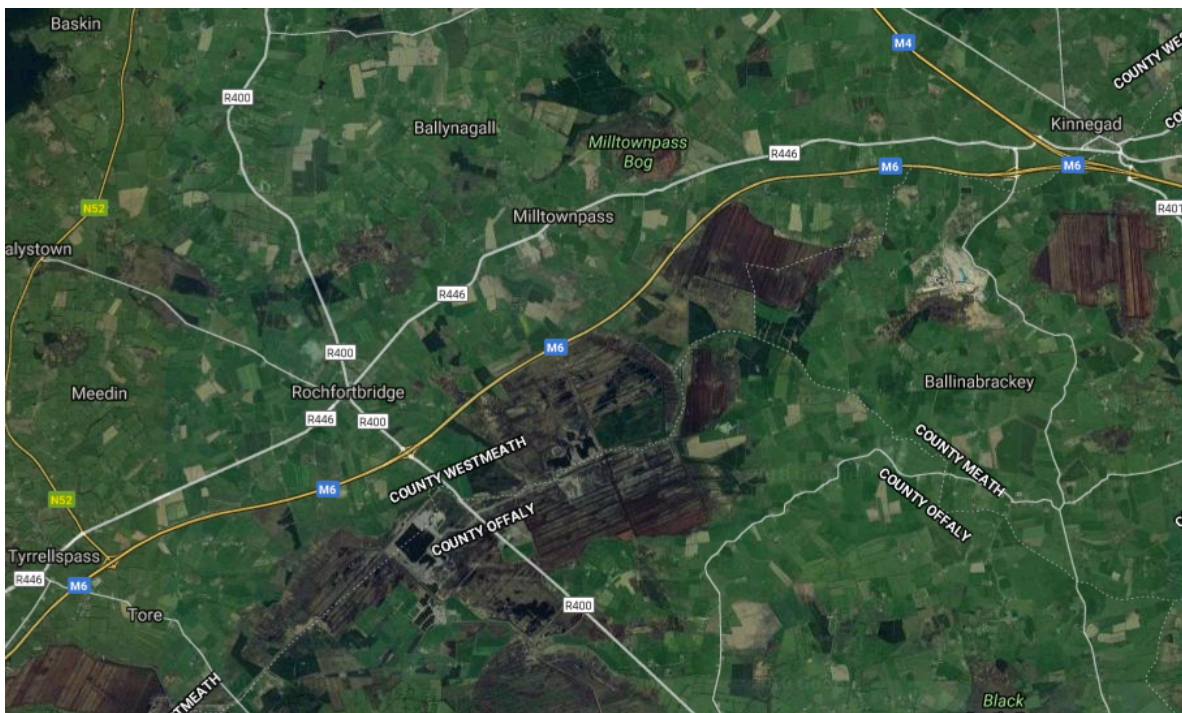# *Milltownpassed*

An experience of the Irish road, and an exploration of its relation to a

relatively disconnected village and its aging individuals

Marieke Schroor

August 2018

Marieke Schroor

6283594

Supervisor: Yvon van der Pijl

Submitted to the Department of Cultural Anthropology of Utrecht University as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science on August 15th 2018

Acknowledgements

This master's thesis would not have been a fact without the people I met during my fieldwork. First of all, I would like to thank the people of the Milltownpass community for welcoming me into their community and accepting my presence in their community center at any given time. One special thank you goes out to Alice, whom I admire for the way she cares about the wellbeing of the community and its individuals. Next, I would like to thank Jane for giving me the experience of living and working on an organic farm. Additionally, I would like to thank everyone I spoke to at the weekly All Saints Church charity mornings; the Killucan farmers whom I bothered with questions during lunchtime; the people that engaged in personal interviews with me; Fiona Breen and Barbara O'Connor and many more lovely individuals that made me feel welcome in Westmeath.

I would like to thank my supervisor Yvon van der Pijl for her professionalism and for always accentuating the positive. To conclude, Alik, thank you for being there for me when I was in the field, encouraging me in the writing process and showing me your support and love every single day.

[Cover image: See Appendix, *Image 1*]

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Preface

"I will just call John, he knows these roads better than me", says Fiona with a clear and calm voice, as if she tries to sooth me. In fact, I do feel rather uncomfortable with her driving me to Rathcam house. Not because we got lost in dark and rainy Ireland, but because I felt a pity in her gesture to drive me there. Actually, her pity is not misplaced, since I do not have any other way to get to this farm. It is more remote than I expected it to be and I feel more than grateful to accept her kind act. Fiona's husband picks up the phone and starts to guide us towards my destination. 'My' farm is *in the country*, which is the local way of addressing a place that is separated from civilization. After further directions and asking a man who happens to be my new neighbor we arrive at a blue gate, which opens after I step out into the rain to push a button. Slowly driving up the narrow lane that leads to the farm I feel nervous and exited at the same time. Fiona, in what I recognize as slight dismay, mumbles something about how "rural" this place is. We stop in front the door and I get out of the car, ring the doorbell and after a minute or two a girl opens the door of the, now visible, enormous manor. I hear dogs barking and the sound of a familiar voice coming from the only bright room across the dim hallway. Relieved, I turn around to say to Fiona that this is the place we have been looking for. I take my backpack from the back seat, tell her goodbye and thank her. Before she drives off into the dark, I am offered to always call her whenever I need a ride to town and I cannot believe the kindness of this woman. I thank her again and I set foot into my new home; an organic farm not far from the village of Milltownpass. A place owned, lived and farmed by a woman called Jane Pinkerton.

The fact that my new home was not easy to reach did not alarm or worry me at that moment. I had found a place to live with an older person in a rural area, not too far from a village, which was all I had hoped for in order to start my research. The one, very crucial thing that I lacked was a car and, soon enough I was going to find out how difficult it is to live on the Irish countryside without having access to a motorized vehicle. Idealizing the combination of a pretty countryside and a bicycle stems from a recent developed love for cycling on sunny holidays, providing me with great adventure. I seemed to have forgotten my teenage years, during which I cycled two hours a day to school and back, cursing but defying storms, rain and even snow. On this farm in Ireland, I was once again reunited with what felt like my teenage-self in winter but worse this time: The roads were hilly and I did not yet know anyone in the area. On this farm, I found myself missing the Dutch flatness for the first time in my life.

Chapter synopsis

Chapter One

Local Roads

This chapter discusses the local roads of Westmeath and the way one can either learn or unlearn the skill to use them. By personally experiencing a shift in my own 'level of mobility' I understood that this could have great impact on one's daily life. When driving the road one becomes part of the landscape and this sphere is only available for those with access to auto mobility. One's mobility thus influences the way experiences the world, and this can change during a lifetime. Moreover, there are large differences in mobilites among my older research participants (Skill, level of mobility, local roads, relation to the road, landscape).

Chapter Two

National And Regional Roads

Chapter two analyses driving on the national and regional roads. It discusses the streetscape of Milltownpass. Moreover, it introduces a second network that affects the villages perspective of growth in the near future: the sewerage system. Since Milltownpass is on the bottom of the county hierarchy settlement list, the villagers understand that no change will come with financial help from the government (Network, sewerage plant, settlement hierarchy).

Chapter Three

Intersection

The intersection metaphorically points at by the government organized rural development meetings. These meetings are arranged to help the village achieve a better 'quality of life'. Most of the people at the meetings are of the younger, mobile generation. However they have access to a large mobility network, they express to long for the community to become the nostalgic way it 'once was' (collective memory, buzz, community development, nostalgia).

Chapter Four

The Motorway

This chapter discusses the bypass. The motorway was finished in 2009 and since then much has changed in the village. Many facilities in the village were lost, but in a positive note, the village had become safer. The road in- and excludes people from its surface and brings a certain speed to the way of life. Simultaneously, it took away the *buzz*. Communal life changed and in order to replace the social aspect that was present in shops and pubs, a community center was built. This concrete solution, however, is not enough for everyone. (Bypass, speed, in- exclusion, buzz, engine-buzz)

Chapter Five

Being Stuck

It may seem that everyone is 'stuck' because of the recent infrastructural changes: young people in traffic, carrying an extra responsibility to care for their older neighbours and family, and older people are stuck at home. However this sounds quite negative, persons do never 'stagnate' and change is always happening. (Stuck, disconnected, connected, network society)

Introduction

Milltownpass is a village located between Kinnegad and Rochfortbridge and counted a number of 299 inhabitants in 2016. Not knowing the village or its inhabitants, one might wonder what is special about this place. It appears to be a small village with a streetscape like any other in the area having a church, a pub, a primary school, a funeral home, a graveyard and a community center. It is a village one passes through while driving the former national road from Dublin to Galway; a road that was recently substituted by a motorway that 'bypassed' the village. The streetscape consists mainly of this road, with houses on each side. During a period of three months, I have met many people of the community living in and around this village. This has resulted in the following case study of which the title, *Milltownpassed*, refers to the impact of the bypass in the village of Milltownpass. The study analyses the (dis)connectedness and mobility of this community, focusing on its older members in particular.

Current studies on aging, across disciplines, overwhelmingly focus on physical and mental health and wellbeing. Natural decline in health is approached as being the main source for difficulties or challenges in the process of aging. In medicine, the body has become an "object to fix" and for an increasing number of diseases and bodily failures, medical treatment is being developed. It has become an ever-lasting challenge for medical specialists to prevent, to fix what is broken or to replace worn components of the body with new or second-hand ones (Gawande, 2014). Likewise, a strand of biomedicine known as 'anti-aging medicine' aims to treat the biological signs of old age as if it were a disease (Davey et al., 2004: 238). In the United States, the medicalization of old age has resulted in an excessive medical approach in nursing homes. This has lead to skepticism about what is left of the 'home' factor of nursing homes, and a growing rejection to relocate when permanent care is needed (Buch, 2015; Gawande, 2014).

Medical treatments do, in fact, 'fix' bodies temporarily and populations with access to advanced medical care become older than ever before. This aging of populations has set many social changes in motion such as the growing need for elderly care, average higher medical costs, and the growing problem of loneliness and social isolation among older persons within western societies to name just a few (Drennan et al., 2008; Gawande, 2014; Shah et al., 2017; and Vasilov, 2016; Walsh, 2014). Moreover, there is an increasing interest within social science in the upcoming use of modern technologies, which assist older

persons in their own home by creating and maintaining social networks, or monitoring health through electronic devices (Garattini et al., 2011; Buch, 2015). Another rising concept within aging studies is that of 'successful aging' which is explained by Sarah Lamb (2017) as a "public cultural discourse [that] highlights specific individualist notions of personhood especially valued in North America emphasizing independence; activity/productivity; the avoidance or denial of decline and mortality; and the individual self as project" (p.42).

Many of the above, and similar theories on aging and health concern my older research participants. However, while keeping the aforementioned theories of current aging studies at hand, emphasis in this study is shifted away from the predominant debates of health and medicine. Atul Gawande (2014) positions that "In a sense, the advances of modern medicine have given us two revolutions: we've undergone a biological transformation of the course of our lives and also a cultural transformation of how we think about that course" (p.23). This ethnography is mainly focused on the latter part of the statement above, and instead of addressing mainly health and the impact of modern medicine on older age it focuses on the following themes that are present in the process of aging, and within a rural community: *Mobility*, *Infrastructure*, *Connectivity, Movement* and *Speed* followed by, and connected to the themes of *Community* and *Community Development*, *Memory* and *Nostalgia*. The following section will introduce current relevant theories about the concepts noted above.

Theoretical framework

When thinking of infrastructure, one might consider transportation networks, road infrastructures or other man-made structures that enhance movement in space. Yet, argued is, that infrastructure is less static than it initially might appear. Infrastructures are explained by Larkin (2013) as follows: "Infrastructures are matter that enable the movement of other matter. Their peculiar ontology lies in the facts that they are things and also the relation between things" (p. 329). Bauman (2001) connects infrastructures to mobility: "It is not just individuals who are on the move but also the finishing lines of the track they run on and the running tracks themselves" (p. 6). Both of the statements above dismiss the inflexibility that is often to infrastructures. Moreover, quite the reverse is stated since both indicate a certain movement or mobility of infrastructure itself. An additional notion of speed and mobility and connectivity is written by Peter Adey (2006) in which he states that "social life must operate through constitutive relationships of movement, relative immobility's and

differences in speed" (p. 77). Sheller and Urry (2005) emphasize the importance of movement in society in an article about the *new-mobilities paradigm*: "Issues of movement, of too little movement or too much, or of the wrong sort or at the wrong time, are central to many lives and many organisations" (p. 208) [1]. A final important debate that I will use is that of the network society, which concerns the emergence of the importance of the network within most societies and includes the rise of virtual networks: "The new social order, the network society, increasingly appears to most people as a meta-social disorder. Namely, as an automated, random sequence of events, derived from the uncontrollable logic of markets, technology, geopolitical order, or biological determination." (Castells, 2009: 502). According to Kesserling (2014) mobility's have become tools of power, and create 'mobilities regimes' which need to be considered as fundamental instruments for structuring social interactions and contexts in general (P.3).

In Milltownpass, a series of community development meetings were organized on which I will elaborate further in chapter three. During these meetings, many statements were made that concern the above-mentioned themes of mobility and infrastructure, in relation to recent changes. I noticed that most of the statements made by villagers were bloated with expressions of memory and nostalgia. These themes are important within this study, since I discovered a certain friction[2]. What the people of the Milltownpass community expect from the community and the village, based on memory and nostalgic ideas, is different from what is feasible for the future. There are ongoing discussions within academic literature concerning the notion of 'collective memory'. Some say it does exist and some oppose the notion of collective memory strongly. Chiara Bottici (2010) positions herself in the debate with the notion: "Individuals, not nations or societies remember" (Bottici, 2010: 340). Jay Winter (2010) states that memories can come together and are constructed and renewed in the performance of creating a collective memory (p.11). Winter does believe in the existence of a collective memory, but notes that the outcome of a 'performed memory' may vary from the true happenings of the past. Another variation of the notion of collective memory is written by Aleida Assmann (2010) is written below.

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[1] The new mobilities paradigm aims at the emergence of mobility studies across disiplines. See Sheller and Urry 2005.

[2] The concept of friction is stated by Anna Tsing as "The awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" see Tsing 2005 (p.4)

Our personal memories include much more than what we, as individuals, have ourselves experienced. We have our share in the larger and more encompassing memory of the family, the neighborhood, the generation, the society, the state, and the culture we live in. […] Humans acquire these memories not only via lived experience but also via interacting, communicating, identifying, learning and participating (p. 40)

There is thus no doubt about the existence of individual memory, but debates on the existence of forms of memory in collective form are ongoing. My stance in this debate in consideration to this study is a combination of those of Winter and Assmann. I have experienced the presence of individual memory in most conversations with research participants. Whether or not a form of collective memory exists in the Milltownpass community, individual memory affects the daily discourse and I believe that individual memory, when articulated, can revive other individual's memories. Therefore, I believe that individual memories can shape each other and have an effect on the outcome of, in this example, a community development program.

Memories of the past are often incorporated with feelings of nostalgia. According to Stewart (1988) nostalgia is a "three-ring circus of simultaneous images in the arenas of life-style, spectacle, and loss. […] Nostalgia, like the economy it runs with, is everywhere. But it is a cultural practice, not a given content; its forms, meanings, and effects shift with the context - it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present" (p.227). Listening to villagers speak, I noticed many expressions of nostalgia to the past of the village in relation to the present. People give a past image of the village as a thriving and social little settlement with shops, pubs, and post office.

The aim of this study is to add to the academic debate concerning infrastructures and mobility, by bringing them in relation to studies of aging. It focuses on the cultural transformation of how we think about the life course (Gawande) and is located in a rural community in transition. To achieve this, I will use the central research question:

How do infrastructures affect the future perspective of the village of Milltownpass; its community; and in particular its older generation, in relation to a nostalgic expectance of community and a changing perception of the life course?

Ireland and Westmeath

The republic of Ireland of is known by its unique history of emigration as a result of a great food scarcity in the 1840s, popularly known as 'the great famine', planting an Irish diaspora across the globe (Miller, 1975). Moreover, the country has known several episodes of injustice and persecution concerning the colonializing of Ireland by British rule, a large revolution and ongoing conflicts at the border of neighboring country Northern Ireland (Powell, 2017: 4-6). Ireland, being an island, has for long been known to be a country with a strong sense of nationalism. Partly due to this unique history and location, Ireland has been a place of interest for anthropologists in divergent subjects. However, as Virginia Dominguez (2015) remarks, influential work of Arensberg and Kimball (1968) "depict an Ireland existing somewhere in the shadows of modernity and history" (p.134), aiming at relatively outdated studies on Irish culture being influential within academy for long periods of time.

In the economic arena Ireland can be considered unique, due to an economic boom in the 1990's and 2000's. During this massive economic growth, oriented on mostly foreign investments and growing strengths in information technology (IT) industries (O'Riain 2000:158), Ireland became known as "the Celtic Tiger". The largest economical changes over the past decades, occurred when the country became a member of the trading bloc under name of the Economic European Community (EEC). More recently has the country been coping with a large economic recession in 2008. Today, the economy is rising again and this period is already been mentioned to be the period of "The Celtic Phoenix" (Regan and Brazys, 2017: 2).

Ireland became a member of the EEC in 1973 (Laffan, O'Mahony, 2008: 30). The EEC is the precursor to the European Community (EC) and European Union (EU) (Ibid. 30). Development strategies after that moment, initiated by Europe and the Irish government, resulted in the strengthening of the Irish economy within the European- and global economy. As the republic's capital, Dublin, grew as international economic hub with an important international airport, a shift took place within the country: The economy turned from being mainly dependent on fishing, agriculture, small industry and the economy of the United Kingdom, to mostly reliant on technology, larger industries and international trade (Powell, 2017). With this shift, a demographic shift naturally followed when young generations received better opportunities for higher education, provided in the larger cities. This made a percentage of this younger population move from the widespread rural areas to concentrated urban centers. Dublin houses 1.2 million people, which is an approximate

quarter of the entire population of Ireland, which was 4,8 million in July 2018[3]. To carry the weight of the urban population, counties surrounding Dublin city became densely populated and are now known as the "Greater Dublin Area" (GDA) (Davoudi and Wishardt 2005)[4]. Housing prices rose in Dublin city and the GDA, which made the counties beyond this area the next base for Dublin's growing workforce. Commuting from counties beyond the GDA became necessary and thus, this expansion of the economy and capital set another change in motion, namely, a large development of the Irish road infrastructure. The amount of cars that drove on Irish roads in 1970 was roughly 390000 and grew to an amount of 1319000 in 2000 (Alan O'Day, and N. C. Fleming, 2004: 579-580). This number has undoubtedly increased more in the past eighteen years. The single carriageways that pass through the landscape, formerly known as the national roads, could no longer carry the growing amount of traffic[5]. This resulted in daily traffic jams in bottleneck towns. A solution was found in the construction of a network of double-carriageway motorways, which made commuting to Dublin and other urban centers easier and more accessible for people all over the country and lifted the load of traffic from the streets of villages and towns.

Behind this 'hinterland' of Dublin, one of the first counties one crosses on the way to Galway is Westmeath, part of the Midlands region of Leinster province in which the village of Milltownpass is located[6]. Westmeath is a county with an estimated population of (amount), housing many smaller towns and villages as well as the two larger towns Mullingar and Athlone. Since 2012 the county carries 57,5 kilometers of motorways, the M4 going over into the M6, which is a direct connection between Dublin and Galway and makes living in county Westmeath interesting for commuters.

Research site

What makes Milltownpass an interesting case study is the fact that it is a village of small scale in an area that is expecting a population increase in the years to come[7]. This population

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[3] Retrieved from: http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/ireland-population/ Accessed on August 4th, 2018

[4] The counties forming the GDA are Fingal, South Dublin, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow. See appendix map (1)

[5] With the arrival of the motorway as a new kind of road, many national roads became regional roads. This is only a change of first digits, and did not affect the materiality of the roads.

[6] See: Appendix, map 2

[7] Westmeath County Development Plan (WCD), 2014-2020, Volume 1, Written Statement.
Retrieved from:
http://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/media/CDP%20Volume%201%20Written%20Statement.pdf
Accessed on: July 15th, 2018

growth in county Westmeath is strongly connected to the arrival of a motorway and the better connection to the expanding capital Dublin it brings. There are several reasons for the current situation of Milltownpass' development and however the most prominent will be explained into detail later; they will be shortly introduced here. First of all, Milltownpass does not (yet) have the opportunity to grow in size due to the practical problem of having a sewerage system that is not fit to carry more wastewater than that of the current dwellings. Second, it is the only village in the area without having a direct connection between the village and the motorway. The picture on the cover of this document is a satellite image of my research site. Two main roads are prominently crossing the image and they are connected in several settlements. The only settlement in this fraction that has no connection to the lower road is Milltownpass. This relative disconnectedness has both positive and negative consequences for the village and its community. The village, even though being located in an area that becomes increasingly interesting for people escaping hectic and fast-growing Dublin with its corresponding rental prices, currently seems to be of less priority for governmental investment than surrounding settlements. To conclude, the community of Milltownpass is taking an interesting position in the current debates surrounding community development, movement and past and future changes of the village and the society.

The main site I have used for conducting research in the village was the community center, of which the construction was finished in 2012. The center is a space of a community room, a large kitchen and a sports hall. It is home to several community groups and is furthermore used for community meetings. It was a public place where I felt like I was welcome and it provided a useful space to observe and participate. Apart from the community center, I have met individuals of the Milltownpass community on additional sites of research. Those include the local pub, several events and the rural transportation bus.

Research population

.   My aim is to start, drive and fuel a debate based on two main foundations for analysis. One concerns the community and its multigenerational aspect, and the second zooms in on the lives of older individuals of the Milltownpass community. I will clarify the notion of community by contesting the theory on community as developed by Anthony Cohen. Cohen (1985) argues that the community is the 'most fundamental and most substantial experience of social life outside the confines of the home' (p.15). Although there is a certain truth to

this statement, it does not inform us about the lived reality of its members in any way. Therefore, I argue that community can be a rather broad notion, which can be experienced differently by every individual. Likewise can a community be based on ones daily practices and surroundings, which are not necessarily confined to one pre-set geographical space of that just outside the walls of the home. There is no such thing as an exact description of the Milltownpass community, yet still I have use the concept in order to include or exclude individuals from my reach population. Reason for deciding to use the concept of community to address my research population in the village, is because villagers refer to themselves as being members of a community. They refer to 'the Milltownpass community' and therefore I follow their notion of their own communal formation.

To define the community of Milltownpass I use the sociological term of similarity, which refers to an aspect owned or carried by each individual member of a collective (Bauman 2001: 105). A reasonable interpretation of a community would therefore include the suggestion that the inhabitants have something in common with one another, and subsequently have something that distinguishes them from members of other collectives (Cohen 1985: 12). The research population of this study is a group consisting of people that identify themselves with the Milltownpass community. This means that they either have the commonality of a direct connection to the village and other community members by living in the village or in its wider surroundings, or feel connected to people and materiality's within the Milltownpass community in such extent that the person is spending time during village activities, and enjoys a social network within the community.

There are no existing records on how far out of the village center this wider area reaches. During a conversation in the community center of Milltownpass, I remember asking someone the questions: *"until where do the non-official village boundaries reach"* and *"how do people decide to identify with Milltownpass, with he neighboring settlement, or with no village in particular"*. The answers were simple; people normally use village facilities such as a community center of the village that is geographically closest to where they live. Still, there are exceptions to the rule based on individual reasoning to do otherwise. This makes it difficult to precisely indicate a geographical population boundary considering my research population. Moreover, I was told that there are individuals living in the area whom do not attend any social activities in the village and thus, when speaking of the 'Milltownpass community' I point at those individuals and groups that I have personally met during my fieldwork whom meet the aforesaid requirements. The people that I have met in the local pub or elsewhere in the area that indicated to feel identified with the

Milltownpass community are assigned to the research population as well. Two popular academic discourses surrounding the study of aging and community are those of 'age-friendliness' (Neville et al., 2016), and 'aging in place' (Davey et al., 2004). The latter has become a popular term in contemporary aging policy and is explained as "remaining living in the community, with some level of independence, rather than in residential care" (Ibid. 133). All of my older research participants age-in-place and the community expresses that it is striving to become an age-friendly and inclusive community[8].

As mentioned, a specific group of research participants within the Milltownpass community are the people that are of older age and live in Milltownpass village or the wider rural area. My network within the community mainly depended on the people that visited the community center. This is also where I met a group of older individuals that gathered every second Wednesday morning. The group is entitled as 'active retirement group' but its members appoint the meetings mainly as 'social morning'[9]. The exact number of members of this group is unknown to me, but every meeting between ten and twenty individuals were present. Aside from participation in a group formation, I have spoken to nine individuals from this group personally. These personal conversations lasted between one and five hours and were held mostly in an unofficial interview setting in the home or a public place such as a lunchroom. Moreover, I have used conversations that occurred of which I have jotted notes, either on paper or by recording my own voice.

Since it took some time to get to know the members of the social morning group and meetings were only every second week, I spent time with additional groups such as the weekly cards playing night, charity mornings in a church in Mullingar, and a group of farmers in neighboring village Killucan that I often met during lunchtime. The people whom do not express to have a connection to the Milltownpass community will in this study not be approached as being part of the research population. I used these engagements to extend my network and to learn about the area, as well as about aging in this environment. Therefore some conversations that are significant to the research will be used in order to give a broader explanation.

Introduction to methods

To get access to the field and to become a part of the community, I have explored several sites for participant observation. Participant observation is a method in which the researcher

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[8] See: Appendix image 2

[9] Will be adressed as *social morning* throughout the study

takes part in daily activities, events and interactions (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 1). Next to participating and observing, the main method was the conduction of interviews. The interviews with my older research participants were mainly individual life histories (O'reilly, 2012: 128). Life histories allowed me to make an analysis of the person's perception of the self in relation to the past and the present (Boeije 2010: 63). In some cases there was not enough time or comfort. In these cases the interviews were constructed as oral histories "which are less focused on a whole life and more focused on a topic or part of a life" (O'reilly, 2012: 129). Next to the research participants in the community, I have conducted several more structured interviews with professionals.

The documentation on the data in the field were mainly by jotted notes, field notes and audio notes. O'reilly (2012) notes, that field notes "move from first impressions to insider sensitivities" (p.102). With this statement, she indicates that even though at first, notes can appear unstructured and broad, in a later stage one is possible to recognize patterns and notes will become more organized and clear to the purpose of the research.

Throughout the fieldwork period and thereafter, I have used my own memories and experiences as a resource of information. The result of this is that segments of the study can be read as auto ethnographic (Oreilly, 2012: 130) or interpretative auto ethnography, which Denzin (2013) explains as a biographical study of life experiences and performance of a person. Complete (interpretative) auto ethnographies are ethnographies of the self where there is no distance between the researcher and the research participant (Ibid. 130). However, in the following study this distance does exist since it involves others and can only be found in a personal experience of (im)mobility.

Chapter One - Local roads

Drive like a local

It is a rainy Thursday evening and I am about to head to Mullingar after cards night at the community center in Milltownpass. Tom is standing outside at the gate, swiftly moving his hand up and down. I push the button to open the window of my new rental car and a cold wind hits my face. "Take your time now, there is floods on the road, go around them." Tom looks at me and seems to be concerned about me driving on the roads of Westmeath at night as he continues: "And if you see any traffic coming from the other side, you just stop and let them pass first." I assure him that I will be careful and when driving off, he waves at me before locking the gate of the parking lot. I turn left to the main road and left again, leaving the village to the Mullingar road. This, I know, is the shortest way to town, but also the most winding and at this time of the day, dark road I could have chosen. All the way home, I slowly go around the puddles at the side of the road, keeping my promise to Tom. Suddenly, a car shows up behind me. The obvious impatient driver flashes his lights and tailgates me until he sees an opportunity to, somewhat aggressively, pass me by. The person might have mistaken me for a local since I am driving around with Irish license plates. I realize that I surely do not yet feel comfort in driving with the speed of a local.

A new (im)mobility

The road mentioned in the chapter introduction passes by the farm on which I was hosted until recently. I had agreed to help Jane on the farm in mornings, in order to experience what it means to live rural. This arrangement meant that I would experience the daily life in my area of research together with an older adult, intending to make participation a valuable research method (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 1). I was, as McLean and Leibing (2007) so beautifully call it, 'taking root', which means that one is "fitting into a different sense of time, where days seem long and slow, often eventless and mostly unplanned" (p. 63). However, fairly soon I realized that this was problematic to combine collecting eggs, counting sheep, and fetching wood for the fire with doing an ethnographic study in the village 'a few miles up the road'. Besides that, I did not succeed in renting or buying a car

while living on the farm, for I did not find the time to go to Dublin[10]. The experience of not being able to drive a car in a remote area during a winter month was more challenging than I had expected. I tried riding a bicycle but the hills and strong February winds, rain and snow halted me there. Regional transport only passes by once a week on Fridays, and I could not rely on Jane and her car. When a sudden blizzard, which the media appointed as 'the beast from the East', arrived I experienced a personal peak of immobility. Jane and me were stuck on the farm together for five days, surrounded by a landscape covered in thick snow. To some, this may sound idyllic, spending winter days on a farm with dogs, a donkey and sheep on the beautiful Irish countryside, lighting a bonfire to stay warm at night. To me, the opposite was true. I found myself feeling lonely and dethatched from the 'outside world'. In one of my diary notes of that time, a somewhat ironic sentence can be discovered: *"I am here to investigate social isolation and loneliness on the Irish countryside, and I am feeling lonely and isolated myself. I am not sure if that is a way of doing participatory fieldwork, since no people are involved"*[11]. This time of being physically immobile helped me understand what it could possibly mean to someone else to become less mobile than experienced earlier in life. Additionally, one no adjustment in my own behavior during this period was, that I started to spend more time using my smartphone, calling friends and family and I even started to write letters. I longed to be near the social surroundings I was so used to and by using virtual networks I felt, in a sense, present while being absent (Brown et al, 2002; Callon et al, 2004). I had become more reliant on virtual mobility while the physical network of roads and transport became unavailable to me, learning that infrastructures and networks affect each other continuously (Castells, 2009).

By moving to Mullingar, no longer spending mornings on counting or feeding sheep, I gained the freedom to travel to Dublin in order to arrange transport. From the moment I picked up my rental car, the course of my research drastically changed. I suddenly felt the freedom to wander around, to visit Milltownpass whenever it suited me and to participate in all the village activities held in the community center of the village. The promise of the automobile was fulfilled of which Hagman (2006) writes: "The 'automobile' promises to make the driver both 'auto' and 'mobile', that is, to give its user both autonomy and unrestricted ability to move around" (p. 66-67). I started to use this 'new freedom' to experience the landscape that surrounds Milltownpass. On the road, unlike being the

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[10] Car rental companies other than the one I found in Dublin, are not permitted to rent a car to someone under the age of 25 while I was 24 at the time.
[11] Personal diary, February 16, 2018.

outsider in the community center or church, I was treated like any other driver since the outside of the car was like any other. Not only had I gained the freedom to be and feel physically mobile, I too got access to a new form of doing research when I started to observe the local roads and settlements of Westmeath from inside the car. Driving involves interaction with other users of the road since, first, the greater part of the local roads is not wide enough to comfortably pass each other without moving aside or slowing down. Second, the local roads are curved and shaped by a landscape of trees, streams, dwellings, hills and fields and is, as Tim Ingold would argue, a fragment of nature itself (Ingold, 2011). This makes the road unpredictable for one not familiar to the road. This unpredictability creates a need for constant focus on the surface and course of the road. To conclude, the ever-changing circumstances of weather and intensity of daylight make one experience a different focus on distinctive moments of the day. The local roads are, using Ingold's words, surfaces *in* the world, not surfaces *of* the world (2000: 47). This made me feel as if I was, when driving a car, living in the world and not on it (Ibid: 47). However one is always living in the world; being part of the landscape, the way of experiencing living in the world varies when using different tools for transportation. From the moment I started to drive daily on the local roads, I entered a (social) space that is only accessible for those able to drive a car. It opened up a complete new range of possibilities for both interaction with the landscape and other drivers.

Changing relation to the road

Local roads have not changed majorly during the lifetime of my older research participants. They have not changed location nor have they changed much in appearance. What did change is the relationship between the society and the landscape, of which the local road is an important part. When levels of auto mobility were low and few people drove a car, daily life was located more local and close to the home. Nowadays, auto mobility seems to be at its peak since cars are accessible and affordable, and life without a car is almost unthinkable in rural Ireland.

Before accessible auto mobility was the norm in Ireland, the country was perceived by the people as large, and Irish people did not travel far (Linehan, 2014: 75). When she was fifteen years old one of my older research participants, Mary, had been spending a year in a domestic economy school where she learned skills such as cooking, laundry and needlework. I asked her if she went home during that year and she replied: *"No, it was too far! It was in Galway, you see… you'd have to get the train. I came home to my mother at*

the end of the year." When she was older, Mary learned how to drive and thus gained a new form of mobility. Today, Mary is 83 years old and only uses the car every now and then to drive up to Rochfortbridge. Like Mary, many of my older research participants have experienced different levels of auto mobility on different ages and in different times or environments. This resulted in participants expressing divergent individual experiences of the relationship with the road and the landscape.

Local roads are the only man-made ways leading to the remote areas of the landscape and thus reaching these parts of Ireland requires either personal skill of driving or the skill of an external person. Ingold (2011) writes about skill that: "For acting in the world is the skilled practioner's way of knowing it […] Thus, skill is at once a form of knowledge and a form of practice, or – if you will - it is both practical knowledgeable practice" (p. 57). Skill is thus learned or generated while we act in the world. With a limited public transport service in certain areas, the road is a space that in- and excludes people based on skill and accessibility. As noted above, I personally underwent the transformation from being almost entirely excluded from the road to being included, making me feel like an active participant of the road. However, during an interview with research participants Lorraine and Darna, demonstrated to me, was how one too could unlearn and thus, lose, the skill of driving or have no independent access at all. In both alternatives, a distance between person and the road infrastructure and with that, a lack of mobility followed by an increased state of dependence is generated or maintained. Lorraine is well in her eighties and copes with Alzheimer's disease. She is cared for in home by Darna whom is Lorraines permanent caregiver from the Philippines. I had met them both at the active retirement coffee morning in the community center of Milltownpass. These Wednesday coffee mornings were key events during my research since they brought together a significant part of the elderly population of Milltownpass (Oreilly, 2012: 47)[12]. Both Darna and Lorraine expressed to be pleased to have me over for an interview. The interview I conducted was a semi-structured life history and even though I gained knowledge about experiences of both individual histories, the life history that I documented as valid data was Darna's. Based on ethical considerations, I made the decision not to use all Lorraine everything expressed during the interview. I chose not to do so because of the rules of consent and disclosure (Oreilly, 2012: 65-67). While Darna had given me full consent, Lorraine only agreed to my visit and I was not certain of her understanding of this visit. I do refer to the following episode to display a

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[12] However all retirees of the village were welcome, most members of the active retirement group were women.

greater inclusive image of the older population, of which a higher percentage than the younger population has a declining mental health and needs permanent care (Drennan et.al., 2008: 177). Morever, the episode beautifully shows the material incorporation of the experience of loss and decline as well as the diversity of origins for immobility.

> The instructions to find the house are vague: I am supposed to enter the black gate after a traffic sign on the right side of the road. Several black gates, traffic signs and phone calls with Darna later, I park my car at the back of the house and am impressively welcomed by a happy old dog when stepping out.
>
> Darna sits across from me on the kitchen table. A few hours have passed and she is stirring her freshly poured cup of black tea while inviting me to eat some more of her homemade cupcakes. Lorraine is seated in a comfortable chair on my left, looking out of the kitchen window with watery blue eyes. We have been spending all afternoon in this small kitchen and what started as an interview, soon turned into a cozy day inside, with me and Darna chatting about anything and everything. Darna tells me that she notices Lorraine likes the company, and every now and then, Lorraine enthusiastically tries to add something to the conversation. When the topic comes up, I ask Darna if she ever tried to get her driver's license but she explains that in the Philippines, she did not need a car and here in Ireland she is afraid to drive. Suddenly Lorraine speaks up: "I loved to drive!" and points at the window. An old, black car is parked just in front of the kitchen window, taking up most of the view and I am surprised not to have noticed it before. Its four tires are flat and the green haze that covers parts of its surface reveals that it has been standing there for quite some time[13].

This scene helps articulate how the level of mobility or, as demonstrated above, immobility, affects people's daily practices and experiences in a sense of going places, social interaction, or the feeling of independence. When an adjustment has taken place in this 'amount' of mobility caused by, say, a change in the environment, the change of bodily functions or the level of skill, a contrast appears between the current- and preceding level of mobility. Personally, becoming mobile again after having lost mobility brought forward a contrast to the previous, making me recognize the improvement of my level of mobility. However, my older research participants often experience the opposite. With a compulsory change in level

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[13] See: appendix image 3

of mobility comes a necessity to deal with this change. I found this to be generally easier when the level of mobility increases and not drops. Though recognizing that a declined physical or mental health is often the most important cause for a declined personal mobility in old age, the effect of an increased immobility involves more than just the mere knowledge of the cause and the compulsory dealing with the declining body. It involves dealing with change in many daily activities, a daily confrontation with past mobility and independence and a, sometimes painful, knowledge of what else was lost next to bodily functions. Moreover, a lack of future mobility perspective can be of great influence in older age since it emphasizes the irreversibility of old age and the life course.

In Lorraine's case the object, a weathered car standing in front of the kitchen window, incorporates the confrontation with loss of mobility and the consequences it brings. Lorraine is no longer a first user of the road but knows what it means to have the freedom that a car can bring and is confronted with this feeling every day, simply by looking out the kitchen window. Darna's experience of becoming less mobile involves no loss of skill or ability, but a change of environment. Individuals in the same place and daily surroundings can experience the mobility situation in different ways, even when the level of physical mobility is equal. Future perspective of individual mobility is an important factor in this analysis, using the prior example once again. For Darna, a woman in her fifties, there is a possible future increased physical mobility since she has the physical capability and legal opportunity to learn the skill of driving, and save up for a car. Besides that, Darna is willing to learn this skill. Lorraine's future perspective of individual mobility has less perspective since her Alzheimer's disease affects her driving skill too strong for her to safely pick up driving again. Lorraine expressed her frustration on the matter loud and clear: *"They won't let me!"*

Just as some research participants long for what once was, others enjoy the opportunities a less local life brought. Susan is 73 years old and lives on a farm with her husband in the wider surroundings of Milltownpass. She knows many people in the Milltownpass community but is not a consistent visitor of the community center and only comes to the active retirement coffee morning every once in a while. She does not feel the need to stay in the local area only and explains that she does not find all she needs in the Milltownpass community: *"I go to a book club in Mullingar every week and there is Tai Chi in the Greville Arms hotel. I like to spend time with groups that are open to people of all generations, if you know what I mean. People with the same interests, and age does not matter that much anyway if you share an interest."* Susan is creative, knows about

information technology and has travelled more than most of my other research participants[14]. Susan feels like she has "a mind that is younger than her body" and she does not feel like she is fitting in with the other ladies that join the Milltownpass active retirement coffee morning. In a conversation between Susan, a lady from Tai Chi class and me I explained that I was doing a research about aging and mobility in rural Ireland. Both recommended me to speak to people other than them

Susan's friend: "I think we are not typical examples of aging people in rural Ireland"

Me: "Okay, but what is typical of aging in Ireland, I mean…"

Susan: "That would be… I would say… the people sitting at home, Isolated people that are all alone on the countryside maybe, more traditional, if you know what I mean".

 Susan's auto mobility allows her to expand her interests and gain and preserve social contacts, skills and experiences. Moreover, it makes her able to identify with a chosen set of surroundings, groups or places and thus Susan does not necessarily identify with her own stereotypical image of an aging woman on the Irish countryside. Susan is satisfied with her own mobility and with her rural location of living however, in a later conversation she confessed that the interview I did with her had made her think about the future. Her home was of great importance to her and her husband, but Susan understood that being immobile and far away from society was not an ideal combination. Her future mobility perspective was most likely going to decline and even though she would not want to move from her farm, she had started to think about the consequences of immobility on the countryside.

An individual can experience several levels of mobility (Banister and Bowling, 2004: 114). Age, health, geographical location and time in history are factors of influence on mobility level. Significant differences in level of mobility result in inequalities among older persons in rural Westmeath. This difference increases when individuals get older, having an increased chance of health related problems. These mobility differences are less significant among younger generations. Comparing the stories of Mary, Lorraine, Darna and Susan, one can conclude that the level of mobility a person experiences can influence a persons

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[14] There are large differences in amount of travel experiences. Some of my research participants have never left the republic of Ireland while others travelled as far as South Africa and the United States. During the interview I had with Susan, she expressed to feel the desire to see more of the world.

perception and daily experience of the environment. Moreover, it affects agency in choosing one's own social surroundings or home-boundness and it may even have influence on individual identification. What can change during a lifetime, is the relation between person and road. When this experience is accompanied with feelings of a reduced independence, which is the case in many situations, the road can become an object of nostalgia or a reminder of what one might have lost. In the case of the road in Ireland, it is an unavoidable and ever present space and thus one can be reminded of loss every day. A person has to adapt to a new norm, one with a reduced feeling of independence. This one change from driver to non-driver creates that someone needs to change his or her lifestyle and sets a series of life-changing events in motion.

Chapter two – From national to regional road

Driving through

From junction Kinnegad there are two roundabouts to take before entering the R446 that leads to Milltownpass. Leaving the second exit of the second roundabout, the road bends and twists at first, but eventually stretches out fairly straight in front of my wheels. The ten kilometer long asphalt way is pleasant to drive, trees and farms on both sides of the road. This road passes through Milltownpass and used to be categorized as a National road, but since the bypass it was degraded to a regional one. It is a single carriageway with a maximum speed of eighty kilometers per hour. Before entering Milltownpass, road signs warn me for the traffic calming coming up, indicating the compulsory reduction of speed from eighty to sixty kilometers per hour. Next to that, there is a pedestrian crossing with traffic lights, which never worked once during my time in Milltownpass. I drive and do as I am told by the signs, but notice to have passed Milltownpass before I know. Sixty kilometers per hour is too fast to decide whether to stop or not, and it is difficult to stop since, in the village, there are no parking spaces at the side of the road. For the people that know Milltownpass as a village, it has the basics to be one; a church, a school, a pub and the villagers have neighbors with no fields separating them. But, since there is nothing to do, see or stop for, what makes living *in* Milltownpass different from living *in the country*?[15] While I drive on, passing the graveyard on the left and Mary's house on the right, I arrive to the next village: Rochfortbridge. I am again guided to slow down, this time to fifty kilometers per hour. Immediately, I recognize the difference between the two villages. This one is bigger and has a few shops and a post office on the right and a strip of new built houses on the left. It is easier to stop, but also, there is something here to stop for. Even though it is the same exact road that passes though both villages, the function of the R446 is different in each settlement and corresponds to the function of the village. In Milltownpass, the road basically functions like no other than the fragments before or after the settlement; Milltownpass is a village one mainly drives *through* while in Rochfortbridge, the road's function is not solely to drive through, but for this village the option to drive *to* presents itself.

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[15] *In the country,* is the local way of addressing a place that is separated from civilization.

The network below the surface

On the 5th of July in 2016 a documentary with the title and subtitle *Bypassed*, S*tories Off The Road* was broadcasted on national television channel RTÉ One. The film documents a series of stories that present local experiences of the first Irish bypass that concerned the town of Naas. Accompanied by artistic shots of rusted gasoline stations, deserted pubs and shops with the windows nailed shut the following lines are spoken

"Long before the motorway came along, life in small-town Ireland was local, simple and slow. But with cars came visitors and shops, petrol stations and pubs sprung up around the promise of passing trade; open and viable, full of the hope of futures. But time passes. New becomes all there is, and old pays the price."[16]

Walking through Milltownpass, a similar experience could be sensed when strolling past the convenience store that had to close down, and a deserted pub at the intersection[17]. Even an abandoned gasoline station like the one displayed in the documentary can be found a few kilometers down the road. Shaun Johnston is the owner of the only Milltownpass public house that is still in business; the red and white facade proudly carries his last name. He is a friendly middle-aged man that speaks of his business with a convincing, but somewhat defeated passion. He works six days a week, opening the doors of *Johnsons bar* from around 4 pm closing them when last people go home. "It's a feast or a famine", Shaun tells me, looking at me over small reading glasses on the tip of his nose. Some days are good, sometimes no one shows up. For a while, the man opened a shop in the building next door but he did it without any extra help. Eventually, Shaun could not keep up with both providing the village with milk and newspapers during the day, and evenings selling Guinness and little bags of peanuts in the pub. Now, with slight irony, Shaun uses the building next door for a new business: *Johnsons funeral home*. The shop was no feasible business in any case, Shaun explains, with the rapid opening of big, cheap supermarkets such as Lidl and Aldi that pop up like mushrooms at the side of the motorway and no new people moving into the village. He is sitting on a bunch of carton boxes which are full of wrapped candy; leftovers from the shop. I take some of it off his hands when he offers. They are slightly dried out, and taste like sweet defeat.

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16 Bypassed documentary, director: Garry Keane
17 See: Appendix image 4

The County Development Plan (CDP) 2014-2022 written statement is a document that "provides the strategic framework for land use planning in the county" and builds on previous development plans and strategies[18]. The current CDP handles a 'settlement hierarchy', in which settlements are arranged in a hierarchal order in order to identify the role and function of each settlement in association with its population and perspective to grow. Table two shows the hierarchal distinction of settlements in Westmeath. Milltownpass is in this hierarchy categorized as 'rural center', at the bottom of the hierarchy[19]. This means that the village is alleged to "provide sustainable rural employment and community service" in the targeted sectors of agriculture, horticulture, forestry, tourism, energy production, rural resource based enterprises and the food sector (CDP 2014-2020: 48). Beyond 'rural center' the hierarchy goes further up dividing between the categories of 'local service town', of which Rochfortbridge is an example, followed by 'service town', 'key service town' and finally 'linked gateway town'.

In the core strategy of the CDP is mentioned that one of the strategic aims of the county is to "Support the role of rural areas and the countryside in sustaining the rural economy". However this aspiration to support and sustain the rural; the creation of a settlement hierarchy causes an inaccuracy between goals aimed for and goals able to be achieved. Milltownpass has been appointed 'rural center' in the plan starting from 2014, but up unto 2018 the village has lost almost all of its local services and businesses and with that, it has lost many of its center functions. Moreover, unlike several surrounding settlements, the village core knows a population decline and is disadvantaged in its possibilities for growth, which it needs to become a prosperous rural center once again. Institutions with top-down power relations to communities like the state might use the notion of sustainable citizenship to show an intention for improvement. This turns out to be not always in line with what occurs in reality. The notion of sustainable development within the debate of sustainable citizenship is that it "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987: 43). The sustainable approach written in the CDP does not meet the needs of the present Milltownpass community the CDP thus does not yet live up to its aspiration to sustain the rural.

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[18] Westmeath County Development Plan (WCD), 2014-2020, Volume 1, Written Statement. Retrieved from:
http://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/media/CDP%20Volume%201%20Written%20Statement.pdf
Accessed on: July 15th, 2018
[19] See appendix: Table 1

In the County Development Plan is clarified that present and future housing development of county Westmeath is generally focused on development in Mullingar and Athlone. The former are the two larger towns of county Westmeath and together form the first category of the settlement hierarchy categorized as 'linked gateway towns'. Table two shows that of the expected population growth of 20,206 individuals until 2020, only 4.4 percent is aimed for to become resident of the rural areas beyond Athlone and Mullingar. Moreover, new residents of Westmeath are only encouraged to settle in rural areas when having 'strong rural links' as the document states that it is: "The aim to support the desire of individual applicants with strong rural links to settle in that area and to encourage people with no such links to settle in the identified extensive network of towns or villages". These proposed rural links range from being born in the area and wishing to return, to living closer to family or workplace in the rural area. The 'extensive network of towns and villages' subsists of towns with a higher amount of hectares permitted for housing development, which in Westmeath thus mostly comes down to Athlone and Mullingar. This policy is causing a lack of growth and diversity in rural areas with none or little constructing perspective[20]. Moreover, it concentrates the individuals whom do not identify with having strong rural links in the larger towns, which hypothetically generates a cultural gap between rural and urban areas.

An important reason for the county council to primarily encourage growth in the non-rural areas is the lower cost of building sewerage networks. Shaun, the only pub owner of Milltownpass tells me that Milltownpass is not a priority for the county council. He explains to me that building sewerage in an area with a limited existing sewerage system is of large expense: "*Its dead money*". A population growth in the county is expected and to rapidly provide housing, the council benefits most by building in an area with existing sewerage systems, which is the case in the two larger towns. In the Milltownpass rural center plan 2014-2020, a plan within the CDP specifically concerning Milltownpass is stated that: "The current wastewater treatment plant is designed to collect and treat effluent from a population equivalent of 80. The remaining residential units in the village are serviced by individual septic tanks"(CDP 2014-2020: 267). This means that wastewater of only 26,7 of the 2014 Milltownpass population was processed by a modern wastewater network.

Notwithstanding, the Milltownpass rural center plan 2014-2020 entails the following

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[20] I make use the term of 'construction' of physical infrastructures and dwellings throughout this study. However, Ingold doubts the use of this term and pleads for 'making'. See: Ingold (2000, 173-187)

policy aim of the Westmeath county council: "To provide for new residential development in accordance with the requirements of the Core Strategy". This statement seems to indicate the presence of an aspiration to build new dwellings, but villagers do not see this happen in the near future. The pub owner is not the only one with knowledge about the county's priorities. Whenever there is an activity in the community center, Jonathan is around to help tidy up afterwards. I assisted him one day, and when we sat down with a cup of instant coffee and some leftovers from the coffee morning, I asked him about why there is no new construction in the village and the answer he gave me is the following

> Well see, we're the only people that can do it. Because the people ís coming back, but they're not coming back to the village, they are just on the outskirts. But this is what I mean: Nobody 'd pump money into a village that's gonna be doomed.

Newcomers and, as Jonathan implies, returners, do see the necessity or advantage for settling in the village center. This is because the village center does have little more to offer than the countryside. Moreover, The lack of government money for sewerage results in villagers losing confidence in the future of their own village.

"What have we in it?"

While seeing growth in several surrounding villages of higher hierarchal settlement status, many inhabitants of Milltownpass do not expect the government to help them expand and develop their village as well. People seem to understand that the sewerage plant in Milltownpass is low on the county priority list and they therefore express to know that they are responsible for development in the near future themselves. Later in my conversation with Jonathan, I ask him about changes in the village over the years. Without hesitancy, he starts to tell me all about the shops and services that used to be present in Milltownpass but are gone nowadays when he resumes[21]

"If you ask an outsider, right, say [from] Mullingar or somethin', [and tell them] "Oh there is a house going [for sale] in Milltownpass, right?"

I nod while he continues his illustrative one-man dialogue

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[21] Two pubs, several shops and a post office

"They say, 'Oh what have we in it?' 'Nothing!' 'Well then I'm not going there".

The decline of village functions causes decline in appeal for newcomers. Milltownpass degraded to less than the rural center it is on paper, lacking many of its functions and therefore making the village unable to fulfill its proposed role of being a rural 'center'. Without any services or shops, even those living within the boundaries of the village need to travel to other settlements for basic provisions. Decline of services and village function thus creates a decline of population, or as villagers call it 'critical mass', and turned into a vicious circle of deterioration. The difference between the village and its greater rural surroundings fades and newcomers might not see reason to settle in the village since it has little more to offer than the surrounding landscape.

Not only did the county, up to now, fail in supporting the role and function that was attributed to Milltownpass while it was being labeled as 'rural center', it correspondingly did not intervene or attempt to rewind the village's decline. Settlements ranked 'local service town' and up carry a certain responsibility to stay in function for the local region and receive better support since inhabitants from several rural centers come in to make use of services. In rural centers, no service like a post office, pharmacy or bank is typically present since those define the other settlements in the hierarchy. Some rural centers do have shops, hairdressers or other small businesses, but these have a weaker constituency since local residents are usually the only customers that can keep them in function. Moreover, with the arrival of large supermarkets such as Aldi, Lidl and Tesco, automobile villagers started to shift their grocery shopping from the village shop to the convenience of these cheaper giants. Rural centers in Westmeath are being held back from possible future development based on governmental decided priorities, which generate developments in surrounding areas or settlements. Even though in the CDP written statement, rural centers are of significant importance to the county government, inhabitants of Milltownpass do not recognize this in the declining attention to their village compared to developing surroundings.

Chapter Three – Intersection

> The place where two things intersect or cross, spec. (chiefly N. Amer.) = CROSS-ROAD n. 2; Geometry, the point (or line) of intersection; the point common to two lines or a line and a surface (or the line common to two surfaces) which intersect[22].

I take my foot off the gas when I see an intersection coming up. There are traffic lights, but they do not seem to be in function. It is quite busy at this time of the day and I come to a standstill. Traffic lights make life easier, but without them I discover the meaning of the word *intersection* as I become aware of other persons that cross the same space. Its my turn to cross and before I know I am on my way again, following my own path.

The missing *Buzz*

However the County Development Plan of 2014-2020 does not treat Milltownpass as a village with significant growing perspective for the near future, the decline of the village function went not entirely unnoticed. Instead of taking action by investing in the sewerage network that lies beneath Milltownpass, the village was one out of seven rural centers that were involved in an action planning initiative held during a period of six months in 2018. This planning initiative was part-funded by Westmeath Local Community Development Committee under the Rural Development Program (LEADER 2014-2020). The action plan "Supports the regeneration of rural towns, promoting them as attractive places to visit, live and do business in"(MVP, p.3)[23]. The program is used as a method to help transition and to use the strength of a community willing to improve their village with its own knowledge and resources, and consists of a series of public meetings in every one of the seven villages[24]. External facilitator Blue Moss guided the meetings. Blue Moss' motto "Our intent is to

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[22] Retrieved from the online Oxford English Dictionary, accessed on August 11th, 2018:
http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/view/Entry/98300?redirectedFrom=intersection#eid
[23]*Milltownpass Village Plan 2018-2023.* Retrieved from:
https://www.westcd.ie/images/Milltownpass_Final.pdf Accessed on July 7th, 2018
[24] In my personal hypothesis, the community development plan can also be seen as a tool for the Westmeath county council to keep rural communities content with their quality of life without spending excessive financial resources on a sewerage system in the near future. This is not stated anywhere and thus will I not use this in the analysis of the program.

support growth, develop connections and enable individuals, communities and organisations to thrive", adorns on the entrance page of their website[25]. The organization's way of working in the community development initiative is to create a *mission statement* together with people of the local communities. The seven mission statements were being presented in June of 2018 to the board of Westmeath Community Development. During the process, creative thinking about feasible alternatives was encouraged. During my stay in Westmeath, I had the opportunity to join several rural development meetings in Milltownpass of which the first occurred when I was living on the farm with Jane.

> Jane pointed at the paper invitation on the kitchen table "Is this interesting for your research?" She wanted to go because the village lacked a bus shelter and this, she assumed, was the moment to do something about it. With a cup of tea still in her hand, Jane drove us to the community center of Milltownpass.

> The group of people in the room consisted of around thirty people and I was clearly the youngest stepping in the room. Lindy, our facilitator, introduced herself and expressed to be positively surprised by the turnout of this small village. To Jane's slight disappointment this two-hour meeting was not just designed in order to note down complaints about what was missing in the village. Divided in groups, we were asked to write down what was good about living and working in Milltownpass. Following, every group penned down thought was missing. When Lindy started to discuss one of the group's second lists, she needed some clarification on one word that someone wrote down. "The *buzz*, can you tell me what you mean by that?" The woman whom had written the word down crossed her arms and answered: "The life in the village, people on the street, at the moment you could drive up the village and you wouldn't see a person."

"It takes a village to make a village"[26]

In the brief introduction of the chapter is referred to an intersection of traffic. In my opinion, the rural development meetings can be seen as an occasion and space for intersection as well. Metaphorically, the facilitator functions as working traffic lights, guiding the intersection of government, community and individuals within the community. This does

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[25]Retrieved from: https://www.bluemoss.co.uk/ Accessed on July 19th, 2018
[26] Expression of the facilitator during the third development meeting on the 11th of April, 2018

not mean that without guidance the community would not exist or function. However, communication and collaboration without guidance might have different outcomes in comparison to communication and collaboration with the influence of a 'traffic light'. As Tim Ingold (2011) calls them "lines of interaction" pass by each other and become all part of a large interweaving meshwork of threads and pathways (p.92). The people and environment as countless lines of interaction, which meet and tangle during the development meetings, thus influence and guide each other continuously.

The development meetings in the village community center were of significant importance within my research since many questions about the meaning of the village and the community were asked and answered by active villagers. Moreover, during the first meeting I received the opportunity to mark my research as 'overt' by shortly introducing myself, as well as my research to the Milltownpass community (O'reilly, 2012: 63). The mission statement that was being presented in June 2018 was the following in case of Milltownpass

The people of Milltownpass live as a connected, thriving community. They are creative, innovative and achieving. They have a strong sense of pride in the village, support each other and feel safe[27].

During the first two meetings there were several moments on which villagers indicated the lack of facilities such as a shop, a pharmacy or a post office. It became clear that the people who were consistently coming to these meetings were hoping to improve the village and their so-called quality of life by express what they thought was missing. Instead of making a list of what was physically missing in the village, the group was guided into a different thinking scheme. To achieve the creation of the above written mission statement, the group's facilitator guided the group in sketching a picture of the village in ten years from now

If you imagine sitting here in ten years' time, 2028, okay? We are sitting here and I (Lindy) come back and I ask you to describe the village today. So, what does that village look like? And don't go into detail of, say, a bus shelter, because that has

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[27] *Milltownpass Village Plan 2018-2023.* Retrieved from:
https://www.westcd.ie/images/Milltownpass_Final.pdf Accessed on July 7th, 2018

happened! But what is the big picture? All of the people of Milltownpass enjoy [fill in]. What is their quality of life?

With this question the crowd is asked to imagine the ideal future sense of living in the village without getting stuck on discussing details of material or infrastructural improvement. During a moment of hesitance before answering, I recognize some confused face expressions until one man breaks the silence

"We win the championship!"

Everyone bursts out laughing

Alice, the woman who is, among many other things, in charge of the social morning jokingly ads: "With a senior title!"

When everybody is calmed down, Lindy tries to discover meaning in the statement: "There is pride in that in that, isn't there? But there is something else... They are leaders and they are healthy."

After this episode, the following concepts were coined by the group considering the development of the future sense of living in the village. They are written here in order of occurrence: More energized; Vibrancy; A sense of belonging; Inclusiveness; Neighborly; Busy; Prosperous; Happy; Healthy; Optimistic; A sense of possibility; Connectivity; Integrated; Creative; Supportive; Progressive; Ambitious; Growth; Sustaining; Achieving.

Overall, the superior part of these answers can be connected to a certain sense of movement that the people long for and many of the concepts explain the missing *buzz*, as one person called it. This buzz of life on the streets of Milltownpass is something most people in the room had experienced in person, since the largest infrastructural changes only happened recently and no very young villagers were present at the rural development meetings. This may indicate that there is a sense of nostalgic longing to the past when referring to the missing energy in the village center.

Few older inhabitants of Milltownpass were present during the meetings, but this missing energy or movement is also mentioned by many of my older research participants. Mary,

one of my research participants with whom I conducted a qualitative semi-structured interview with, based on the life history method expressed to miss this movement in the in her surroundings as well (O'reilly, 2012: 128). She is 83 years old and lives just outside of the village. Aside from missing some opportunity for social interaction that the shop provided, the misses a certain spontaneity. Using stories of the past, she expresses what this spontaneity was like

> People are so busy now! At night, long ago […] my husband knew a lot of people here in the area, and the neighbors would come in here at night. There was a big chat going on and you'd hear the news from the area. People came in to 'ramble' as we used to call it. It was the same at home long ago when I was a child, growing up. […] It was homely, now if there is visitors coming there is a fuss.

The spontaneity that Mary misses requires time to relax. By mentioning the busy lives of younger people these days, she seems to connect the missing of social life to the busy schedules of younger people.

The preceding example of Mary is added to this chapter, because there is a strong similarity between Mary's and other similar older informants' nostalgic ideas of being social within the community and the ideal community of the younger generation. This idea was most present in the concepts 'neighborly' and 'connectivity'. Most people that showed up at the development meetings were not people of the oldest generation, but of a generation younger. Most people of the people belonging to this generation are still working, and almost all are driving cars. Even though the people that drive cars can enjoy a social life where ever they prefer, and are able to shop at Aldi or Tesco, they seemed to want their social engagements to be closer to home and more spontaneous and peaceful. They express to wish to create a place to belong. By blending different memories of the past, there was a hope to recreate this feeling of belonging and inject the village with the possibilities for a new (or old) sense of pride. According to Winter (2010) 'performing the past' can create a common notion of the past, which might differ from reality

When individuals and groups express or embody or interpret or repeat a script about the past, they galvanize the ties that bind groups together and deposit additional memory traces about the past in their own minds. These renewed and revamped memories

frequently vary from and overlay earlier memories, creating a complex palimpsest about the past each of us carries with us (Winter, 2010: 11).

I argue, that this happens during the community development meetings in Milltownpass, resulting in an expectation of an unrealistic idea of what the community should mean to all its members. While trying to create a single meaning of community for everyone within this group, a certain homogeneity was implied while in reality, this group is diverse and has divergent wants and needs.

Ann Bookman (2004) conducted a research on community involvement in the United States. In this, she touches upon the fact that communal involvement is ever changing

"Communal and associational life is changing, to be sure, being reshaped by changes in the family, the nature of family care work, and the workplace. New forms of community involvement are taking shape in cities, suburban towns, and small rural communities" (p. 210).

In Milltownpass this is the case as well, since people do express to want communal involvement, but that the way they are involved differs from the involvement of past generations. By continuously mentioning the missing of a buzz, and connecting this buzz to the presence of facilities which the village used to have and the social aspect they bring, memories of the past are used to generate the 'ideal' perspective of the future. One might argue that a collaboration of individual memories, or as some argue, collective memory, was shaping thoughts about what to expect from a community. These expectations might not have been in line with the reality of the possible future perspective of the village after the construction of the motorway and the economic shift in the country.

Chapter four - The motorway

Looking down

To get to the motorway from Milltownpass, one can either take the old national road up to Kinnegad, or pierce through the landscape, taking some slow and curvy local roads before entering the M4 at Coralstown junction. I decide for the second option and take the long and bumpy local road that passes the Milltownpass bog. A few turns later, I pass by Mary Lynch's pub and take a left to blend in on motorway four. It is comfortable to drive this road compared to the bumpy and winding roads I have just left behind me. Its surface is smooth, the lanes are wide and on this road I have just a few clear and easy rules to stick to. I turn on the radio and realize that I know the Irish pop charts by heart as a result of driving the car every day. The moment I insert onto the highway, it feels like leaving the landscape and rather than driving *in* the landscape, it now feels like I am driving *above* it. Besides the fact that in Ireland everybody drives on the left hand side of the road while I am used to driving on the right, this road seems similar to all other highways.

A stranger among the Irish roads

Characteristics of this highway are indeed comparable to other highways around the world such as its shape, color and high maximum and minimum speed. Yet, when looking closer, every highway is built on a specific landscape in a specific time and is surrounded by a particular society, making the road an interesting materiality for social research (Dalakoglou, 2017). Every road infrastructure is specific to its surrounding environment and, over time, vice versa. As already clarified in the previous chapters, the building of the M4/M6 motorways has brought many changes to Milltownpass, Westmeath and the republic of Ireland in general. Not only did the motorway bring speed, people, tourism and the access to a faster lifestyle for some, the coming of the motorway also took a much-valued buzz away from the village and "changed real and perceived notions of distance and travel" (Linehan, 2014: 75). Just like roads did vehicles change the perception of distance and time. Sheller and Urry (2005) subsequently note the "overwhelming impact of the automobile in transforming the time-space 'scapes' of the modern urban/suburban dweller"(p.208). Linehan furthermore argues against the nomination of the Irish motorway being a non-place, which Marc Augé defined as 'space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity' (1995: 77). I hereby agree with the above quoted statements since I

found the motorway and the automobile to be clearly present in daily discourse among my research participants.

The presence of the motorway and auto mobility in many different ranges of conversation proved that the motorway could have a different meaning for inhabitants of the same area. For those inhabitants of Milltownpass with access and ability to drive a car, the motorway is a useful space and it had become the fastest way to move longer distances. Part of the short distance routes involving a meshwork of winding roads is, too, being replaced by the comfort of the motorway, even when it results in driving a longer distance (Ingold, 2011: 92). The national and regional roads have remained present in order to reach remote areas and this makes the motorway a pleasant addition to the mobility of drivers and not a replacement.

Yet, for those not driving, the motorway is the slowest option for non-assisted travel, since the space and high speed of the motorway are not available at all. The distinction between motorway and remaining roads is mainly based on speed and accessibility. Yet, this has changed due to the increased normalization and accessibility of auto mobility and a general faster speed of cars on the smaller roads. As a result has the non-motorway road become more dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists[28]. While thus even the national, regional and local roads have become less available for slow traffic or pedestrians; what still differentiates the Irish motorway from national or regional roads in the area?

To answer the preceding question, one needs to acknowledge both the actual and figurative distance between the landscape and the motorway. While national, regional and especially local roads snake through the land- and streetscape, having become part of it over long periods of time, the building of the motorway was an extremely fast project and the M6, the first city-to-city motorway of Ireland was officially opened on the 18th of December 2009[29]. Built higher, straighter, and over a shorter period of time compared to all the other roads, the Irish motorway now rests on the landscape like a poorly integrated, elevated tarmac ribbon as the strange newcomer among the Irish roads. It became a representation of

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[28] The Irish Times, Pollak 12th of May, 2018 The cycling fatalities: 'Never cycle in Ireland' retrieved from:

https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/the-cycling-fatalities-never-cycle-in-ireland-1.3488223 Accessed on Augst 7th, 2018

[29] The plan for the motorway was the Tranport 21 project.
https://www.rpsgroup.com/Ireland/News/pdf/M6-Opening-Brochure-en.aspx Accessed on August 14th, 2018

speed, progress and modernity. Dimitris Dalakoglou, in his ethnography of the road notes the following about the impact of the building of highways

> As David Frisby (2001) implied, the straightness of these roads represented very specific perceptions of the social world in comparison to those that winding roads represented. It can be argued that highways were framed within the wider context of the aesthetics of progress, representing unlimited growth, unlimited speed, unlimited length, and a straightforward, unobstructed path to the future of the new world order" (Dalakoglou, 2017: 7).

The motorway passes by Milltownpass but its physical presence is, unlike that of the other roads, not noticeable in the village since it is not visible, audible or in any otherwise primarily sensible. Additionally, non-drivers are not being excluded from the national, regional and local roads in the same way as they are being excluded from using the motorway since they are still allowed on the roads. National, regional and local roads are present in- and even physically shape the village. This makes the older roads the first to use when leaving the home, and in most cases present when looking at the landscape from the comfort of the home. They form an unavoidable network for those leaving the home making them part of most people's direct surroundings. The national, regional and local roads are thus part of the direct landscape and of the materiality of the village. Villagers may thus identify themselves with the roads while identifying with the village. The motorway distances itself from the other roads since it is an avoidable, and moreover, primarily absent space in the streetscape of the village. This makes it not necessary to identify with the motorway when identifying as inhabitant of Milltownpass.

The sound and speed of the village
Before the construction of the motorway, the road that passes through Milltownpass was the most common route from Dublin inland. This meant that all traffic arriving from Europe by ship going West, as well as traffic going from Dublin to the West of the country and back passed by the village. This included commuters and tourists but also trucks and other heavy transport. Now, the presence of the motorway is to be discovered in the absence of former normality. Though the motorway has no primal presence in the village of Milltownpass, the secondary presence of the motorway is to be found in the relative silence that is present the village. In chapter two was deliberated on the pitiful loss of the so-called social *buzz* that

was a result of the construction of the motorway. When the main street of Milltownpass turned quieter and the air became cleaner as a result of less passing traffic, it equally became safer[30]. This is why inhabitants of Milltownpass expressed that the vanishing of an accompanying, as I call it, 'engine buzz' was experienced as mainly positive.

The bypass changed the sensible experience of being in the village by taking away the stream of vehicles that used to be in the streetscape as a moving, but permanent object. With no more speeding cars and raging trucks one might conclude that a certain speed has left the village. However, on the other side, one could argue for an increased speed after the bypass in Milltownpass as well. This increase of speed concerns the experience of the pace on which daily life is expected to be lived. This feeling of a certain expectation and the manner one follows, or has the ability to follow to this expectation is unique for every individual and I will thus not generalize on the changes the motorway brought for people in recent times. However, some examples from the field could demonstrate the effects of the availability of the speed of the motorway on the daily practices of individual villagers.

With the community center as main site for observation and participation, I visited the pub on free evenings as additional site for participatory observation, but also in the hope to reach a more diverse group of the Milltownpass inhabitants and create a snowball-sample (Bryman, 2012: 418). It is around ten in the evening on an evening in March and I am sitting alone at the bar, every now and then chatting to Shaun, the pub owner. The door opens and a man whom I estimate to be in his end forties steps in. He takes a seat next to me and orders a Guinness, keeping his coat on. After a few looks and a frowning eyebrow that wonders who this stranger is, he starts a conversation with the usual question of what brings me to Milltownpass. I explain what I am doing, and in our conversation I ask him if he ever participates in the events or groups that are organized in the community center. He shakes his head: *"I work at the times of almost all the activities I would have an interest in."* Next, he confesses that he would like to be more involved in the local community, but that he is too tired to do anything else when he comes home late from his IT job in the city. This individual is less involved in the community than he wishes to be due to obligations elsewhere. He uses his energy for his job and the journey home instead of for involvement in the community. Later he expresses that he feels as if he has no other choice since all of

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[30] One key benefit in the Transport 21 planning brochure is: "Improved environment for the towns and villages bypassed through the elimination of through traffic" Retrieved from: https://www.rpsgroup.com/Ireland/News/pdf/M6-Opening-Brochure-en.aspx Accessed on August 14th, 2018

his three children are studying in college and he supports them financially.

The example above, shows that many people have no or limited time to spend in the community due to a schedule elsewhere and commuting time. The motorway took away peoples spending time in the community, as well as things to spend time on. The community center was built as a concrete solution for the community when village functions declined and a need arose for a communal space. For those having the time and ability to make use of this space, this solution, although partially, worked. The community center, however, is open on limited and pre-set times, and hosts organized activities. The center provides space for a less 'organic' and a more 'static' form of communal interaction and excludes people that are not able to visit on the opening times.

Overall, it seems to be the case that the building of the motorway was a process too fast for the community to adapt to. In a rapid speed, the motorway took away the life out of the village and returned a quiet and safe village. The community of Milltownpass did not find an immediate solution to the undesired quietness, which now, is partially solved by the community center. Still, villagers indicate to miss the life in the village but the motorway also took away their time to spend on this village life.

Chapter five – Stuck

When I reach the toll station I feel Dublin getting closer. I open the window, feverishly search for some lost coins on the bottom of my backpack and successfully toss them into the plastic basket. The red-and-white bar raises and I hit the gas. Not long after the toll station the road gets fuller and when Dublin; 'the big smoke'[31], arises in front of me, the speed limit drops to eighty. I look at the time and realize that I have left Milltownpass exactly at the start of the notorious Dublin afternoon traffic jam. My navigation is telling me what to do and thus, unlike my first days on the Irish road, I do not worry. At walking pace, we all glide into the city and I feel my thoughts drifting off. On my right is a couple in a Mini, and since the passenger's seat on the left in Irish cars, I can shamelessly observe the person doing her face-covering Irish make-up in the car mirror. On my left is a man alone, hands-free talking to someone on the phone or, who knows, to himself. Even though traffic jam is generally written off as unpleasant, boring or a waste of time, I do not fully agree with that. I enjoy this moment on my own, letting my anthropologist's' eyes roam free while shielded by my car from any comments on staring.

As clarified in previous chapters, the motorway brought a certain speed to Irish lifestyle, and took away both a 'social buzz' and an 'engine buzz'. This chapter tries to analyze the opposite of speed namely; the notion of stagnation. People of younger generations whom live rural and work in the city are stuck in their cars, while older people are stuck at home without anyone to help them be physically mobile. By using several examples from the field, I will explore the relative individual 'stuckness' the bypass has generated. Hereby do I ask the question: are people actually stagnated?

Noted at the end of the previous chapter, is that the 'motorway took away villager's time to spend on the 'village life'. This was meant in a primary way of younger villagers spending a lot of time on the road. The statement can also be interpreted in another way: Because of the arrival of the motorway, and with that, the decline of village functions such as shops, people of the older generation necessarily depend more on their mobile surroundings. In a village with basic services, the non- automobile persons might have been more able to care for basic provisions by themselves. This necessary dependence on others

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[31] Dublin has the nickname 'the big smoke'. This is based on exhaust gasses and was used by someone in the documentary *Bypassed* (see bibliography).

puts more pressure on either those mobile and willing to help, or charity and governmental institutions. Auto mobility mobilizes the people who have access to a car, but "virtually immobilizes people, especially in old age, when they no longer have access to an automobile in the way they had been accustomed to (Fisker 2011). These people are dependent on the mobility of others. Their mobility potentials need to be constituted externally through people who are professionally or due to family and emotional relations and obligations close to them" (Kesserling 2014: 6). However, as Anna Tsing argues,

> If analysts must "move out of local situations "to find circulation, there must be some local folks who are still stuck inside them, being stagnant. These imagined stagnant locals are excluded from the new circulating globality, which leaves them outside, just as progress and modernity were imagined as leaving so many behind (Tsing, 2000: 346)

As is pointed out in the introduction, being stuck in a car, for example, is less stagnant than it sounds. Even though one cannot walk or move out of the vehicle, one's mind can be active and in a sense, mobile. This suggests that being stuck does not always mean, that one is not mobile. In the following three vignettes, I will demonstrate that being stuck in old age, or in the home, does not always mean that people are not connected or mobile. They have a different mobility compared to the people belonging to this 'circulating globality', but are not completely stuck.

The Telephone

Lorraine, Darna and me are still sitting in the kitchen of Lorraines old country house when suddenly the phone rings. Darna picks up, greets the person on the other side of the line and puts the phone on speaker before giving it to Lorraine. *"It's Mary, your daughter"* she says. Mary is driving in her car and tells Lorraine that she is picking up her daughter after work. They live in Donnegal and do not have the opportunity to visit Lorraine weekly. After a short chat about the rain, Lorraine immediately asks: *"Are you still coming home?"*

Mary*: Yeah I'm hoping to get up there to see you, I was working, I've been working over the weekend, but I'm off today now. I know you keep asking me, I'm sorry.*

Lorraine*: That's all right, oh, I know, I know, your job, God almighty!*

Mary*: I suppose the kids are at school this week, and then, Casey is working at the weekend if I'm not working at the weekend. It's kind of hard to find the time... I know I have to make*

the time, I know that. So I'll get there.

Lorraine*: I'd like to see you again anyway.*

Mary*: I know. It's been too long... How are you keepin?*

The Bus

The rural transport bus number R17 passes by Milltownpass every week on Friday morning. It is a vehicle with approximately twenty seats. The reason why most rural transportation runs on Fridays, is because this is the day when new weekly pensions arrive at the post offices. I contacted Joe, the driver of this bus, and asked if I could drive with him every week. He agreed and picked me up in Mullingar every Friday morning. The route of the bus goes by Gaybrook, Rochfortbridge and Milltownpass, and stops at several dwellings on the way between the villages. One morning, when the last people were getting on the bus at Milltownpass, shopping strollers had to be placed on people's laps and even the two seats next to the driver were occupied. When we arrived in Mullingar one of the last ladies that got off was furious: *"We need a bigger bus! Or two busses, I don't care. What if there is more people coming next time?"* Joe, who is only an employee, went in defense by telling her that the transport company does not have bigger busses. The woman, clearly still irritated, walks off.

The Alarm

At the last social morning of the season, Alice has made a summary of the group's activities form this year. She reads the list out loud and with every activity the other women express how they enjoyed tem. Alice continues: *"And there was the lady that came to tell us about the personal alarms, who of you were there?[32]"* a couple of people raise their hands. *"For those who weren't there, I have folders with information and a list to subscribe. Who of you already has a personal alarm?* Again, several ladies raise their hands and start to express their feelings of safety and security since purchasing this object. Alice gives out some folders and says: *"They are grand, aren't they? We have to accept help, otherwise if something happens it will be our own fault".*

By adding the three episodes of *The Telephone, The Bus* and *The Alarm* I emphasize several ways in which non-auto mobile individuals can be, or at least feel, some independence or

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[32] Personal alarms are electronic devices that one can carry on their body. In case of emergency the button can be used in order to call a service line.

mobility. *The Telephone* shows the importance of virtual networks (Castells, 2009). Even though Lorraine cannot meet her daughter at this moment, the two can interact. In this case, the telephone even made Lorraine's daughter realize that she needed to visit her mother soon. As for *The Bus*, another instrument for independence in old age is displayed. The rural transport service is an outcome for those with limited mobility and limited options for help. There are, however, differences of the purpose of taking the bus. For some, it was a mere necessity for this was the only day of the week they could get to town, while for others it was an 'extra outing' since they had mobile connections. Third, the vignette of *The Alarm* sows the growing importance of technology in heath care and the growing reliance on professionals instead of familial or neighboring surroundings. Alice's statement says enough about the perception of the life course in later life: "We have to accept help, otherwise if something happens it will be our own fault". This statement, as well as the importance of the rural transport bus and the presence of modern communication technologies, implies a sense of individualism and acceptance of this individualism.

The bypass, and many other changes have created a new environment for everyone. What differs between individuals is the manner in which one is able to adapt to these changes and to what extent the changes 'fit' to a person's mobility. Taking the bypass as example, this structure is easy to adapt to for those driving and creates difficulties for those without cars. The community is working together to make the adaptation process easier for everyone by trying to improve the local 'quality of life'.

Conclusion

I got to know the people of the Milltownpass community as a group of optimistic individuals that long for an old connectedness. A certain movement or, *buzz* disappeared from the daily life in the village and people of all generations expressed to want this feeling to return. This disappearance of social interaction and spontaneity is connected to the arrival of the motorway that bypassed Milltownpass. However this road brought many positive changes to the village, it took something that is now a mere nostalgic memory.

Mobility affects the lives of everyone, including myself, and can be seen as a factor that enriches an individual's quality of life. When personal mobility is lost, this affects the person greatly. Since the village functions declined, every individual needs at least some kind of mobility. This is ideally one's own mobility but can also be an external person's mobility. When the latter is needed, this puts an extra pressure on the ones mobile. This, in turn generates that younger people have even less time to spend on communal involvement.

Communal involvement is, as a reaction to the declined function of Milltownpass 'artificially generated' by a community center and recent rural development meetings. However the meetings are meant to create a future Milltownpass that is adapted to the present infrastructure, many villagers tend to return to feelings of nostalgia about the past, generated my intersecting memories.

What the village needs, is an understanding of the changes, and that adaptations in expectation need to be made in relation to these changes. Moreover, there is a need for a new ideas of how to regenerate the social *buzz* while not needing the 'engine buzz'. This might be found in alternative thinking about either new transportation or vitual communication networks, or to generate a new place to get together in a more 'organic manner'.

Epilogue

It is the last day of my fieldwork period in Westmeath and I'm on my way home after saying goodbye to Jane and the farm I spent some cold February weeks on. The sun is dangling low in the sky, shining a golden light over the fields full of lambs and as I slowly drive down the avenue, tears well up in my eyes. I don't often express emotion in this way, and for a moment I feel like I have to hold it back. Why am I crying? Is it happiness to leave, or the opposite? I realize that my tears' source is one big collection of emotions. I realize that what I got was a glimpse of a life I would probably never live again. The people I met are most probably going to remain here until the end of their days. Jane is going to watch over her lambs; Lorraine will look at her car standing in the rain; and Mary will go to mass every Sunday before having her family over. The R17 will go every Friday for pensions and coffee; and the community center will be home to social mornings, evenings for playing cards, and art class without me. I turn left after exiting the blue gate and remember entering this for the first time three months ago, together with Fiona Breen. I speed up and see the hilly roads I tried to bike in the rain, realizing that I know these roads now. I know in which gear I can take some turns, I know where to be extra careful because of the floods, I know where I can drive full speed and that the little bridge at Gaybrook makes the car jump; giving me a rollercoaster-feeling. For a moment in my life, I became not only a user of this road, but also a part of it. I became part of the landscape and the landscape became part of me. It made an impression that will stick around and travel on in stories that I am going to pass on and, in time, nostalgically remember.

Appendix:

Images

[1]

The image on the cover of this document is a satellite picture derived from the popular navigation service *Google Maps*. Visible in the upper center of the image is Milltownpass, as well as the regional road it is located on. The motorway lies south of the village and is displayed in a yellow color. Note that the village has no direct connection to the motorway. Google maps was accessed on August 12th 2018 www.google.com/maps.

[2] Picture of the motto's of inclusiveness in the community center, photo by author

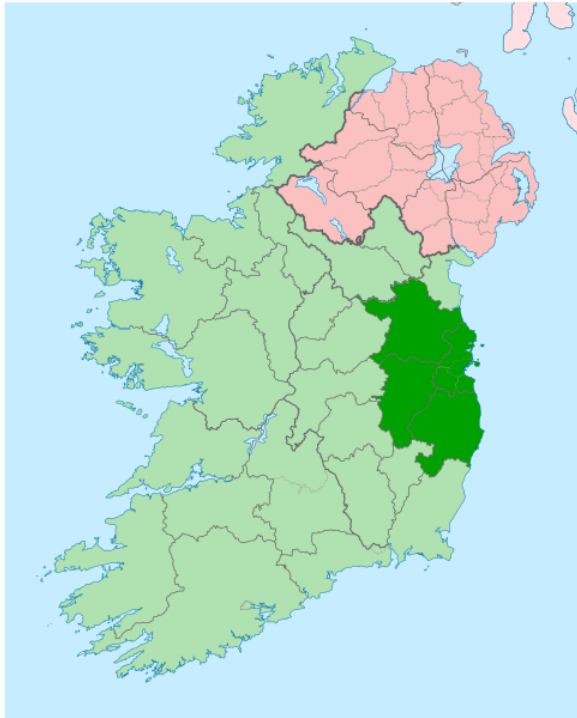**[3]** Picture of Lorraines car from the kitchen window. Photo by author.
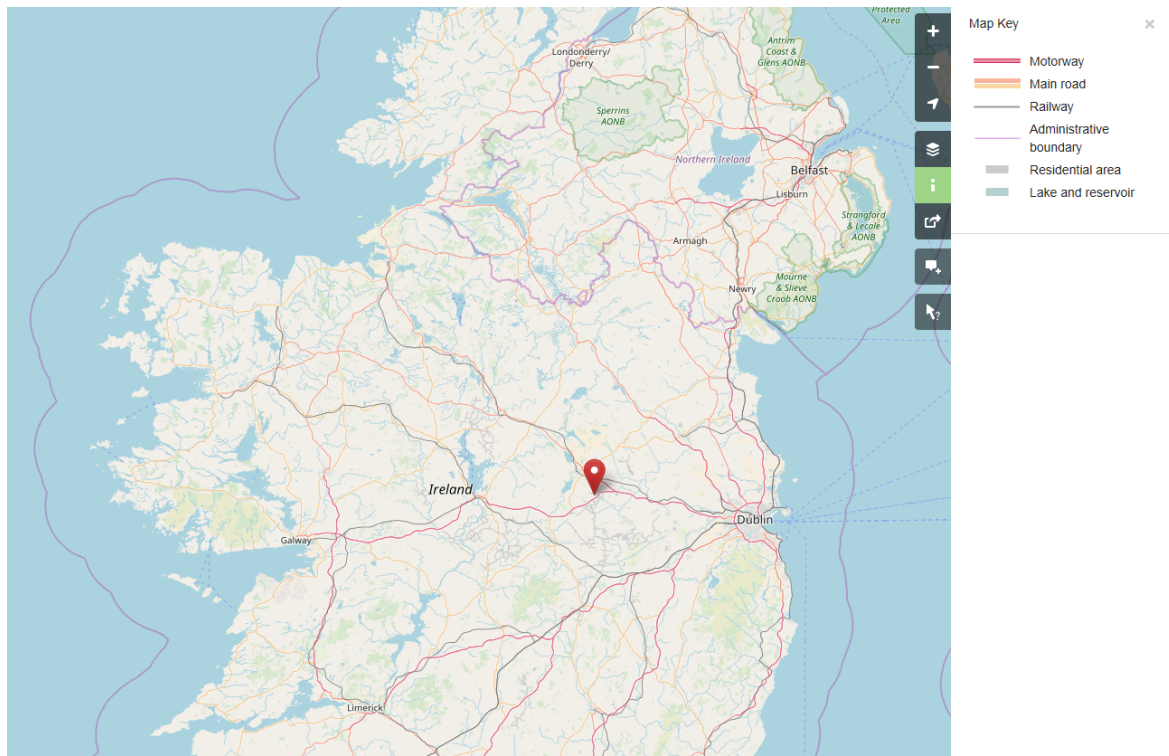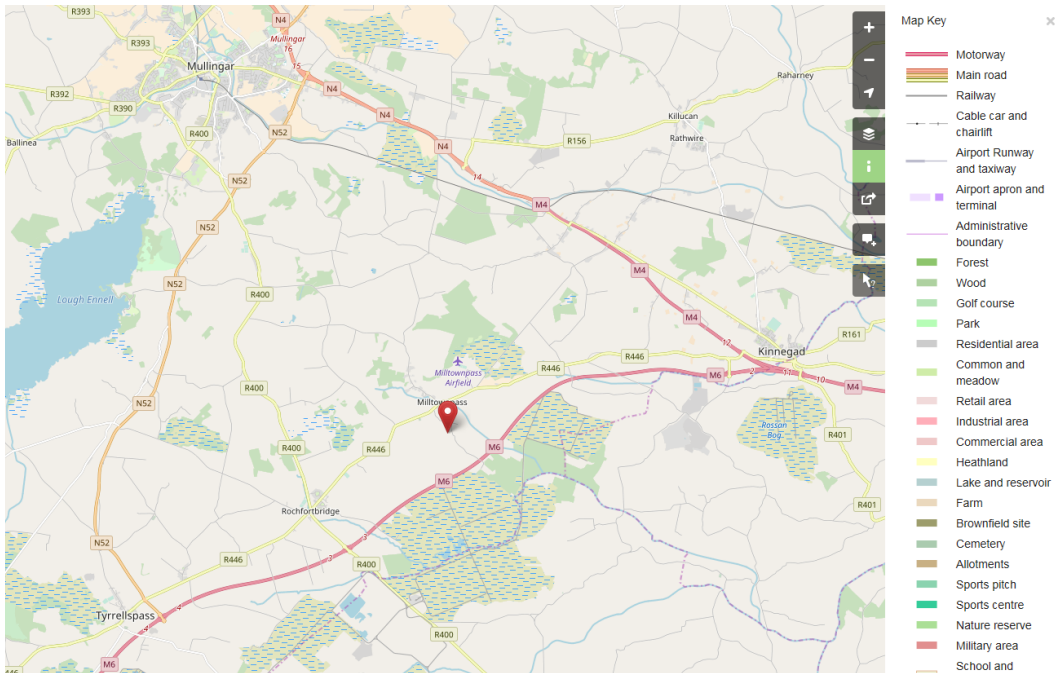
[4] Nano's, photo by author

Maps:

Map 1:GDA

Acessed on August 15, 2018. Dark green area is GDA. Westmeath connects to this area.

Map 2: Milltownpass in Westmeath

Map 3: Milltownpass zoom.

Tables

1:Settlement hierarchy

Table 2.3 Westmeath Settlement Hierarchy

Position in Hierarchy	Description	Settlement
Tier 1	Linked Gateway Town	Mullingar, Athlone
Tier 2	Key Service Town	Castlepollard.
Tier 3	Service Town	Moate, Kilbeggan, Kinnegad.
Tier 4	Local Service Town	Rochfortbridge, Killucan/Rathwire, Clonmellon, Tyrrellspass.
Tier 5	Rural Centres	Delvin, Coole, Multyfarnham, Ballymore, Ballyncacarrigy, Raharney, Milltownpass, Collinstown, Glasson, Ballinalack, Rathowen, Finnea, Ballinagore, Ballykeeran, Castletown-Geoghegan.

Table 2.4 provides a breakdown of Settlements in the county, including the distribution of residential zoned land and projected housing yield for each settlement up to 2020.

http://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/media/CDP%20Volume%201%20Written%20Statement.pdf

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Documentaries:

Bypassed Broadcast RTÉ One, Tuesday, July 5th 2016 at 9.35pm

Director Garry Keane

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Accessed on: July 12th, 2018