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Retaining relevance through reaction: Muintir na Tíre 1931-1971

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Introduction

Ireland went through a very difficult period in the early decades of the newly created state. In their early nation-building phase governments had to interact with all of the groupings that represented the interests of their constituents including, perhaps most importantly of all, the Catholic Church. One of the most powerful voluntary bodies to assume a critical relationship with both the Church and State was Muintir na Tíre. The rise and decline of the voluntary organisation Muintir na Tíre, (traced through the spatial expansion and contraction of its local branches or guilds) and the changing nature of its activities and concerns between 1931 and 1971, mirror quite accurately the changes that were occurring in Irish society. The social, economic and cultural geography of Ireland is reflected in the geography of Muintir na Tíre. This paper examines the diffusion of Muintir na Tíre and the means by which it manoeuvred its way through the stagnation of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, and the turbulent social and economic watershed of the 1960s.

Founded during the 1930s, Muintir na Tíre catered specifically for rural areas and had a strong input from the Catholic clergy. The organisation was born out of despair as the newly independent state failed to deliver with the required speed on promises of the pre-independence era and rural areas in particular suffered. Ironically, it was at this very time, when agriculture, the mainstay of the rural economy, was suffering the worst effects of the world-wide 1930s depression, that both the Catholic Church and the State tried to extol the virtues of rural life and the rural homestead, and exhort people to live in rural areas. Yet such a lifestyle held little appeal. Neither electricity nor indoor water supplies was available to rural dwellers. Health and nutrition levels were relatively low. Farmers were poorly recompensed. At the very time the Church and State espoused a rural lifestyle, many rural dwellers were leaving rural areas to re-locate in urban areas both in Ireland and overseas. In the years to come, culminating in the 1950s, rural depopulation was to become quite a serious problem.

Muintir na Tíre Limited 1931-1937

One individual who dedicated his life to tackling the problems that confronted rural Ireland was Father John Hayes. The main vehicle he used was Muintir na Tíre. This organisation was initially registered with the Office of the Registrar of Friendly Societies as a limited liability company in 1931. One of the main forces behind Muintir na Tíre Limited with Father Hayes was J. J. Bergin from Athy, County Kildare. Bergin had been involved in efforts to organise agricultural producers for many years. His main concern was that Irish farmers were not receiving adequate remuneration for their work. To assist in his campaign to achieve better prices for Irish grain he founded the Grain Growers Association. This, however, was only one of many such associations that had been established (others included Potato Producer

Associations, Fruit Grower Associations and Pig Producer Associations). Unfortunately these different associations frequently campaigned for directly opposing objectives. The Grain Growers Association wanted higher prices for grain while the Pig Producers Association wanted a reduction because they required cheaper grain prices to maintain viability. The net result was that the government received so many contradictory requests and petitions that it had little option but to ignore them all.

Bergin suggested that what Irish agriculture needed was an umbrella organisation that would co-ordinate the activities of all of the producer associations. Muintir na Tíre Limited was set up with this function in mind. It sought to secure the greatest measure of co-operation possible between the various sectional movements by encouraging existing organisations to continue their activities while at the same time securing an interest in the management of the new society. The company's local structure was based on the Catholic parish and several Church Area Committees were established. Documentation of their distribution has not survived but evidence suggests that they were tied very much to the producer-based organisations and concentrated predominantly in tillage areas.

In this form Muintir na Tíre had little success. The vehicle of a limited company offered little scope or flexibility. Father Hayes became increasingly frustrated and disillusioned by the organisation's lack of progress. By 1933 interest in the society was waning, membership was stagnant, committee members were bickering and rural life, despite all his hopes and ambitions, had benefited little from the activities of Muintir na Tíre Limited. Somehow he had to revitalise interest in the organisation. He recalled from his days as a seminarian in the Irish College in Paris that the French held 'Semaines Rurales' (Rural Weeks). The people of the countryside came together to attend discussions, lectures and exhibitions. Father Hayes decided that for Muintir na Tíre Limited a less ambitious rural weekend would suffice. These rural weekends were strategically spread across the country (in counties Waterford, Tipperary, Louth, Kilkenny, Cork, Carlow and Galway) and probably saved the organisation from extinction. The newspapers sent reporters to cover their activities. Bishops and politicians attended and used the weekends as a platform to air their views and, especially in the case of the latter, to canvass support. The rural weekends played a very important role in the reshaping of Muintir na Tíre Limited. Father Hayes used the weekends to acquire a deeper understanding of the concerns and difficulties of rural life and tried to make Muintir na Tíre Limited more relevant by applying what he learned when restructuring the organisation. He consequently sought to extend the scope of the organisation beyond the agricultural sphere.

This restructuring occurred over a number of years and necessitated a complex manoeuvring. After the 1934 AGM Father Hayes dismissed all but three of the committee. As soon as a new committee took office they set about breaking Muintir na Tíre free from its status as a limited liability company. By March 1937 Father Hayes and Bergin were ready to launch Muintir na Tíre in the form which survived until 1971, as a voluntary organisation with parochial guilds (with a strong vocational structure) replacing Church Area Committees at local level, and rural weekends were expanded to rural weeks. While the structure of the organisation was radically different, the objectives remained almost unaltered. Father Hayes was much happier with the flexibility of the new structure.

In July 1937 notice of the dissolution of Muintir na Tíre Limited appeared in Irish in the *Irish Times*. This newspaper was chosen because it did not have a large readership at the time. It was written in Irish because it was important that as few people as possible understood the notice. It was confusing enough that the organisation winding up had the same name as the new one, but in addition, the new one was launched five months prior to the other's final demise.

Early Expansion of Muintir na Tíre 1937 -1946

Between March 1937 and 1940 Muintir na Tíre's progress was slow and it is not possible to establish the spread of the organisation for this period. Precise records no longer exist to indicate where guilds were established. Estimates of the organisational strength (i.e. number of parochial guilds) have been made but these have been shown to be unreliable. With the publication of the *Muintir na Tíre Official Handbook* from 1941 onward, however, an accurate account of the organisation's annual progress is provided.

The years 1940 and 1941 represented a turning point in the fortunes of Muintir na Tíre. During this period the organisation more than trebled its number of parochial guilds and established itself as a significant force in rural Ireland. Muintir na Tíre fought hard to consolidate and build on its new-found popularity. By 1941 Muintir na Tíre had seventy guilds in sixteen of the twenty-six dioceses in Ireland. Between 1942 and 1945 little progress was registered. The number of new guilds formed annually slowed substantially (Table 1) as Emergency conditions and restrictions made life very difficult for the fledgling voluntary organisation.

TABLE 1
Annual parochial guild formation 1938- 1946

Date	No. of Guilds	Net Change	Comment
December 1938	Unknown	—	—
November 1939	20	—	Locations Unknown
June 1940	35	+15	Locations Unknown
December 1941	70	+35	Locations Unknown
December 1942	76	+6	Locations Unknown
December 1943	79	+3	Locations Unknown
December 1944	86	+7	Locations Unknown
December 1945	88	+2	Locations Unknown
December 1946	89	+1	Locations Unknown

A strong core area immediately emerged in the dioceses of Cashel and Emly and Limerick. A second smaller cluster developed in the Munster diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross. However, this centred only on the Lee Valley. County Carlow acted as Muintir na Tíre's flagship in Leinster, while in Ulster, Cavan and Monaghan were the only counties where progress was registered. Connacht was the least receptive province with only three parochial guilds founded by 1941, all of which were located in County Galway. While several factors contributed to the early distribution of Muintir na Tíre guilds, two were particularly important. The first was distance from the organisation's Tipperary town headquarters and the second was available finances. Both, however, were directly related. The cost to Muintir na Tíre of an official assisting the development of an Ulster guild would have been much greater than if assistance was required in Munster. When Emergency restrictions began to bite through petrol rationing, distance emerged as a critical factor and by 1941 one third of all guilds were concentrated within a twenty-five mile radius of Tipperary town.

Muintir na Tíre's success during the Emergency was due in large part to the fact that it had anticipated the harsh Emergency conditions. During the Emergency the Government introduced legislation which made it compulsory for all farmers to devote a percentage of their

land to tillage production. In doing this, the Government achieved what Muintir na Tíre and its predecessor Muintir na Tíre Limited had long been advocating. Rather than being an ideal that should be aspired to, as had been the case in the 1930s, self-sufficiency for Ireland became a practical necessity.

The local level success of Muintir na Tíre during the Emergency was built on the activities of the local guilds. Emergency conditions were most felt in the lives of Irish people through food rationing and fuel shortages. Consequently, the guilds initiated and co-ordinated food and fuel production and distribution schemes. They sought to take full advantage of local resources, for example peat, and make their parishes self-sufficient in whatever they produced. If there was a surplus they strove to establish distribution networks to cater for less fortunate or less organised parishes. These schemes, while important in themselves for the levels of production they achieved and for what they contributed to the local and national economy, also helped Muintir na Tíre to achieve its goals of fostering co-operation, self-reliance and self-help at community level.

A prolonged Emergency held certain dangers for Muintir na Tíre. From 1944 until 1947 only four new parochial guilds were formed. Yet, ironically, without the Emergency the rapid increase in the number of parochial guilds between 1940 and 1941 might never have happened. The clusters of guilds formed during this two-year period functioned as significant cores of influence in the years that immediately followed the Emergency, providing Muintir na Tíre with the injection of popular support required to diminish the possibility of stagnation.

To help with the administrative difficulties imposed by the Emergency, the Government sought to establish Statutory Parish Councils in all Catholic parishes. In the *Local Government Act* (1940) the Government for the first time utilised the territorial unit of the Catholic parish. The immediate consequences of the Government's utilisation of the Catholic parish network was that it created friction between the newly appointed local government officials and the traditional community leaders, the clergy. Muintir na Tíre was asked by the Government to co-operate in establishing Statutory Parish Councils and, essentially, to alter the status of existing guilds to Statutory Parish Councils. Muintir na Tíre considered the offer very carefully but eventually declined. The main advantage would have been adequate funding for its activities but this was strongly outweighed by the disadvantages. Had Muintir na Tíre agreed to involve itself with the Government in implementing the Act, it would not only have lost its autonomy but it would, in all probability, have limited its existence to the duration of World War II. With Muintir na Tíre Limited, Father Hayes had been severely restricted by rules and regulations. He was not inclined to be restricted in any way with Muintir na Tíre. Several politicians openly criticised the organisation for its refusal to co-operate. Muintir na Tíre responded through its monthly periodical *The Landmark* (September, 1941) by stating:

a people who surrender their rights and responsibilities, even to native rulers, ceases to be a nation and sinks to the depths of servitude in a slave state. The more we ask the state to do for us the more it will do, until democracy as an active force is smothered beneath the accumulated weight of official orders.

The Statutory Parish Councils, while bearing some similarities to Muintir na Tíre's parochial guilds in terms of activities pursued, were different in origin and ethos. In the end it was Eamon de Valera who defused a situation that had the potential to escalate into a conflict between Church and State. At a rural weekend in Lucan in 1941 he said he was against incorporating Muintir na Tíre into the State organisation.

At no time was there a question of the State desiring to do that. That desire has come unfortunately from people forming parish councils or groups who have been trying to bring the State in and organise them and give them statutory functions. We have resisted that and agree with Father Hayes that it would destroy the whole movement. The whole idea would be destroyed if the State came in and made local groups part of the general State organisation. It is precisely because it is a voluntary coming together, with full independence of action that this movement promises so well. I would deem it a great misfortune should there be any attempt to deprive it of that character (*Muintir na Tíre Official Handbook*, 1942).

A Phase of Sustained Expansion 1947-1951

The years immediately following the Emergency represented a critical period. With a gradual return to normal conditions a danger existed that people would no longer perceive a need for Muintir na Tíre and that it would lose its recently acquired position of national importance. The label of 'Emergency organisation', proved difficult to escape from. However, a series of shrewd decisions by the National Executive Committee, and the co-operation of the affiliated parochial guilds, ensured that Muintir na Tíre not only survived but grew much stronger in the years from 1947 to 1951. Over this period Muintir na Tíre trebled its organisational strength and expanded from established core areas into what were for the organisation a number of new territories.

The decisions made by the National Executive Committee affected three key areas. Firstly between 1945 and 1949 the Emergency food and fuel production and distribution schemes were slowly phased out and replaced by new activities. The single most important activity was co-operating with the Rural Electrification Organisation (REO) in its programme to provide a supply of electricity to rural areas. The second decision taken concerned three aspects of internal administration. In chronological order these were:

- Muintir na Tíre employed its first full-time staff member (1946):
- The National Executive Committee appointed an Organising Sub-Committee to direct the spread of Muintir na Tíre (1948) and
- Muintir na Tíre made the change from a diocesan administrative structure to the more relevant county structure (1949).

The third and final decision concerned the rural weeks. With the phasing out of Emergency restrictions and rationing Muintir na Tíre was able to take greater advantage of the rural weeks as catalysts for the perpetuation of the organisation. Now more than ever, the location of the rural week each year became a very important strategic issue for Muintir na Tíre.

Between 1947 and 1951 the region where Muintir na Tíre registered most progress was in north Cork and south Limerick. This spate of intensive expansion linked the Lee Valley and Limerick/Cashel/Emly cores and made it the most densely concentrated region of guilds in the country. Significant new growth occurred along the Shannon and Muintir na Tíre guilds and spread into counties Laois, Wexford, Monaghan, Sligo and, to a lesser degree, Mayo. The number of guilds in the established core areas also increased.

The REO was established by the Electricity Supply Board to co-ordinate the electrification of rural areas. However, it experienced severe difficulties in communicating the benefits of electricity to a largely conservative rural population. Attitudes ranged from total apathy to stubborn opposition. By late 1945 so little progress had been registered that the REO sought outside help. Muintir na Tíre, along with two other rural voluntary organisations, the Irish Countrywomen's Association and Macra na Feirme, was approached 'to canvass people' and

'to induce the farmers to want electricity' (Morris, 1986). All three organisations operated at parish level, as did, uniquely in the history of this state, the REO.

Muintir na Tíre's campaign for rural electrification was launched in *The Landmark* in November 1945. From Muintir na Tíre's perspective it proved a valuable partnership. The organisation saved the REO time and money by educating rural people as to the advantages of having easy access to electricity. In return, the parishes with Muintir na Tíre guilds were among the first to benefit from electric power, giving them advantages with regard to developing rural industries and improving agricultural production (McGrath, 1945). Electricity would help Muintir na Tíre achieve one of its central ambitions to modernise rural society and counter the appeal of urban areas.

The expansion of Muintir na Tíre parochial guilds during this period can be directly and singularly attributed to the electrification scheme in only one area, north Cork/south Limerick. Dairy farmers were quickest to realise the advantages of electricity. Electricity could be used for lighting, milking machines, refrigerators, separators and churns. In dairying areas farmers sought to take advantage of Muintir na Tíre's involvement with the REO, and by establishing Muintir na Tíre guilds, which exploited its partnership with the REO, they were able to accelerate the process they had to undergo to receive a supply of power. A huge expansion in the number of guilds therefore occurred in the dairying areas of north Cork and south Limerick.

From 1947 onward Muintir na Tíre focused its resources on the region surrounding the selected rural week venue many months in advance. New guilds were formed as a team of Area Organisers generated enthusiasm. These guilds then played a role in the organisation and administration of the rural week. Again, after the rural week, following all the publicity in the provincial and national newspapers, the Area Organisers would resume their campaign in the area and try to transform any new-found enthusiasm for the organisation into new parochial guilds.

The 1946 rural week marked the return of Muintir na Tíre to the venue of its first rural weekend, Mount Saint Joseph's Abbey in Roscrea. The bishop of Limerick opened the rural week because Bishop Fogarty of Killaloe, in whose diocese the venue was located, refused to welcome it. Despite this, the rural week was an unprecedented success. Twenty-five new guilds were formed as a result of the efforts of the Area Organisers. In 1947 the choice of Monaghan town as the venue resulted in a frenzy of activity in that county. Bishop O'Callaghan of Clogher opened the rural week held in Saint Macartan's Seminary. Seventeen guilds were formed as a result of this rural week. By 1948 the rural weeks had achieved such importance that the President of Ireland, Sean T O'Kelly, honoured the proceedings with his presence. Over one thousand people attended the 1948 Knockbeg rural week in County Carlow. As a result of the publicity twelve new guilds were formed.

After pursuing a policy of expansion since 1946, Father Hayes successfully argued that it would prove beneficial to locate a rural week in the Limerick/Tipperary core area to consolidate the movement. As a result Mungret, County Limerick was chosen as the venue in 1949. However, the expansionist policy was revived in subsequent years. In 1950, a rural week in Mullingar, County Westmeath firmly established Muintir na Tíre in the midlands and the following year the rural week in Wexford town was used to introduce the movement to that county. Bishop Staunton and Monsignor Benelli from the Papal Nunciature were honoured guests and a record crowd of over four thousand people attended. Thirteen new guilds were established. Muintir na Tíre's activity in Sligo and Mayo at this time was in anticipation of the first rural week in Connacht for twelve years. It was scheduled for Sligo in 1952.

Between 1937 and 1945 the formation of only twenty guilds was directly attributable to the rural weeks. Between 1946 and 1951 over one hundred resulted from rural week activities. This improved return for Muintir na Tíre from its rural week programme, however, owed much to

the activities of the Organising Sub-Committee, whose function it was to direct the area organisers and co-ordinate expansion at local level.

The Consolidation of Muintir na Tíre 1952-1956

The economic and social climate of the 1950s made it increasingly difficult for Muintir na Tíre to sustain and perpetuate the organisation. Much hard work had to be undertaken in order that it maintain its status and increase its membership. The novelty of the organisation had long-since worn off. Even though the national total of guilds rose in this period, from 295 to 404, the Munster core area registered a slight absolute decline. County Tipperary alone was responsible for this as the guild totals in Counties Cork and Limerick remained stable. As the national total of guilds rose, the relative importance of the traditional Munster core declined significantly (Table 2).

TABLE 2
The declining significance of the Munster core

Date	No. of Guilds Cork	No. of Guilds Limerick	No. of Guilds Tipperary	No. of Guilds Munster Core	% of National Total
1950	66	29	45	140	54
1951	67	31	50	148	50
1952	64	32	42	138	42
1953	62	31	29	122	37
1954	65	35	28	128	36
1955	65	31	28	124	33
1956	66	33	30	129	33
1957	63	32	37	132	35
1958	65	35	36	136	33

From 1952 until Father Hayes's death in early 1957, Muintir na Tíre consolidated its position in Irish life. Consolidation was greatly facilitated by the fact that the organisation had never previously been as financially secure. In 1953 Cardinal Cushing from Boston visited Ireland and presented Muintir na Tíre with \$1,000. In 1954 Father Hayes contributed an article to Father John A. O'Brien's controversial book on Irish emigration *The Vanishing Irish*. In it Father Hayes appealed for financial assistance for Muintir na Tíre. This prompted many people in the USA to establish fund-raising societies. Within nine months of the book's publication they contributed another \$1,000 to Muintir na Tíre. In 1955 Muintir na Tíre successfully applied for a share in the American Grant for Technical Assistance and received \$10,000. At home Muintir na Tíre's annual national collections always yielded significant amounts of money and an ever increasing number of guilds insured that the annual subscription totals also rose.

In the winter of 1952/3 Father Hayes and Tom Fitzgerald, the Chief Administrative Officer of Muintir na Tíre, undertook a very successful tour of the west of Ireland which included counties Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Longford and Donegal. This tour, along with the 1952 Sligo rural week combined to create an enthusiasm and interest in these counties. From 1951 onward the movement registered considerable success in the Western seaboard counties of Munster and Connacht (Table 3). So successful was the organisation in penetrating these counties that the percentage of the national total of guilds located in them rose from 13.2 percent in 1951 to 25.7 percent in 1958.

TABLE 3
Growing Importance of Western Seaboard Counties

Date	Sligo	Mayo	Galway	Clare	Kerry	Western Seaboard	% National Total
1951	7	8	5	6	11	39	13
1952	20	15	11	2	23	74	22
1953	15	11	10	6	17	61	19
1954	21	16	10	2	24	76	21
1955	20	18	11	3	26	81	22
1956	19	22	20	6	25	95	24
1957	14	22	19	5	26	85	23
1958	14	21	19	30	20	104	26

Throughout the 1950s Muintir na Tíre continued its involvement with the REO and steady progress was made in all provinces. But this was not the only guild activity pursued. With the assistance of the Department of Agriculture, Muintir na Tíre sought to create an interest in forestry among Irish farmers. Most afforestation occurred where Muintir na Tíre was strongest and most secure; several guilds in Tipperary, Cork, Limerick, Kerry, Wexford and Sligo were involved in this activity. From 1955, the guilds co-operated with Bord Failte, which was in the process of developing a tourist industry in Ireland. This involvement in tourism stemmed directly from Muintir na Tíre's promotion of cleanliness and tidiness at parish level, including cemetery clean-up campaigns in local communities and the initiation of Bord Failte's Tidy Towns competitions. Also during the Marian Year (1954) several guilds erected Marian shrines.

In 1957, after years of almost uninterrupted growth, there was a significant decrease in the overall national total of parochial guilds (Table 4). This indicates the importance of Father Hayes to the movement. Immediately after his death in 1957 people seriously questioned the organisation's ability to survive. Furthermore, the organisation was involved in what could mildly be termed a difference of opinion with the Department of Agriculture. At the centre of the controversy was Professor J Lyons's (UCC) *Parish Plan for Agriculture*. This plan was devised for Muintir na Tíre but it was significantly altered by the government. Muintir na Tíre's role in the Parish Plan was continuously eroded as the Department of Agriculture increasingly began to regard the organisation's involvement as an unwelcome nuisance.

TABLE 4
Impact of Father Hayes's Death

Date	No. of Guilds	Net Change
1951	295	+34
1952	330	+35
1953	329	-1
1954	356	+27
1955	375	+19
1956	393	+18
1957	377	-16

In the midst of the ensuing controversy the president of Muintir na Tíre, Bishop Lucey of Cork and Ross, resigned. Consequently Muintir na Tíre ended the 1950s without the leadership of Father Hayes or Bishop Lucey and in disagreement with the Department of Agriculture. There was still, however, much that the organisation could build on. There remained a substantial number of operating guilds and these were to function as catalysts for development in future years.

A Period of Reorientation 1958 -1970

Struggling to come to terms with a series of new realities, this period posed great challenges for Muintir na Tíre. It had to determine the manner in which it could best adapt to the changing circumstances in Ireland. The years 1958 to 1963 very much represent a period of soul-searching for the organisation as it tried to remain relevant in a rapidly changing society. At a national level Muintir na Tíre found that it had to rapidly construct a new organisation for its new context; an organisation that was both new and relevant, yet one which also sought to preserve the best of the old. It had to cater for an increasingly urbanised and secular society, while not turning its back on its rural origins or its strong ties with the Catholic Church. Wrangling that occurred in 1963 within the organisation, when a campaign for a lay person to be elected chairman was launched, was very much a microcosm of an emerging debate about the merits of the increasing secularisation of Irish society. At local level two contradictory impulses led to the creation of new guilds. On the one-hand local communities established guilds in order to preserve a link with a rapidly disappearing 'traditional' Ireland. For such communities, the organisation represented a comforting agent of continuity. On the other hand, some communities saw Muintir na Tíre as a vehicle through which progress could be achieved. For these communities Muintir na Tíre represented a progressive, modernising body with an important role to play in the newly emerging Ireland.

At local level, the range and diversity of guild activities increased significantly. They now, however, took on a significantly more economic aspect. The growth of interest in tourism, for example, during the 1960s was phenomenal. The guilds' knowledge of their local areas worked to Bord Failte's advantage as they helped the semi-state body to compile a list of the type and location of ancient monuments in the country. Guilds became increasingly aware that tourists represented a new source of revenue for their communities and became actively involved in encouraging tourists to their areas. The effect that this had on the diffusion of parochial guilds was most noticeable in the west Cork area. Guilds were initiated so that tourist potential could be exploited. In Kerry and along the western seaboard counties several guilds began to co-operate with Neil Blaney, Minister for Local Government, in his campaign to provide an indoor water supply for the 87.5 per cent of rural dwellings that still lacked piped water.

Muintir na Tíre registered the highest number of guild affiliations since its foundation in 1958. The National Executive Committee, aware of allegations that the 1957 decline was an inevitable result of the loss of Father Hayes and possibly represented the beginning of a long-term trend, sought to build upon an attitude or resolve that emerged at local level not to let the organisation decline. They wanted to show that without Father Hayes, Muintir na Tíre could not only survive but prosper. But resolve alone proved insufficient to sustain the organisation. In 1960 the number of guilds slumped.

From 1962 until 1965 there was a resurgence of interest in Muintir na Tíre. Its organisational strength reached an all-time high in 1964 with 407 guilds. This surge of interest can be tied

directly to Muintir na Tíre's introduction to the concept of 'community development'. Between 1959 and 1962 the Executive Committee concentrated on familiarising itself and the general membership with community development, a new and yet surprisingly familiar concept which emphasised community spirit, community leadership, co-operation, self-help and self-reliance. A deepening knowledge of the concept of community development served to make the organisation more introspective. It entered a phase of self-analysis and self-assessment, using criteria from community development theory. It began to construct a history of the movement within the context and framework provided by community development. In the absence of Father Hayes, community development became the movement's inspiration. Several international conferences on community development were organised and Muintir na Tíre frequently sent delegates to keep itself informed. In 1962 Muintir na Tíre hosted a major international conference, *The European Study Group for Community Development*. It was held in Gormanston, County Meath and Dr. Jeremiah Newman of Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth was appointed director of the Study Group. The conference was opened by the Taoiseach, Sean Lemass. President deValera attended along with delegates from the UK, Norway, Sweden, France, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal, Pakistan, India and the USA.

In the nine years 1962-1970 there was a noticeable geographical shift in the number of guilds created. Leinster began to dominate, as Munster and Connacht lagged behind. Ulster, a province that Muintir na Tíre had only partially penetrated, completely fell by the wayside. In Leinster, a period of growth was registered from 1964 and this reduced considerably the difference in guild numbers between Munster and Leinster. In 1963 the total number of guilds in Munster exceeded those in Leinster by 112, and by 1966 this had been reduced to just 43. While in Leinster the number of guilds expanded, the number in Munster remained stable. In Leinster, the organisation had new areas into which it could expand. The role of rural weeks during this period declined in significance for the movement, not just in terms of guild development, but also on a more general level.

While the distributions of new guilds formed were significant, of far more importance to the movement during the period 1958-1965 was the number of guilds that disbanded. Despite these losses, the Executive Committee did not react with the degree of urgency required and between 1966 and 1970 the losses continued. It should be stressed, however, that the organisational losses were not noticeably regional in distribution, but were distributed throughout the entire country. This indicates that there were broader forces at work that were causing a decline in the organisational strength. Maintaining relevance in a changing society is a challenge that all voluntary organisations face on an on-going basis. At the beginning of the 1970s Muintir na Tíre changed from a vocationalist guild structure to a community council structure at local level which it was hoped would herald a new era. While it remained relevant at local level the National Executive Committee failed to keep pace with the speed of change in Irish society. The problem was not that the organisation did not change but that it did not change quickly enough. A dichotomy emerged between the more materialistic and secular attitudes of the people at local level, using Muintir na Tíre to achieve a better standard of living, and the ideals of self-help, co-operation, community spirit and Catholic Social Principles at executive level. This is a problem that the organisation is still struggling to address over thirty years later. Perhaps Muintir na Tíre has only begun to take the problem of its continuing existence with appropriate seriousness in recent years. Could Muintir na Tíre be described today as an organisation that refuses to die rather than one with a clear purpose and function in Irish rural society?

Conclusion

Because Muintir na Tíre's activities encompassed the social, cultural, economic and recreational spheres, a study of the movement reflects changes in these aspects of Irish life over the period involved. Its activities reflect the changing agenda of the country and its priorities in different decades. One of its key strengths until the 1970s was its effectiveness in keeping its finger on the pulse of Irish rural society and correctly identifying its chief concerns. The regional variations in the distribution of guilds reflect the priorities of the different parish communities in which the guilds were located. Guilds were formed to take advantage of the activities that Muintir na Tíre was sponsoring. In some cases once the desired objectives were achieved (e.g. rural electrification or indoor water supply) the guilds disbanded. The rural weeks and the activities of the Area Organisers also strongly influenced the pathways of diffusion.

The activities of the organisation at local level were designed to take advantage of various programmes but Muintir na Tíre rarely initiated these; rather, it took its lead from outside bodies (church, state and semi-state) and reacted to circumstances and situations not of its own making. Its diffusion was aided by its involvement in Emergency activities, rural electrification, group water schemes and working with Bord Failte. This also explains why the border with Northern Ireland proved such a significant barrier and why the diffusion of Muintir na Tíre was almost completely confined to the Republic. Its local activities were not relevant North of the border, being part of wider programmes based in the twenty-six counties.

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