



The mapping LGBTQ lives at NUI Galway - A pilot project

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Working Paper – the Mapping LGBTQ Lives at NUI Galway - A Pilot Project

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The aim of this working paper is to seek feedback from participants in the project and to invite comment/ discussion from members of the wider LGBTQ+ communities. We also invite responses from people who have experiences of partnerships between NUI Galway (or other higher education institutes) and members of the wider community to promote the rights of people who identify as part of sexual and gender minorities.

1) Project Summary

On 13 August 2019, as part of the annual Galway Pride Festival 2019, NUI Galway LGBTQ+ Staff Network & the Students' Union hosted a talk by community activist Nuala Ward. Throughout her talk, Nuala made multiple references to the key role played by NUI Galway staff and students in the development of LGBTQ+ rights and activism on and off campus. Many of us were not aware of the key role NUI Galway played in the development of, for example, a telephone support line and a safe space for LGBTQ+ people and their family members in the early years of LGBTQ+ activism in Galway and beyond and the flourishing of LGBTQ+ creativity in Galway. This constructivist grounded theory project aimed to identify, raise awareness about and to celebrate the people and places on campus that contributed to the development of LGBTQ+ rights, services and culture in Galway and further afield. See point 4 below for additional information. The Office of the Vice President for Equality and Diversity awarded funding for research activities and dissemination of findings of this project.

2) Project Team (Individuals or Unit/Schools involved)

Committee members of the LGBTQ+ Staff Network at NUI Galway; Declan Coogan, School of Political Science & Sociology; Kylie Kinsella, MA student with the School of Political Science & Sociology, NUI Galway.

3) Project Activities included the following:

- Proposal development and discussion with the Committee of the LGBTQ+ Staff Network at NUI Galway;
- Meetings with MA student and the Director of the MA programme to prepare for the project's research activities and design;
- Development and submission of application for the School Research Ethics Committee (approval granted);
- Project related research and administration; project redesign due to COVID 19;
- Weekly research and project supervision meetings for the duration of the data gathering stage of the project;

- Identification, contact with and set up of interviews with research participants;
- Research interviews, preparation/ set up/ transcription and analysis
- Preparation of report and presentations at the conclusion of the data gathering and analysis stage of the project;
- Dissemination of project findings.

4) Project Completion

The following activities were completed as part of the Mapping LGBT+ Lives Project at NUI Galway:

Researcher recruited to the project; Recorded interviews with 3 people who were involved with or who remember those who were involved in the development of LGBT+ rights and services in NUI Galway during key periods: (1) pre-decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland, (2) post-decriminalisation and (3) pre-marriage equality and gender recognition constitutional/ legislative changes.

Data analysis to identify key events and actions, common themes among interviewees and to identify any findings that could contribute to the further development of LGBT+ rights and services;

The identification of the places at NUI Galway that were important for the development of LGBT+ rights and services in Galway, on and off campus;

A public seminar on campus about the project has had to be re-scheduled due to COVID 19 public health restrictions. It is hoped to host a public event to disseminate the findings of the project, collect additional historical information and to develop links between NUI Galway and community agencies in the west of Ireland in the academic year 2021-22.

Events for the dissemination of project findings included the following:

- (a) the findings were shared with the committee members of the LGBT+ Staff Network at NUI Galway;
- (b) at the All Ireland Social Work Research and Education Forum (online) on 7 January 2021;
- (c) the projects findings were shared with NUI Galway students and staff during a webinar hosted by NUI Galway's LGBT+ Staff Network on 18 February 2021;
- (d) a paper based on the findings of the project was presented at the 4th Global Social Work and Sexuality conference (online) on 10 September 2021.

5) Lessons Learned and Recommendations

We have achieved all, except one (a public on campus event about the project) of the objectives of the project. The main findings are outlined below:

- A. There is significant evidence **of active partnerships involving students, staff members and the wider Galway city community to promote LGBT+ rights and culture**. Participant 1 reflected this through the observation that *"There were people outside the College (campus) helping to run things and organise things...great friendships developed in Pluto and outside of the university"*. Participant 2 pointed to the marriage equality referendum and campaigns in 2015 as examples of students, staff and people in the wider community working together

- to promote equality. Participant 2 also referred to campaigns to promote gender inclusive policies and, for example, all-gender toilet facilities on campus.
- B. Although some perceived the then University College Galway as a conservative institution, **the university supported the establishment of an LGBT+ student society (Pluto) in the 1992, before the decriminalisation of homosexuality** in Ireland in 1993. Participant 1, for example noted, *“College authorities went out on a limb and were very supportive but it was seen as a very conservative college....some people felt they couldn’t come out”*. The University also permitted regular social events for LGBT+ people, such as discos on campus.
 - C. At different eras, some people were reluctant to be fully open about their LGBT+ identity but there were places on campus, such as the IT Building where the LGBT+ student groups had their meetings that gender and sexual minority people experienced as safe spaces. Participant 2 stated *“The IT Building was like **a haven on campus**, often very quiet and empty in the evenings...**a space to relax away from busy places”***. Other significant spaces identified by participants included the **Quadrangle, the McMunn Theatre and, off campus the Family Planning Clinic, Teach Solais** (the LGBT Community Resource Centre in Galway) and **Tigh Neachtain’s** bar.
 - D. One participant suggested that the then UCG played a significant role in the **development of the nightclub scene in the mid-late 1990s** which then developed in Salthill. Participant 1 linked this to the success of the gay student discos on campus which drew many people from the entire west coast of Ireland as there was then **no other place for LGBT+ people to socialise together**.
 - E. Although much as been achieved in the promotion of LGBT+ rights, participants 2 and 3 reflected on work that remains to be done. This is evident for example in participant 2’s observation that, *“**A lot of work still needs to be done on visibility, active visibility...recognising the struggles LGBT+ students and other minorities face”***. Participant 3 noted the LGBT+ Ally Programme at NUI Galway presently but pointed to the need for advocacy and activism.
 - F. Through this small-scale pilot project, we have laid the foundation **for and recommend further research into local partnerships for change and activism** both on campus and off campus involving students, staff and individuals/ groups outside the campus.
 - G. It also raises **questions about the kinds of action, activism and partnerships that are still required for the realisation of the human rights** of people in minority groups, including, but not confined to individuals and groups who identify as LGBT+.
 - H. I hope to schedule a public event to publicise further the findings of the research.

Although this was a small-scale pilot project, we have achieved the aims of identifying and celebrating people, places and events that were significant in the evolution of LGBT+ rights and culture on and off campus. We have also highlighted the importance of supportive and encouraging spaces and places for human rights activism and for the promotion of the cultural and social rights of gender and sexual minority people.

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