. As the nightlife scene in Galway is one that seems to be constantly undergoing changes and is very dynamic, a more long term study could be completed to observe these changes and formulate a best practice plan for the future of the scene.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

	Questions	Themes	References
Baseline understanding/introduction	<p>Introduction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What is your role in Galway nightlife? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How long have you been involved? Why did you choose to get involved in Galway nightlife? Is this a full time job for you? Would you like it to be? Tell me a bit about how the Galways scene has evolved over the years 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Economic issues Importance of nightlife 	
Macro context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What do you think the role of nightlife is in a city? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of nightlife Planning/infrastructure Lack of consideration of 	Olvasen, 2004; Cordes 2012; Anderson, 2009; Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982; Nofre, 2021

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What are the (social, economic, environmental, health) benefits? How important is it? b. Do you view it as having a similar cultural role to theatre in the city? <p>5. How do you view the role of urban development in nightlife?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Do you think this is different from other culture forms, is it sufficiently accommodated in planning processes? 	Irish government	
Meso context	<p>6. What is your understanding of how planning for culture happens in Ireland, if at all?</p> <p>7. How has urban development or planning impacted the nightlife in Ireland over recent years?</p> <p>8. How much of Galway's dying nightlife scene can be attributed to a lack of cultural appreciation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Do you think this is just for nightlife or all culture forms b. Do you think the benefits of nightlife are underappreciated by the government/policy makers/city planners? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of cultural appreciation 2. Planning and infrastructure 3. Overall perception of nightlife 	O'Sullivan, 2024; Baffoe, 2023; Petrilli and Biagi, 2024; Nofre, 2020
Micro context	<p>9. Has nightlife in Galway changed since you've been involved in the scene?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why do you think this is? What do you think of the general state of nightlife in Galway? b. Can you compare this to other cities you have worked in or just partied in? <p>10. What is your opinion on the recent (or not so recent) proposed changes to Irish nightlife? Late night hours extension, sale of alcohol bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Do you think this is enough? <p>11. What do you think can be done better or changed completely to improve nightlife in Galway?</p> <p>12. If things continue the way they are, how do you see the future of nightlife in Galway?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Future of nightlife in Galway 2. Legislative issues 3. Planning and infrastructure 4. Youth culture 5. Impact of alcohol 	O'Sullivan, 2024; Nofre, 2020; McLaughlin, 2004

Appendix B: Thematic analysis

Category	Themes	Description	No of interviewees that mentioned this theme
Historical context			
	Post-colonial society	Lasting impact of colonialism	3
	Catholic church	Lasting impact of Catholicism	6
Importance of nightlife	Economic benefits	Financial benefits of nightlife	3
	Social/ community benefits	Social benefits of nightlife	7
	Culture/creativity	Impact of nightlife on culture and creativity	2
Alcohol			
	Financial dependency	Financialisation of alcohol in nightlife	5
	Alcohol culture	Alcohol focused culture of Ireland as a whole and nightlife culture	10
Lack of cultural appreciation		Lack of recognition of nightlife as a legitimate culture form	10
Perception		Overall negative perception of nightlife culture	9

Overall issues facing nightlife culture			
	Economic	Financial issues faced by nightlife industry	8
	Legislative	Legislative issues faced by nightlife industry	7
	Govermental	Lack of consideration of Irish government towards nightlife industry	7
	Planning/infrastructure	Urban planning and infrastructure issues faced by nightlife industry	8
	Space / ownership	Overall attitudes towards ownership in Galway and resulting issues regarding access to space faced by nightlife industry	8
Future of nightlife			
	Alternative spaces	Use of alternative spaces by stakeholders in the nightlife industry in response to nightlife decline	7
	COVID-19	Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Galway's nightlife industry	11
	Young people	Overall attitude of young people towards nightlife in Galway	6

Appendix C: Candidate details

Name	Details	Interview date
Áine	DJ, promoter, based in Galway	15th April 2025
John	DJ, promoter, based in Galway	15th April 2025
Sean	DJ, Founder of Give us the night, based in Dublin	23 April 2025
Sarah	Galway's nighttime economy advisor	24th April 2025
Cillian	DJ, radio show host, long time involvement in Galway's nightlife, long time partygoer	18th April 2025
Emily	DJ, promoter, runs Electric	18th April 2025
Finn	DJ, club worker, promoter, promoter, experience in Galway, Amsterdam and Berlin, based in Berlin	23rd April 2025
Owen	Runs Galway's most successful late bar, assists with Galway arts festival	1st May 2025
Rory	Partygoer, experience in Galway and Amsterdam, based in Amsterdam	29th April 2025

Connor	Promoter, experience in Dublin and New York, based in New York	6th May 2025
Jack	DJ, promoter, experience in Dublin and Berlin, based in Berlin	6th May 2025