



# THE CILL RIALAIG PROJECT

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15<sup>th</sup> November 2012

Mr Jimmy Deenihan  
**Minister** of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht  
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht,  
Room 3.15,  
Kildare St,  
Dublin 2

Dear Minister,

You have a grave responsibility in your custodianship of the arts for Ireland at this time. As we approach the onerous task of cutting public expenditure in the Budget there is a real and present danger of unenlightened servants of the State relegating the arts as a luxury we cannot afford. Compared to health for instance, culture itself may seem to be something to be put on the back burner.

You must make *'the powers that be'* aware that the cultural health of the Nation is of equal if not more importance as it is the very bedrock of our country's *self esteem* and *image abroad*.

A country will never be appreciated, nay, recognized for the money it makes (or indeed saves!) but as can be seen throughout the world (Asia in particular), Ireland is recognised and admired for its cultural heritage, its literature, its poetry, its music, and its art.

This cultural image is an object of admiration if not envy by countries as near as our neighbour! Britain, discovering its image abroad, had as much to do with its cultural image as with its rate of corporation tax- in **not** getting 'its fair share' of inward investment sent their top artists (e.g. Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin etc.) to help them 'road show' in the US in an effort to help correct the balance as they saw it.

It's the Government's job to safeguard our principal assets in the face of ignorant tabloid scare mongering and uneducated populist opinion.

Whilst speaking with a former financial advisor to the *Shah of Iran*, now himself one of the richest men in the world, I personally felt his admiration of our rich cultural past which led him to visit our humble Cill Rialaig village in Ballinskelligs (restored as you know from a pre famine village) to be used by artists for the creation of art. The same gentleman returned to England where he bought a village himself and has built a private museum to house his oriental art collection. Since then he publicly proclaimed his inspiration for such a project was found in County Kerry, Ireland.

We have lagged behind in making it easy for international philanthropists to invest in the arts in Ireland and I know your Department has been working to alleviate this situation and to encourage and incentivise arts organisations to look to outside philanthropy. This is good thinking but it will take some years and more tinkering with our rules and tax legislation to accomplish much. In the meantime, it is **imperative** that this Government *protect and stabilise our art infrastructure* so that those philanthropists will have something and someone to invest in!

We must distinguish cultural tourism from ‘catch all’ tourism projects and pay particular attention to those projects that have high standards and most of all *integrity* which will be recognised by the worlds highly educated culture mandarins.

In our own simple way in South West Kerry, we have been exploring ways of *identifying* some of those super wealthy individuals who may need to ‘retreat’ to a cultural haven themselves and by offering them what they need most we hope to bring their active interest in the whole of Ireland and the need for investment in all National infrastructure, including the arts.

Damage this infrastructure now by starving worthy projects, chipping away at the buildings and foundations and you’ll see it all return to ruins and its people vanishing like in the days of the *Great Famine*.

‘Others’ may have done it to us in the past but its acknowledged that a degree of ignorance on our part aided and abetted them- lets not do it to ourselves this time round- you and your government can avoid this dilemma this time if you are wise.

By recognizing the need to maintain self esteem through continued investment in the arts and culture we will gain massive respect in Europe maybe even leading to a better deal all round!

The body needs food **and** the soul needs art- the country needs both.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Noelle', with a large, sweeping flourish above the first letter.

Dr. Noelle Campbell-Sharp  
Founder, Cill Rialaig Project